



The Bible as a Key to Environmental Thought

Fall 2018

Lecturer: Rabbi Michael M. Cohen
3 hours once a week. 3 credits

Course Description

This survey course will analyze the environmental dimensions and lessons of the Book of Genesis and other books of the Bible, and at times from other traditions as well. Through the use of mostly contemporary commentators the text of the Bible will also be read as an environmental text. The course will also examine the scores of references to nature and the environment with an eye to asking how and why they are used in the biblical narratives. On another level the text also forces us to confront and explore our relationship with the environment. In addition, the course will explore the prevailing universal themes of journey, exile, family dynamics, and personal growth with the understanding that our interaction with the environment can only be better understood if we understand ourselves better. At times this course will also look at the Biblical texts through a Conflict Resolution lens.

Reading Assignments

Students will be expected to read 20 pages a week. If there is more than 20 pages of reading the student can choose which reading assignments they prefer to read so long as they read 20 pages.

For readings from the Bible: <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0.htm>

For readings from the Quran: <http://al-quran.info/#home>

Miscellaneous

No cell phones in class; computers only for note taking. No plagiarism per Arava Institute policy. Only two classes may be missed. Class starts on time (please arrive a few minutes beforehand). Readings on Google drive or www link in syllabus. As I am here most of the time I will not have regular office hours - write to me to set up meeting if needed.

Grade Components

Class attendance and participation	25%
2 Reflections (2 - 3 pages each)	20%
Paper (due January 1st; 4 - 6 pages)	20%
Final Exam	35%

Session One.

Creation & the Garden of Eden

Genesis 1:1- 2:7

Quran The Cow Chapter 2: 28 - 39

Quran Jonah Chapter 10: 1 - 7

Quran Elaborated Chapter 41: 1 - 12.

Riskin, Shlomo, "The 7th Day: An Adam to Conquer, an Adam to Serve," Jerusalem Post, October 13, 1990

Zeigler, Ronnie, "Defining the Two Adams," Har Etzion,

<http://etzion.org.il/vbm/english/archive/rav/rav16.htm>

"Begin with 'the Beginning,'" Philologus, The Forward

"Ecosystem Management and the Arrogance of Humanism," David Ehrenfeld, Conservation Biology, 1995. See pages 256-57;261.

[ftp://www.ufv.br/def/disciplinas/ENF448/artigos_manejo_ecossistemas/artigo%203.](ftp://www.ufv.br/def/disciplinas/ENF448/artigos_manejo_ecossistemas/artigo%203)

White, Lynn, "The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," Lynn White, *Science*, 1967

<https://www.uvm.edu/~gflomenh/ENV-NGO-PA395/articles/Lynn-White.pdf>

Gaye, Marvin, "Mercy, Mercy Me (The Ecology)

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/marvingaye/mercymercymetheecology.html>

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=pQu892GGbts>

Session Two.

In the Beginning Gd Created a Strong Environmental Message

Genesis 2:8 - 15:21
Deuteronomy 6:4
Quran The Faithful Chapter 23:23 -36
Quran Noah Chapter 71

Green, Art, "Creation"

Fox, Michael, "Genesis As A Foundation..."

Gould, Stephen Jay, "The Narthex of San Marco & the Pangenetic Paradigm," Natural History, July/August, 2000
http://www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/archive/stephen_jay_gould/gould_san-marco.html
see south cupola, west narthex and south cupola, west narthex detail (x2)
http://www.wga.hu/html_m/zgothic/mosaics/6sanmarc/

Abu-Sway, Mustafa, "Toward an Islamic Jurisprudence of the Environment"

"Did Man or God Create Woman? Feminist Interpretations of the Story of Eve and Adam,"
Patheos, June 19, 2009
<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithpromotingrumor/2009/06/did-man-or-god-create-woman-feminist-interpretations-of-the-story-of-eve-and-adam/>

"Let's Talk About Sex(ism) Baby: Genesis, Eve and Adam through Feminist Eyes," by Crystal S. Lewis <http://crystalstmarielewis.com/2011/03/12/lets-talk-about-sexism-baby-genesis-eve-and-adam-through-feminist-eyes/>

Forman, Lori, "The Untold Story of Eve," from The Women's Torah Commentary.

Sandford, John "The Man Who Wrestled With God: Light from the Old Testament on the Psychology of Individuation," pp. 103 - 123

Pitzele, Peter "Our Father's Wells," pp. 29-32

Leibowitz, Yeshayahu, "Noah," from Notes and Remarks on the Weekly Parashah, pp. 1-2

Spitzer, Julie "Mrs. Noah," from The Women's Torah Commentary, pp. 53-56

Benstein, Jeremy, "The Blessing of Babel," The Jerusalem Report, October 25, 1999.

Schwartz, Richard "A Vegetarian View of the Bible," from Judaism and Vegetarianism, pp 1-13.

<http://www.jewishveg.com/JudaismAndVegetarianism/JudaismandVegetarianism2001.pdf>

King, Martin Luther, "Remaining Awake Through A Great Revolution,"
<http://www.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/BlackHistoryMonth/MLK/CommAddress.html>

Cohen, Michael, "Gd is One: A Kabbalitic Explanation,"
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-michael-cohen/kabbalah-shema-yisrael-explanation_b_1118395.html?

Session Three.

The Sabbath as Environmental Day (No Conflict with the Environment)

(repeat syllabus)

1st Reflection due (select one):

Summarize Soloveichik's Adam I Adam II, does it relate to you, and its application toward humans and the environment.

What are the lessons of the Garden of Eden story when it comes to understanding human beings and do any have application towards humans and the environment?

Does the beginning of the Book of Genesis produce an environmental ethic?

Genesis 2: 1- 4

Exodus 16: 21-30

Exodus 20: 8-11

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Fink, Dan, "Sabbath and Sabbatical," in Ecology & the Jewish Spirit, pp.112 - 120.

Gilman, Neil, "Cosmos and Chaos: Biblical View of Creation," in Ecology & the Jewish Spirit, pp. 172 -179.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua "The Sabbath," pp. 3 - 32.

Presbyterian Church, "An Invitation to the Sabbath: Rediscovering a Gift," pp. 1 - 6.

Fromm, Erich, "On the Sabbath Ritual," In The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales, and Myths, pp. 241-249.

Prinz-McMillan, Sheryll, "Feminist, Ecology, and the Sabbath," Adventistpeace, April 1994.
http://www.adventistpeace.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1530/Prinz-McMillan-Feminists-Ecology-and-the-Sabbath-1994.pdf

Metropolitan John of Pergamon, "Pope Francis' Encyclical Laudato Si: A Comment," Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, June 18, 2015
<http://www.goarch.org/news/metropolitanjohnpergamon-06182015>

Session Four.

Field Trip Uvda Valley

With Dr. Uzi Avner

(Note: Trip will leave earlier in the afternoon)

Avner, Uzi, "Sacred Stones in Desert," Biblical Archeological Review

<http://members.bib-arch.org/publication.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=27&Issue=3&ArticleID=2>

Avner, Uzi, "Settlement patterns,"

http://www.antiquities.org.il/articles/pdf/u_avner1.pdf

Session Five.

Biblical (Environmental) Conflicts

(Schedule mid-semester feedback)

Genesis 13:5 - 12

Genesis 18:16 - 19:28

Genesis 26: 12 - 33

Genesis 39 - 41:57

Exodus 23:5

Deuteronomy 22:4

Proverbs 25:21

Psalms 34:14

Quran Joseph Chapter 7

Quran Hijr Chapter 15:51 - 77

Quran The Spider 29:26 - 35

CR Theory Guide

Session Six.

Humans and Land

Genesis 4: 1- 26

Genesis 25:19 - 35

Exodus 2:23 - 4:17

Quran The Table Chapter 5:27 - 32

Benstein, Jeremy, "Others, Brothers," The Jerusalem Report, October 17, 1996

Pagis, Dan "Written in Pencil in a Sealed Railway"

Steinbeck, John, "East of Eden," pp. 305 - 311.

Springsteen, Bruce, "Adam Raised a Cain."

<http://brucepringsteen.net/songs/adam-raised-a-cain>

TREES, FORESTRY, AND THE RESPONSIVENESS OF CREATION by Brian J. Walsh, Marianne B. Karsh, and Nik Ansell

<http://www.crosscurrents.org/trees.htm>

Session Seven.

Islam and the Environment

Guest Lecturer:

Readings to be announced (date and day of the week and time may change)

Interview: Dr. Mustard Abu Sway, "Islam & Ecology"

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=VOByKmTyPfU>

2nd Reflection due (select one):

Can the Biblical Sabbath be considered a weekly Environmental Day?

Are there lessons from Biblical environmental conflicts for today?

Do ancient desert dwellers help us better understand the Biblical approach to the environment?

Session Eight.

Field Trip Yotvata

(Note: May be earlier in the afternoon)

Numbers 33:33 - 35

Deuteronomy 10:7

Solomon, "Nebuchadnezzar, Nahman's 'Cripple' and Groundhog Day

Buber, "I and Thou."

Havreuvei, "Tree and Shrub in Our Biblical Heritage," pp. 24-53; 118; 347
Feliks, "Nature and Man in the Bible," pp.18-23
Eisenberg, The Ecology of Eden, pp.335-360
Hepper, Nigel, "Illustrated Encyclopedia of Bible Plants," 191 - 192

Session Nine

The Psalms

Psalms 8, 19, 24, 29, 95-98, 104, 121, 148

National Council of Churches Centennial Gathering," Administrator Lisa P. Jackson, EPA

<http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/8d49f7ad4bbcf4ef852573590040b7f6/70eeadc264a571d6852577d6005500ac!OpenDocument>

Gendler, Everett, "A Sentient Universe," Parabola, Fall 2007
<http://gendlergrapevine.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Parabola-A-Sentient-Universe.pdf>

Havel, Vaclav, "The Need for Transcendence in the Postmodern World."
<http://www.worldtrans.org/whole/havelspeech.html>

Session Ten.

Pope Francis 1

Pope Francis I, "Laudato Si,"
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

Session Eleven.

The Environment in the Bible Its Use

Genesis 16:1- 17:27; 20:1 - 25:18
Quran Woman Chapter 4: 162 - 165
Quran The Cow Chapter 2: 21 - 31
Quran The Rangers Chapter 37: 83- 113
Pitzele, pp. 107-115; pp. 159-163; 174-176
Cohen, Norman, "Self, Struggle & Change," pp. 69-92; 95-103
Visotsky, "Reading the Book," pp. 76-99;
Miles, "Casting Genesis," 40-49:52

Curzon, "The Ones Cut Off," p.1
Visotsky, "Genesis of Ethics," pp. 112-120

Zornberg, pp. 123-128; 155-164
Landes & Robbin, "The Victim Becomes Victor," p. 1
Sandford, pp. 11-16

Session Twelve.

Bringing the Bible Environmental Messages to Today's Conversation

Final Paper due:

Take a sentence from the Bible that deals with the Environment, and/or an Environmental Biblical concept and discuss. Where possible use readings from the course and what we discussed in the class. Always cite sources.

"Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change," <http://www.ifees.org.uk/declaration/>

"Interfaith Climate Change Statement to World Leaders,"
https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bhumipledge/pages/147/attachments/original/1462361730/Interfaith_Climate_Change_Statement_2016_FINAL_may_4.pdf?1462361730

Rakeover, Nahum, "Environmental Protection: A Jewish Perspective," pp. 5 - 21.

Greenfaith, "African American Clergy Open Letter on Climate Change"
<http://www.greenfaith.org/programs/environmental-justice/african-american-clergy-open-letter-on-climate-change>

Cohen, Michael, "Meditation on my lawnmower," VPR

"Carbon Dioxide and Climate" Scientific American July 1959/Dec 2008
<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/carbon-dioxide-and-climate/>

"U.N. climate panel: ...need to take action," Washington Post, March 30, 2014, Steven Mufson
http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/un-climate-panel-governments-businesses-need-to-take-action-now-against-growing-risks/2014/03/30/0feb5cba-b788-11e3-b84e-897d3d12b816_story.html

"Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change," UN Women Watch
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf

"Climate Change: how to talk about bad news," Sarah Gardner April 24, 2014

<http://www.marketplace.org/topics/sustainability/climate-change-how-talk-about-bad-news>

“Are African-Americans More Vulnerable to Climate Change?,” Ebony, Feb. 2013, Dr. Marshall Shepherd <http://www.ebony.com/news-views/are-african-americans-more-vulnerable-to-climate-change-352#axzz3S7xUHOWC>

“Climate Change War is not a Metaphor,” Eric Holthaus
http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2014/04/david_titley_climate_change_war_an_interview_with_the_retired_rear_admiral.html

“Climate Change and the Political Landscape,” Barrie Dunsmore April 3, 2014
<http://vtdigger.org/2014/04/06/barrie-dunsmore-climate-change-political-landscape/>

“It’s the end of the world as we know it...,” Daniel Smith, April 17, 2014
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/20/magazine/its-the-end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it-and-he-feels-fine.html?_r=0

“Climate change scepticism and the media”
<http://talkingclimate.org/guides/climate-change-scepticism-and-the-media/>

“Why are people still sceptical about climate change?”
<http://talkingclimate.org/guides/beyond-climate-science-why-people-are-still-skeptical-of-climate-change/>

“Communicating uncertainty in climate science”
<http://talkingclimate.org/guides/a-guide-to-communicating-uncertainty-in-climate-science/>

“The Arab Spring and Climate Change,” Ed. Caitlin Werrell & Francesco Femia, February 2013
<http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/report/2013/02/28/54579/the-arab-spring-and-climate-change/>

“The Other Arab Spring,” Thomas Friedman, April 7, 2012
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/08/opinion/sunday/friedman-the-other-arab-spring.html>

“Obama’s Last Shot.” Jeff Goodell April 23, 2014
<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/obamas-last-shot-20140423>
<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/obamas-last-shot-20140423>
~~“Science and Activists See American Why In Matters,” Betsy Sherman, CNN April 2014~~

Darfur Conflict, Julian Borger, The Guardian, June 23, 2007
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2007/jun/23/sudan.climatechange>

“Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict,” Thomas F. Homer-Dixon
<http://www.homerdixon.com/projects/evidence/evid1.htm>

Session Thirteen.
Final Exam

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