

FEATURING THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY

TANAKH TRANSLATION

THE
JEWISH
STUDY
BIBLE

SECOND EDITION



TORAH
NEVI'IM
KETHUVIM



nts realize that they demand not only
ency and understanding of the text,
methodological sophistication. One
simply say anything that comes to
out differences of opinion and vari-
getical methods are legitimate, each
ion having its own interpreters.
ential *peshat* is based on criti-
vat, but the two are not identical.
many scholars must keep the text at
ice, behind a barrier, an interpreter
to make the Bible relevant to his or
sonal existence is thereby regarding
herself as one of those to whom it is
sed. The Bible's role as the foundation
he Jewish people is not dissimilar to
of parents: One can develop rela-
ps of all kinds toward them, but one
relate to them as strangers. Just so, a
r of the Jewish people may respect the
ve it, obey it; but may equally well
it, rebel against it, or feel estranged.
Whatever the case, that person can-
n the Bible as "just another book."
tly demonstrated by a 1990s show,
mer va-yelekh ("And he said, and he
staged by the *Ittim* ensemble under
ction of Rina Yerushalmi, who writes
rogram notes that, after staging two
peare plays, "we felt that the time had
reach out to our own text, and the
our primeval text." As a prodigal son
ng to his parents, this powerful show
back to the Bible, with admiration,
ger, bitter mockery, and pain.
ential *peshat* will never be able to
ie Bible at the center of public life.
of struggling in vain to recreate a by-
tuation, it is more realistic to promote
tanding of the Bible as it is, with its
inner tensions; and chronological and
phical contexts; and, at the same time,
g out the relevance of the Torah, the
ts, and the Writings for our own time.
getical technique, however, can create
ted the motivation for its use. Lack-
st, there is no sure need for the well-
ump. Good teachers are capable of

provoking thirst, but their numbers are
steadily decreasing for lack of a supportive
public atmosphere. Nevertheless, if we can
believe the many signs that herald the begin-
ning of a new era, marked by reaction to the
prevalent cynicism and nihilism, by growing
awareness of the benefit inherent in a defini-
tion of personal and collective identity, in a

Wherever Jews migrate, the Bible follows
them, for Jewish communal life is impossible
without it. So late in 1655, perhaps a year after
the first Jewish communal settlement in New
Amsterdam (today New York); a Sephardic
merchant named Abraham de Lucena (d. ca.
1670) arrived in town bearing a Torah scroll,
borrowed from the Jewish community of
Amsterdam. The presence of this Torah scroll
served as a defining symbol of Jewish com-
munal life and culture, creating a sense of
sacred space.

Wherever Jews later created communities
in North America, they either brought Torah
scrolls with them from home, which is what
the Jews who emigrated to Savannah did in
1733, or they quickly borrowed Torah scrolls
from elsewhere, as the Jews of Newport did in
1760. Some individual Jews brought privately-
owned Torah scrolls with them to the New
World. Jewish religious life in smaller 18th-c.
colonial Jewish settlements like Lancaster
and Reading, Pennsylvania revolved around
these privately-owned Torahs. Whenever a
minyan (prayer quorum) could be gathered,
usually in the owner's private home, the pres-
ence of the Torah scroll defined the worship
service as authentic, for the scroll contains
the sacred teachings of Jewish religious life.

While the ritualized public reading of the
Torah from a properly written scroll natu-
rally focused attention on the Torah, the first
five books of the Bible; which Jews continue
to privilege and know best, some early

commitment to norms and values, and in the
awe confronting spiritual greatness—if we
can trust these signs, there are good pros-
pects that all these will be sought first and
foremost in that wonderful book which rests,
well-nigh forgotten, on the bottom shelf of
the "Jewish bookcase."

[URIEL SIMON]

The Jewish Bible in America

American Jews also possessed printed Heb-
rew copies of all twenty-four books of the Jewish
Bible, imported from Europe. Others relied
upon less expensive Christian editions of the
Bible in English, even though these contained
the "Old Testament" and New Testament
bound together in one volume, following the
Christian canon, with headings that high-
lighted how the "Old Testament" prefigured
the New.

Millions of Christian Americans likewise
possessed that Bible, which they read, pon-
dered, preached from, and debated. In the ear-
ly decades of the 19th c., historian Mark Noll
shows, belief in the Protestant notion of the
"Bible alone" [*sola Scriptura*] "constituted an
anchor of religious authority in a churning sea
of demographic, social and political turmoil."

Even if they owned the same Bibles,
however, American Jews never viewed them
the same way as their neighbors did. They ac-
corded sanctity only to the books that formed
part of the Jewish Bible, resisted Christologi-
cal interpretations, and recalled that their
own tradition ordered the books of Scripture
in a different way than did Christians.

Jewish biblical interpretation, by its very
existence, complicated American Christian
ideas of following the "Bible alone." If, after
all, there were Jewish and Christian Bibles
and Jewish and Christian interpretations of
those Bibles, how could all of them be true?
The *sola Scriptura* concept, moreover, ran
counter to Jewish teachings concerning the

"Oral Torah." Judaism in that period stressed that there is a wealth of tradition preserved by the ancient Rabbis of the Talmud and other rabbinic sources that had been handed down at Sinai, though not found in the written biblical text itself.

For their part, Christians viewed Jews as "keepers of the Old Testament" who obstinately misunderstood the Jewish Bible's central message. William McGuffey's *Eclectic Third Reader* (1836-37), a widely used elementary school textbook, for example, taught a generation of American schoolchildren that the "Old Testament" was Jews' "own sacred volume, which contained the most extraordinary predictions concerning the infidelity of their nation, and the rise, progress, and extensive prevalence of Christianity." To Jews, of course, such Christological readings of the Jewish Bible were anathema.

Simultaneously, then, the Bible served both as a bridge and as a boundary marker between Jews and Christians in America. It linked the two great faiths around commonly-cherished biblical teachings. And it demarcated differences over what the term "Bible" connotes, and how the Bible's sacred words should be understood.

The vast majority of American Jews, until comparatively recent times, privileged the Jewish Bible over the Talmud, which few could read. This distinguished them from traditional European Jews, whose educational priorities were precisely the reverse. In 19th-c. America, it was the Bible and not the Talmud that bound Jews together and linked them to their neighbors. Leading Jews, like the editor, politician and dramatist Mordecai Noah (1785-1851), believed that God's word, as found in the Jewish Bible, was "our safest guide." He once advised the American Jewish religious leader Isaac Leeser (1806-1868) to "shut the Talmud and open the Bible."

Indeed, it was a Jew, Jonathan (Jonas) Horwitz (d. 1852), who, in 1812, "proposed the publication of an edition of the Hebrew Bible," the first of its kind in the United States. Many Christian clergy subscribed

to the project, and it was brought to fruition two years later by the Scottish printer, Thomas Dobson. In 1826, another Jew, printer Solomon Jackson (d. ca. 1847), proposed the publication of a Heb-English linear Bible. Six leading Jews and three Christian clergy recommended the project, one of the latter highlighting the fact that the "author and editor belong to the *literal* family of Abraham."

While that Bible never appeared, Isaac Leeser in Philadelphia published a handsome edition of the Hebrew Bible in 1848. Six years later, in 1854, he produced the world's first full-scale Jewish translation of the Bible into English. That translation freed Jews from their reliance on Christian translations of the Bible and taught Christians who consulted it much about the Jewish view of Scripture. By contrast, the Talmud remained neglected on the part of 19th-c. American Jews. The first printed American edition of the Talmud and its commentaries only appeared in 1919.

Rightly or not, many in America looked upon Jews as experts on everything connected to the Jewish Bible, since leading rabbis could read its text in the original Heb and cite a chain of traditional Jewish interpretations concerning what that text meant. When controversies arose over such topics as temperance, capital punishment, and slavery, the Jewish view of Scripture was regularly solicited.

In the case of slavery, Rabbi Morris Raphael (1798-1868) of New York, in a celebrated address delivered on the National Fast Day (January 4, 1861) at the request of the American Society for Promoting National Unity, concluded that even if Southern slave holders had acted wrongly, slave holding as such was "no sin" for slave property was "expressly placed under the protection of the Ten Commandments." (Slaves are mentioned explicitly in Exod. 20.10, 14.) His address reinforced familiar Protestant arguments, but nevertheless received wide circulation, coming as it did from a learned rabbi. One enthusiastic Protestant minister was so persuaded by Raphael's reading, based on the Heb original, that he declared the rabbi's lecture to be "as true

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object, and it was brought to fruition years later by the Scottish printer, Dobson. In 1826, another Jew, printer Jackson (d. ca. 1847), proposed the creation of a Heb-English linear Bible for Jews and three Christian clergy members ended the project, one of the latter citing the fact that the "author and editor of the *literal* family of Abraham." That Bible never appeared, Isaac Philadelphia published a handwritten edition of the Hebrew Bible in 1848. Six years later, in 1854, he produced the world's first large-scale Jewish translation of the Bible into English. That translation freed Jews from dependence on Christian translations of the Bible and taught Christians who consulted it about the Jewish view of Scripture. By the late 19th century, the Talmud remained neglected among 19th-c. American Jews. The first American edition of the Talmud and its commentaries only appeared in 1919. Whether or not, many in America looked to rabbis as experts on everything connected with the Jewish Bible, since leading rabbis could read the original Heb and cite a variety of traditional Jewish interpretations concerning what that text meant. When controversy arose over such topics as temperance, capital punishment, and slavery, the Jewish view of Scripture was regularly solicited. In the case of slavery, Rabbi Morris Raphall (1815-1888) of New York, in a celebrated sermon delivered on the National Fast Day (April 4, 1861) at the request of the American Society for Promoting National Unity, argued that even if Southern slave holders acted wrongly, slave holding as such was for slave property was "expressly sanctioned under the protection of the Ten Commandments." (Slaves are mentioned explicitly in 20.10, 14.) His address reinforced fashionable Protestant arguments, but nevertheless had wide circulation, coming as it did from an ordained rabbi. One enthusiastic Protestant minister was so persuaded by Raphall's sermon based on the Heb original, that he urged the rabbi's lecture to be "as true

almost as the word of God itself." Unsurprisingly, opponents of slavery, significant Jewish leaders among them, condemned Raphall's reading of the biblical text and insisted on a more historically contextualized reading or one that focused on the spirit rather than on the letter of Divine law. Rabbi David Einhorn (1808-1879), for example, argued vehemently that it was "rebellion against God to enslave human beings created in His image." What is significant is that both sides in this debate appealed to the Jewish Bible, as interpreted by rabbis who could read it in Heb, and were familiar with its traditional commentaries.

Americans continued to look to Jews as experts on the Hebrew Bible long after the Civil War. Popular 19th-c. Bible magazines, such as *The Old Testament Student*, welcomed Jewish participation and brought Jewish teachings concerning the Bible to non-Jewish readers. Chautauqua and other lecture forums regularly featured Jewish speakers on biblical subjects. Thanks to the Jewish philanthropist Jacob Schiff (1847-1920), Harvard University created its Semitic Museum and funded the first American archeological excavation in Palestine, which Schiff saw as the fountainhead of Semitic civilization. Elsewhere, in many parts of the country, Christians consulted with knowledgeable Jews concerning what the Heb of the Jewish Bible originally meant and how Jews understood difficult biblical passages.

These developments went hand in hand with the first flickers of Jewish Bible scholarship on American shores. The initial group of American Jewish Bible scholars was trained in Europe, immigrated with the great wave of Central European Jews that swelled America's Jewish population from less than 15,000 in 1840 to about 250,000 just forty years later, and most were active rabbis. Some, like Isidor Kalisch (1816-1886) and Isaac M. Wise (1819-1900), sought to strengthen the hands of the faithful against missionaries and higher biblical critics. Others, like Benjamin Szold (1829-1902), whose commentary on Job was the first commentary on a book of the Bible

by an American Jew, wrote primarily for his peers abroad; he has been described as a "conservative critic." Meanwhile, Michael Heilprin (1823-1888), the only member of this early group who was not a rabbi, enthusiastically promoted biblical criticism and did much to familiarize Americans of all faiths with the fruits of German scholarship. Perhaps the most creative of all the early Jewish Bible scholars in America was the eccentric Arnold Bogumil Ehrlich (1848-1919). Ehrlich, though like Heilprin not a rabbi, taught Heb and rabbinic thought for many years in New York City. His scholarly writings in German and Heb, replete with suggested emendations of the biblical text, continue to be widely consulted.

The lonely efforts of these scholarly pioneers contrast with the poor knowledge of the Bible that characterized the mass of American Jews at that time. Like so many of their Protestant and Catholic peers, they revered the Bible more than they actually knew it. They formally studied the Bible for only a few years as youngsters in supplementary schools that met mostly on Sundays.

The textbooks Jews employed to teach the Bible were similar to Christian volumes. Instead of word-for-word translations from the original Heb, common in traditional Jewish pedagogy, American Jewish textbooks mostly relied upon catechisms with posed questions and memorized answers, as well as moralistic Bible stories (including folk legends such as the extrabiblical story of Abraham smashing his father's idols), and, for older children, abridged translations known as "junior Bibles." For all that these resembled Christian textbooks in form, the Jewish texts emphasized Jewish interpretations in place of Christian ones, and sought to ensure that Jewish children identified the Bible as a Jewish book and the source of Jewish law. For example, the popular Protestant *Child's Scripture Question Book* (1853) depicted the prophet Malachi as foretelling the coming of John the Baptist, "to prepare the way before Christ." Its closely related Jewish counterpart,

Elementary Introduction to the Scriptures for the Use of Hebrew Children (1854) depicted Malachi instead as one who came to "reform the people," and who foretold the coming of "Elijah the prophet."

The mass migration of over two million east European Jews to America's shores in the late 19th and early 20th centuries brought to America a community of Jews who knew and respected the Jewish Bible; many of them could read it in the original. Their numbers elevated the American Jewish community into one of the world's largest, with a new responsibility to advance Jewish learning at all levels. Publication in New York of the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901-1906), a grand synthesis of Jewish scholarship, reflected this responsibility and heralded American Jewry's cultural arrival. The encyclopedia devoted substantial attention to biblical subjects, making available to lay English readers both traditional Jewish approaches to the Bible and the fruits of modern critical scholarship.

The Jewish Publication Society, established in 1888, likewise committed itself to advancing knowledge of the Bible among Jews. In 1917, it published a new Jewish translation of the Bible, under the chief editorship of the Russian-born Max Margolis (1866-1932), one of America's foremost biblical scholars (see "Jewish Translations of the Bible," pp. 2091-2106). Significantly, a majority of the members of the translation committee for the new Bible, including Margolis, had received at least an important part of their formal Jewish education in the United States, a signal of how quickly serious study of the Jewish Bible in the country was developing. "It was a Bible translation to which American Jews could point with pride as the creation of the Jewish consciousness on a par with similar products of the Catholic and Protestant churches ..." historian Abraham Neuman explained, "To the Jews it presented a Bible which combined the spirit of Jewish tradition with the results of biblical scholarship, ancient, mediaeval and modern. To non-Jews it opened the gateway of Jewish tradition in the interpretation of the Word of God."

Interest in the Bible likewise spread at the popular level. The *American Jewish Year Book*, in 1923, provided a list of some sixty volumes on Bible and Biblical Literature, which it described as "standard books in English" on the subject, numbers of them written by American Jews. The Jewish Chautauqua Society produced educational materials on the Bible for teachers. Educator Joseph Magil (1871-1945) created a series of linear Bibles to facilitate word-by-word translations from biblical Heb into Yiddish or English. For Yiddish-speaking Jews, the poet Yehoash Solomon Bloomgarden (d. 1927) also produced a lyrical Yiddish translation of the Bible ("the greatest single achievement of American Yiddish poetry" according to David Roskies) that began to appear serially in the New York daily *Der Tog* from 1922.

Popular interest in the Bible soon spilled over into American Jewish literature and popular culture. The poet Delmore Schwartz (1913-1966), for example, wrote a series of dramatic monologues expounding on the biblical stories of Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob. The prolific novelist Sholem Asch (1880-1957) produced novels on Moses and Isaiah. Between 1939 and 1949 he published a trilogy on New Testament characters—*The Nazarene*, *The Apostle*, and *Mary*—which involved him in controversy within the Jewish community. Charles Reznikoff (1894-1976) penned *By the Waters of Manhattan*, as if reimagining Ps. 137 ("By the rivers of Babylon ...") for a new diaspora land. Later, under the influence of the Holocaust, novelists like Bernard Malamud (1914-1986) drew upon themes from the book of Job.

Film-makers likewise turned to biblical themes. The world's first Yiddish talkie film, produced in the United States by Joseph Green (1900-1996), was titled *Joseph in the Land of Egypt* (1932). Other Yiddish-language films featured titles like *The Sacrifice of Isaac* and *The Destruction of Jerusalem*, recycled from biblical epics originally produced for the silent screen. These stories from the Jewish Bible proved popular with Jewish

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Screenwriters likewise turned to biblical stories for the world's first Yiddish talkie film, in the United States by Joseph P. Kates (1900–1996), was titled *Joseph in the Land of Egypt* (1932). Other Yiddish-language film titles like *The Sacrifice of Isaac* and *The Destruction of Jerusalem*, recycled biblical epics originally produced for the screen. These stories from the Bible proved popular with Jewish

audiences; they reinforced Judaism's central narratives and helped to legitimize film as an acceptable form of mass entertainment.

The religious revival that followed World War II led to a series of film epics from the Jewish Bible for broader English-speaking audiences, notably such titles as *Samson and Delilah* (1949), *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Esther and the King* (1960). All three, according to film scholar Patricia Brens, employed biblical themes to "provide a commentary on the recent suffering of the Jewish people, their miraculous survival and their hope for reconstitution in the new State of Israel." To date, more than fifty films based on themes from the Jewish Bible have been produced in the United States. Their subjects, selected both for their dramatic power and for their familiarity to viewers, include widely-known stories from Gen. and Exod., the tale of Samson and Delilah from the book of Judg., episodes from the lives of King David and King Solomon, and the thrilling story of Esther.

The post-war revival also witnessed new interest on the part of Jews in the study of the Jewish Bible, paralleling renewed Christian interest in the "Book of Books." Rabbis in the 1950s spoke of the need "to reclaim the Bible for the Jews." Sales of the 1917 Jewish Bible translation boomed. A new Heb-English version of that Bible was produced. Synagogue Bible classes and home study programs proliferated. Bible-themed art books, and illustrated Jewish editions of individual books of the Bible, such as *Jonah and Ruth*, sold thousands of copies.

Against this background, the Jewish Publication Society decided to undertake a new Jewish translation of the Bible, on different principles than the 1917 translation. Protestants had produced the highly successful Revised Standard Version and Catholics had likewise begun to translate the Bible anew. The Jewish translation promised to take full advantage of modern scholarship, to render the Bible into modern (as opposed to King James) English, and to print

the Bible according to the highest standards of contemporary typographical design (see also "Jewish Translations of the Bible," pp. 2091–2106).

The scholars and rabbis who worked on the new translation were, for the most part, American-born and trained. Several taught at major universities, reflecting both the growing acceptance of Jewish studies as a legitimate academic discipline and the increased willingness on the part of universities to permit biblical studies to be taught by Jews. The goal of these rabbis and scholars was to produce a Jewish Bible translation, based on the accepted Heb MT and sensitive to Jewish interpretive tradition, that would be respected by Jews and non-Jews alike.

The completed Torah translation, when published in 1963, was warmly welcomed by Catholic and Protestant, as well as Jewish scholars. Its appearance was judged an important event, and was covered in major newspapers and magazines. The Torah translation also achieved wide sales—a quarter of a million copies were printed within a decade.

Twenty more years would pass before the Jewish Publication Society celebrated the translation of the whole Bible in 1982. Three years later, all three parts of the Bible translation, with revisions, were brought together in one volume entitled *Tanakh*—from the Hebrew acronym for *Torah* (Pentateuch), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Kethuvim* (Writings). That title, carefully chosen, underscored the Jewishness of the new translation. A "Judeo-Christian" title like "The Holy Scriptures," the title of the 1917 translation, was consciously rejected.

Tanakh thus encapsulated an important message not only about the Bible translation but about the whole story of the Jewish Bible in America. It underscored the fact that Jews, even as they shared the Hebrew Bible in common with their Christian neighbors, understood much of it differently, and even called it by a different name.

[JONATHAN D. SARNA]