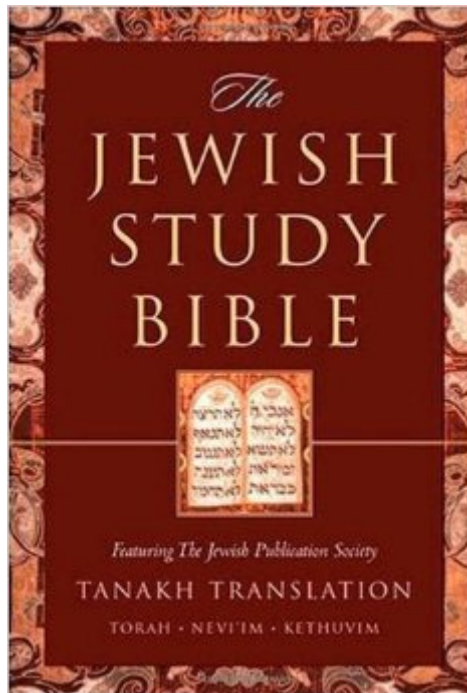


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# The Jewish Study Bible: Featuring The Jewish Publication Society TANAKH Translation



## Synopsis

The Jewish Study Bible is a one-volume resource tailored especially for the needs of students of the Hebrew Bible. Nearly forty scholars worldwide contributed to the translation and interpretation of the Jewish Study Bible, representing the best of Jewish biblical scholarship available today. A committee of highly-respected biblical scholars and rabbis from the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism movements produced this modern translation. No knowledge of Hebrew is required for one to make use of this unique volume. The Jewish Study Bible uses The Jewish Publication Society TANAKH Translation. Since its publication, the Jewish Study Bible has become one of the most popular volumes in Oxford's celebrated line of bibles. The quality of scholarship, easy-to-navigate format, and vibrant supplementary features bring the ancient text to life. \* Informative essays that address a wide variety of topics relating to Judaism's use and interpretation of the Bible through the ages. \* In-text tables, maps, and charts. \* Tables of weights and measures. \* Verse and chapter differences. \* Table of Scriptural Readings. \* Glossary of technical terms. \* An index to all the study materials. \* Full color New Oxford Bible Maps, with index.

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## Customer Reviews

I held back from submitting a review until I had worked my way through this hefty volume (or rather, its original material, as I was very familiar with the translation), so I might as well address some of the issues raised in the meantime. At least some of the earlier reviewers seem originally to have

been under the impression that the base text of this commentary was the Jewish Publication Society translation of 1917 (and not happy to find out that it wasn't). That translation (JPS or JPSV for short) was itself a de facto revision of the British Revised Version of 1885, carried out under the direction of (and largely the work of) Max L. Margolis, a distinguished critical scholar. (He had a known distaste for organized religion, which probably helped him ignore objections from some of his supposed colleagues in the Rabbinate.) It \*was\* the base text in the Soncino Bible Commentary, and the second edition of the Hertz Pentateuch, used in Synagogues for decades, and for a series of commentaries on specific books, published by the JPS itself. The Old JPS "Holy Scriptures" in its black-bound small format was for me, as for many other Jewish readers in the United States (and elsewhere), the primary introduction to the Bible. (For further details, the essay on Jewish Bible translations in the present volume may be consulted.) The 1917 text was reprinted in larger format in 1955, with what may be called (out of courtesy) a "distinctive" orange binding, but a very attractive blue dust jacket. It retained the original title of "The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic text: A new translation with the aid of previous versions and with constant consultation of Jewish authorities," although it wasn't "new." Both versions often can be found used. A version based on this re-set printing can be consulted on-line, as "A Hebrew - English Bible According to the Masoretic Text and the JPS 1917 Edition" from Mechon Mamre. (The Hebrew text offered there is not presented to either traditional or modern critical standards, but is suitable for most purposes.) "The Jewish Study Bible" is, in fact, based on the \*replacement\* for this familiar version, published between 1962 and 1982, often known as the New Jewish Publication Society Version (NJPSV). The Old JPS version, however, was reprinted for some time, fortunately for those who found the NJPSV gratingly modern, or just bland and rather abstract in its choice of words. It is important to keep the two versions distinct, however, as they were carried out following different principles of translation, and have very a different "feel". The New Translation (now a few decades old) differs dramatically in using modern, instead of modified King James Version, English, in both vocabulary and, more radically, in sentence structure. With its various revisions in 1985 and subsequently, it has the advantage of nearly a century of additional scholarship, especially in archeology and ancient languages. Instead of being stamped with the influence of one strong-minded scholar, it was hammered out by committees of scholars, including representatives of the (modern) Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform movements. The NJPSV has served as the basis of Reform and Conservative one-volume Torah commentaries, of a JPS five-volume Torah commentary, and of JPS commentaries on various books which are appearing at intervals. The whole translation is also available facing a very beautiful Hebrew text, with selected Masoretic

(traditional textual) notes. Although some sections (Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others) were first published separately, the translation mainly appeared in three volumes of Torah (Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im (Prophets -- the main historical books and the "writing Prophets"), and Ketuvim (Writings -- everything else, including Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, Lamentations, and Daniel, classed as historical or prophetic by Christians). This is the Jewish canon, known by the acronym of T-N-Kh. Officially, the complete edition is known as "Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text," with the Hebrew-English editions known as "JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh" (and variations, which may require a little searching on). NJPSV is still the common abbreviation, however. Although the translation has been challenged at many points on technical grounds -- with the translators themselves joining in -- Emanuel Tov's "Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible" (1992) singled it out for its fidelity to the received text (any departures are clearly identified), and independence of earlier translations, adding, rather more boldly, that "its exegesis is reliable." Beyond its reception in Jewish circles, the NJPSV seems to have influenced the "New Revised Standard Version" of 1990, whether as a model, or because the translation committees had an overlapping membership. There are other recent Jewish translations, complete or in progress, some from resolutely Orthodox perspectives, others, like Richard Elliott Friedman's, embracing Higher Critical analysis. A major attempt, by Everett Fox, to follow the Hebrew text as closely as possible while still being intelligible as English, differs quite radically from the NJPSV in style, although often in agreement on the meaning where they both depart from familiar phrasing; it is appearing in installments as "The Schocken Bible." The present commentary, covering the whole Jewish Biblical canon, aims to place the Jewish Bible, as a Jewish text, in the context of modern information, and modern critical theories of various kinds. It is, logically enough, based on what is now the mostly widely used \*modern\* Jewish English translation. Obviously, this project will not please those who want to think of the Hebrew text as a revelation dictated to human secretaries, and satisfactorily explained by the great medieval commentators and their latter-day synthesizers, whose views need only be copied (selectively). However, the team which has prepared this commentary, like the team of translators, is extremely aware of Jewish issues, and the kinds of questions Jewish readers are likely to have, even if it does not attempt to give Orthodox answers. (For example, Jonathan Klawans' essay on "Concepts of Purity in the Bible" manages to be clear, accurate, insightful, and probably useful to novice Bible readers -- with a good vocabulary or dictionary -- in a mere seven pages; but it is not a guide to observance of traditional Jewish practices.) In addition to the annotations to the Biblical text, which are themselves of considerable value, there are excellent essays offering surveys of scholarship from various points of view, of

which those under the heading "Jewish Interpretations of the Bible" might well be read first by those with a limited familiarity with this enormous subject, and can probably be read profitably by advanced students as well. The results are at times strikingly different from those found in the other Oxford Annotated Bibles, and in other one-volume commentaries, such as the avowedly ecumenical "HarperCollins Study Bible." A typical example of the difference in emphasis in the three volumes is the commentary to the second chapter of "Ezra," which in this case includes information, not found in the others, on early Rabbinic understanding of the extent of Ezra's status and authority as a non-prophetic interpreter of Torah, seen as foreshadowing their own. (Rather as a commentary on "Acts" might note its use in controversies over the organization of the Church.) However, even besides material such as maps and portions of essays from the recent "New Oxford Annotated Bible: Third Edition," there is also a very high degree of similarity in the information in the notes, due to the large amount of commonly received linguistic and material (archeological and other) information with which modern scholarship is conducted. (And perhaps to the presence of Jewish contributors to the other projects, including some whose work is also found in the present commentary.) (The "Oxford Annotated Bible" series was based on the mainly American Revised Standard Version, and more recently on the New Revised Standard Version. Confusingly, there is also a 1992 "Oxford Study Bible," edited by Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, which is based on the Revised English Bible of 1989, a version of the New English Bible of 1970, which had a Study Edition in 1976. The recent editions of these "Annotated" and "Study" Bibles have, I think, only one contributor in common.) Although those looking for an Orthodox Jewish approach are likely to be disappointed, if not outraged, traditional Jewish understandings of the text are drawn upon, to a considerably greater degree than in other general commentaries, and some, at least, of the Jewish liturgical uses of Biblical passages are identified, either in essays, or in notes to the passages in their original contexts. As I am sure will be true of every reader with a wide background in Biblical studies, I have a number of points with which I disagree. But I am enormously impressed by the enterprise as a whole.

This study Bible contains the Jewish Publication Society's "Tanakh" translation of the Jewish scriptures [the Old Testament to Christians], together with extensive notes. The notes reflect modern scholarship, also indicate how a passage has been interpreted throughout the long history of Judaism and how a passage is used in Judaism today. Frequently, the notes give alternatives to the meanings presented in the translation. While the notes are far more extensive than in ecumenical study Bibles [such as the New Oxford Annotated Bible and the HarperCollins Study

Bible], they serve only as a bare introduction to the vast wealth of Jewish commentary on the Bible. The JPS translation, like all Jewish translations, adheres to the Masoretic (traditional) Hebrew text used in the Jewish liturgy. Most Christian translations substitute readings from other sources (such as the Greek Septuagint translation and the Dead Sea Scrolls) when they are thought to be more accurate than the Masoretic Text. This study Bible does not pretend that, in places, other sources may reflect the original form of the text. The notes -- both to the Study Bible and the translation -- suggest possible alternate readings from other sources. A long section of articles in the back of the Study Bible provides an introduction to Jewish interpretation and use of the Bible throughout the ages. While it is impossible for any one-volume work to do more than scratch the surface of Jewish Bible scholarship throughout the ages, the Jewish Study Bible provides an introduction for Jews, and others who are interested in Judaism, to Jewish Bible study. It is definitely worth buying by those who do not have the time (or the money) for a multiplicity of volumes.

I've always been a fan of the TANAKH Translation of the Hebrew Bible (aka Old Testament), but have been unable to find a volume that had study notes for the entire translation. The Jewish Publication Society (copyright holder of the TANAKH) has nice Commentaries on the individual books of the Torah (plus Jonah and Esther), but these cover only the books mentioned and are too unwieldy for everyday use. Oxford Univ. Press has produced a great single-volume work that is beautifully typeset and easy to read. Each book has an engaging introduction and helpful sidebar notes and commentary provided by reputable Jewish scholars. These notes are organized as thought units, not as random facts and definitions. Although the TANAKH does not break down the text into subunits with section heads, the scholars providing the notes do this in a non-obtrusive manner. I find this to be a very respectful way to treat the Scripture text. (Many Christian study Bibles intrude upon the text in such a willy-nilly manner it can be hard for even a serious Bible-reader to know where the Scripture ends and the "commentating" has begun.) The volume concludes with 200-pages worth of essays: 7 on Jewish interpretation of the Bible; 8 on the Bible in Jewish life and thought; and 9 on backgrounds for reading the Bible (some of which are adaptations of essays found in Oxford's Annotated Bible). Like most study Bibles, the Jewish Study Bible has a timeline to help the reader get an approximate sense of when key biblical events occurred. What's nice about the JSB is that it also has a Chronological Table of Rulers listing rulers not directly referenced in the Bible; this helps the reader better place those that are. The 20-page glossary covers literary and theological terms (casuistic law, etiology, haplography, Oral Torah, etc.) as well as key names and terms from the biblical text. As for "chutzpah"...this can be found in the

commentator's note on Isaiah 44.9-13: "God rebukes [the people] for their chutzpah in questioning the means through whom God chose to work." I offer this as evidence that the authors do not confine themselves to dry, esoteric scholarly ways of expression.

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