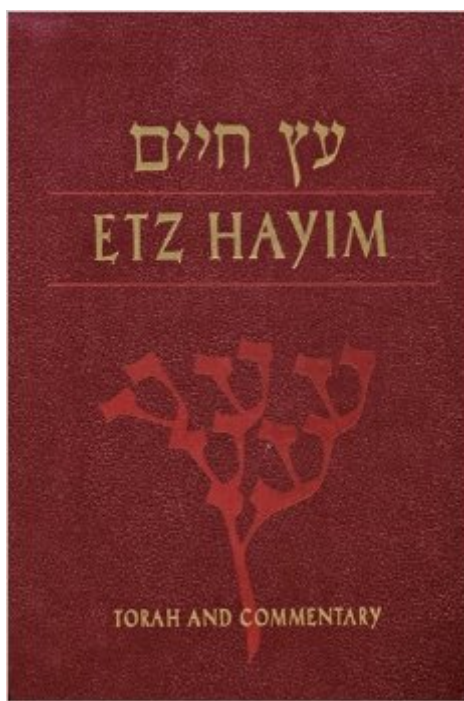


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Etz Hayim: Torah And Commentary



Synopsis

Special features make Etz Hayim meaningful for lay and clergy alike: - Essays on key themes by prominent Conservative movement rabbis and scholars- Separate p'shat and d'rash commentary themes, showing two approaches to interpreting the Torah: The p'shat commentary, adapted from the JPS Torah Commentary and edited by Chaim Potok, seeks to explain the basic meaning of the text. The d'rash commentary, edited by Harold Kushner, selects insights from over 2,000 years of Torah study, including passages from the Talmud and Midrash, the teachings of the Sages, comments by Rashi, homiletic and psychological insights by Hasidic teachers, and readings by contemporary rabbis and scholars, including women's voices.- The haftarot commentary, edited by Michael Fishbane and drawn from his JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarot, explains the supplemental readings from the Prophets (Nevi'im), which accompany each weekly Sabbath reading.- Highlights of traditional readings for Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities including the special section halakhah l'ma'aseh, which indicates where Jewish laws are based on biblical passages. Also, blessings for the Torah and haftarot, full-color maps, glossary, timeline of biblical events, and indexes.

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Customer Reviews

How can one decide to purchase upon a chumash? I think it can be based on translation, ease of use, and commentaries. On some Shabbat mornings, I might use three chumashim: the Hertz, the Plaut, and the Fox. One I use for translation, the others for commentary. For about seventy years,

Conservative/Masorti congregations have chosen to use chumash by Rabbi Hertz, a pre war Chief British rabbi. Some find it very Thee-Thou-stilted in British English, and somewhat apologetic for Hebrew practices, like animal sacrifice. It reflected the insecurity of Jewish life at the time of its publication. This new book and keepsake is a replacement for the Hertz chumash. Etz Hayim was a ten year project, and it reflects the beliefs and ideology of the Conservative movement. It is not apologetic in tone, it gets rid of Thou Thy and Thee, and it contains some commentaries that are inclusive and feminist in nature. I like it because the commentary does not sugar coat the actions of the early Hebrews, and it does not hide from the belief in redactors and an evolving Torah. In terms of translation to English, I find Etz Hayim enlightening. For example, take the first sentences of Parshat Noah (Genesis 6:9-12). The old Hertz Chumash translates the lines as: "These are the generations of Noah. Noah was in his generation a man righteous and whole-hearted; Noah walked with god. And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. And the earth was corrupt before god and the earth was filled with violence. And god saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth." When you compare this to the UAHC Plaut translation, generations of Noah becomes "the line of Noah", and whole-hearted becomes "Blameless in his age."

Why do we need another commentary on the 5 Books of Moses?...what do you get with this? One big reason for this book is the massive 5-volume JPS commentary, by four editors. It is the most thorough Jewish humash commentary in English. Its indispensable for someone who wants real depth but, like me, is not fluent in Hebrew. However, this is far too much for a synagogue Bible. So it was condensed down to give the pshat level of commentary in Etz Hayim. That means that you are hearing four voices --- not just one, as in other books. It includes recent understandings of biblical history, archeology, linguistics and literary forms. There is a second layer of commentary, the derash, which provides spiritual insights that go beyond the plain meaning of the words., and is original for Etz Hayim. These two layers thus have different agendas. The pshat provides what the Torah meant in its time and place. For example, in the Akeda story, Isaac sees no animal for sacrifice, and asks Abraham, "Where are the sheep for offering?" Abraham responds, "God will see to the sheep." The peshat observes "the father's vague reply surely sustains whatever doubts Isaac now feels, especially in an age when human sacrifice was possible." OK, you're right there in the story itself. The derash adds, "One suspects that Isaac at this point intuited that he was to be the offering. Both father and son missed an opportunity for open conversation about a matter of supreme importance to each of them. This father and son never have the opportunity of speaking

with each other again." The Derash provides a moral lesson, musar, a spiritual and sometimes mystical dimension . It somewhat resembles the "gleanings" section of the Plaut, but is more focussed and distilled.

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