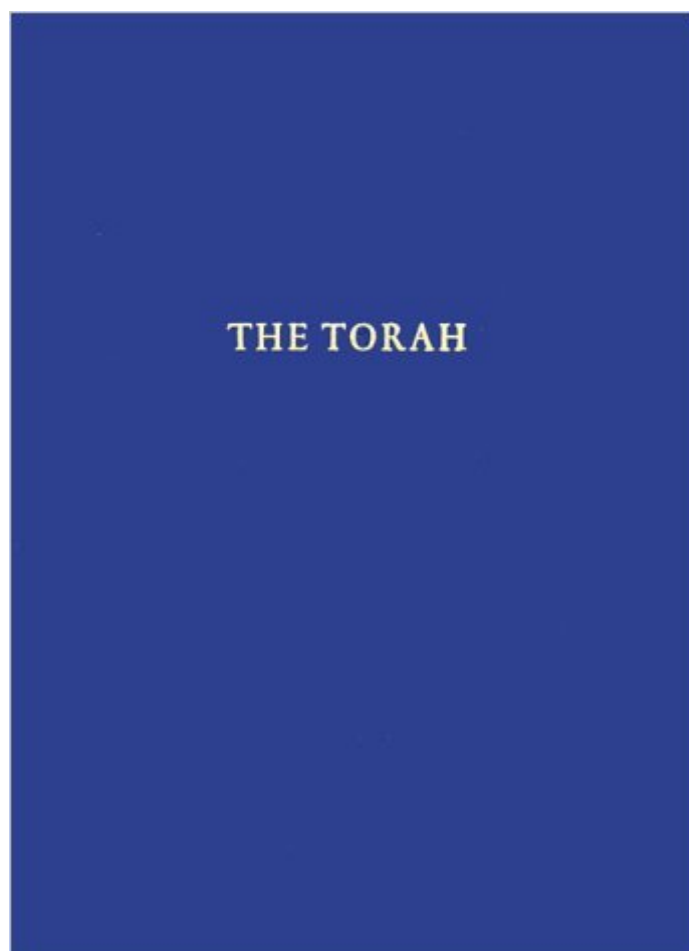


The book was found

Torah A Modern Commentary/Hebrew Opening (English And Hebrew Edition)



Synopsis

One of the outstanding works of Reform Judaism.

Book Information

Hardcover: 1787 pages

Publisher: Union of American Hebrew Congregations (June 1, 1981)

Language: English, Hebrew

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Customer Reviews

The revised edition of *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* has a much better layout, better translations and better organization than the previous version. The footnotes are more meaningful, and the commentary is improved. There are also corrections to the Hebrew text, and clearer typesetting. This edition uses a modified kamatz for the kamatz katon to distinguish it from the kamatz gadol, thus helping readers pronounce things more easily if they are not used to the Sephardic pronunciations. (Their kamatz katon looks a bit like the Frank Zappa logo, which consists of his mustache and imperial beard.) The translation is revised without being revisionist. Certain words that have been translated a certain way for the past 500 years are now replaced with more accurate translations that make more sense to a modern reader. For example, in modern English, clean and unclean have a different connotation from pure and impure, thus creating a misleading understanding with the less accurate translations. The translation is more gender accurate than gender neutral. References to God are rendered in gender-neutral terms, which is consistent with the Jewish belief that God has no gender, as opposed to a "literal" translation of the grammatically masculine wording of a language that does not use a neuter form. However, other phrases such as "when you take a census of the Israelite people ..." which been replaced with "when you take a census of the Israelite men ..." are less gender neutral but more accurate. In other words, changes

to more gender neutral language are done because English does not use a gender for anything but animals and people (and the occasional oddity such as ships if you want to be picky) while languages such as Hebrew have no neuter case. Therefore, it makes more sense to respect the context, just as you would not refer to a table as him or her simply because it's a literal translation of another language. Other reviews of this book written prior to 2005 are for the previous edition, so be careful to determine if any specific point of an old review is still relevant.

The translation is good, based on the latest scholarship. The commentary is extensive, and from a historical point of view, illuminating. But from a religious point of view this book is, in most places, a deep disappointment. While Plaut offers this as a book for religious Reform Jews, it spends most of its time disparaging the laws in the Torah as outdated anachronisms that have no place in the lives of Jews today. Those Jews on the more traditional side of the Reform movement - or anyone at all in Conservative Judaism - will be disappointed to learn that the introduction spends a great deal of time trying to show how God has little or nothing to do with the Bible, nor for that matter does Moses. While I appreciate the editor's correct impulse in combating the extreme claims from religious fundamentalism, I do not understand why the response was go totally in the other direction (religious abandonment), I do not find the Ultra-Orthodox Torah commentaries (The Artscroll Torah, by Mesorah) to be any better. While Plaut's Reform commentary commits the sin of abandoning Judaism by worshipping archaeology, the Artscroll books commit the sin of intellectual dishonesty by abandoning - and denigrating - all archaeology, history and linguistics. If I had to make a choice, I'd say that Plaut's book is better than Artscroll books. So where can one go for an authentic Torah commentary that is deeply religious, yet non-fundamentalist; one based on adherence to the latest scholarship, as well as traditional Jewish commentary? I would suggest the five volume JPS Torah Commentary series, published by the Jewish Publication Society. (2 Volumes by Nahum Sarna, 1 by Jeffrey Tigay, 1 by Baruch Levine and 1 by Jacob Milgrom). Used by Modern Orthodox, Reform and Conservative Jews, this is the set for a serious student of Torah to have. If one wanted a one volume Torah /Pentateuch commentary, I would get "The Pentateuch and Haftorahs" by Dr. Joseph H. Hertz or "The Chumash" by A. Cohen. (Also note that an affordable, one volume edition of the 5 vol. JPS set is due to be published by the Conservative movement in about 2 years)

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