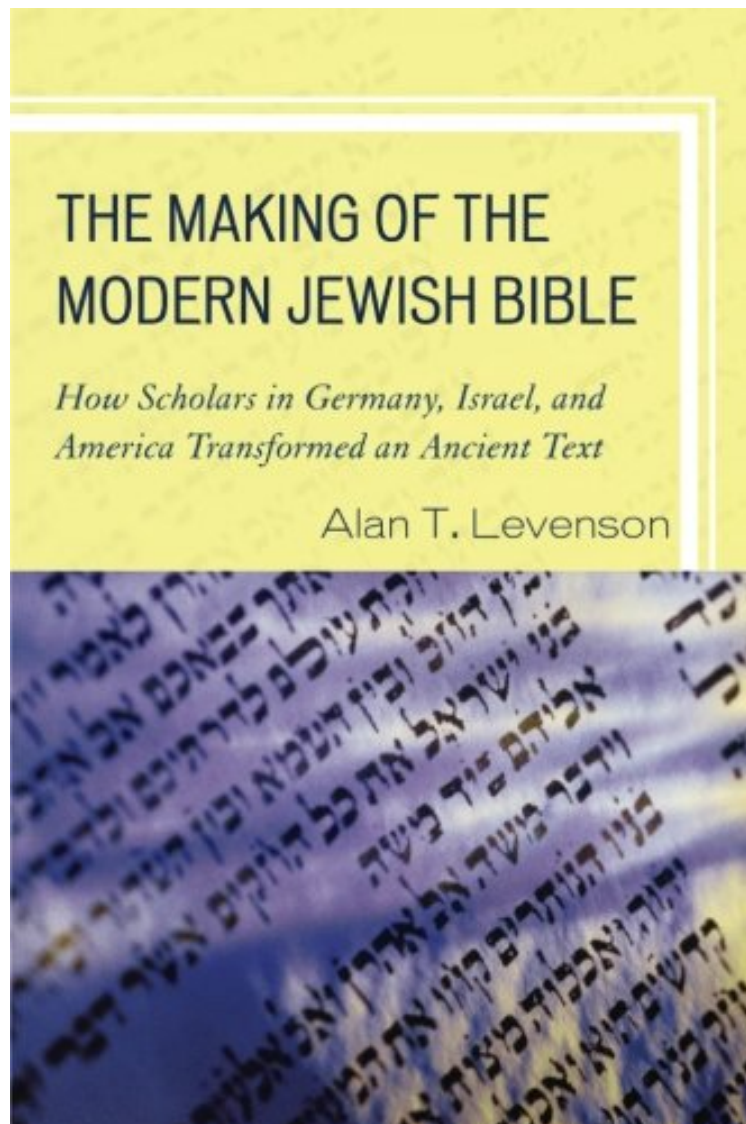


(Download ebook) The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible: How Scholars in Germany, Israel, and America Transformed an Ancient Text

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Alan T. Levenson

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Alan T. Levenson : The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible: How Scholars in Germany, Israel, and America Transformed an Ancient Text before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible: How Scholars in Germany, Israel, and America Transformed an Ancient Text:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. More than a textbook
By Eclectic Reader
Though this is listed as a text book, it is extremely readable and comprehensible to the lay person. Of course, you have to have a serious interest in the Hebrew Bible, and enjoy following its travels through translations and interpretations. Every year, it seems, a new Hebrew Bible translation comes out or some group (The Women's Commentary, for example) "tweaks" a word here and there to try, in the editor's opinion, to make it more readable. It's nice to know, before we criticize their "chutzpah" to know that they are following an ancient tradition. Even if you read your Torah mostly in Hebrew, this book is valuable and even exciting.
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Praise of The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible
By RR
Thank you, Professor Levenson, for the gift of "the Making of the Modern Jewish Bible." By reclaiming the Bible - or is it by asserting that the Words of Old are the guiding light for the Jewish people - Alan T. Levenson acquaints us with the Jewish thinkers who in more recent years wrote their thoughts about the Bible. I feel transported back to the mind and soul enriching classes I had the privilege of attending at Siegal College in Cleveland, Ohio where Dr. Alan Levenson lectured for a number of years.
Angret M. Georgi
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. German, Israeli, and American thinkers compared
By Michael Lewyn
This book analyzes commentaries on the Torah (and to a lesser extent, the rest of the Hebrew Bible) by modern thinkers, from Moses Mendelssohn in the 1700s to the present. The book is divided into three parts, addressing German, Israeli, and American commentaries in order. To some extent, the book compares apples and oranges: the German discussion focuses on full-fledged translations of the Five Books of Moses. By contrast, the Israeli discussion focuses on comments on the Torah by a few thinkers who did not write such translations, and the American section covers a wide range of thinkers and books. Nevertheless, I generally found this book to be pretty interesting. The German section I think is the most interesting; it informs readers of the fabulous creativity of German Judaism, which produced twenty translations of various stripes, including some who (despite the liberal reputation of German Jewry) aggressively criticized the Documentary Hypothesis. The major commentators had very different agendas: Mendelssohn sought to teach Jews grammatically appropriate, readable German while at the same time affirming traditional interpretations of the Torah, 19th-c. Samson Raphael Hirsch sought to link the written Torah to the "oral Torah" of rabbinic tradition, and Martin Buber and Franz Rosenszweig sought to create a Torah that could be understood without commentary. In addition to discussing German commentators, Levenson notes that quite a few of the leading Jewish religious intellectuals of the mid-20th century went to universities in Germany on the way to the U.S., including A.J. Heschel, Joseph Soloveitchik, and Nechama Leibowitz, and suggests that perhaps their exposure to a wide variety of cultures contributed to their creativity. Early Israeli commentators, rather than writing a full-fledged Torah commentary for synagogue use, discussed individual parts of the Torah - often while trying to use the Torah to support a nationalist message. Finally, Levenson discusses the U.S., focusing on the congregational Chumashes (Torah plus commentary) produced by the leading denominations, as well as independent attempts at creating a Torah translation. Levenson ably discussed the advantages and deficiencies of each. He criticizes Artscroll (the Orthodox market leader) for ignoring the insights of Christian and non-Orthodox Jewish commentators, and (to a lesser extent) modern Orthodox commentators. The Reform translation does discuss medieval sages, but fails (according to Levenson) to adequately emphasize their disagreements. The Conservative translation is an adequate middle ground in some respects, but should discuss halacha more according to Levenson.

The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible explains how Jewish translators, commentators, and scholars made the Bible a keystone of Jewish life in Germany, Israel and America. In each site, a particular need - religion, nationalism, ethnicity - drove the enterprise of Bible study as scholars wrestled with the demands of the non-Jewish environment and their own indigenous traditions. Contrary to popular conceptions, the author argues that the modern period has been the golden age of Jewish Bible study.

This book traces how ten Jewish thinkers brought the Bible to the center of Jewish identity over the past four centuries. With a light touch, the author insightfully describes how they and other scholars in Europe, America, and Israel responded to the needs of Western culture and Jewish nationalism. (Frederick E. Greenspahn, Florida Atlantic University) This is an original, creative, and thoughtful guide to a topic and an era (or rather, several topics and several eras) that are crucial to understanding today's Judaism but they are not usually brought together with the insightful and informative methodology that Levenson has managed to construct. He has a fine eye for both detail and context as he spins out a tale that covers over three centuries and takes place in three continents. Agree with him or disagree with him or come down somewhere in the middle, the engaged reader of this book will be greatly illuminated and moved to think about things, both old and new, in meaningful and fruitful ways. (Leonard Greenspoon, Creighton University) Alan Levenson has restored the Bible to its rightfully central place in modern Jewish thought. He has done so with considerable sensitivity and consistent lucidity. This is a book that scholars and laypeople alike will read with profit. (David J. Sorkin, University of Wisconsin, Madison) Alan Levenson explains clearly and directly how the meaning of the Bible is socially constructed. He explores how makers of meaning from Spinoza, Jewish Enlightenment thinkers, and modern Jewish thinkers, constructed our ever-changing understanding of the Bible. From

his survey of how modern Zionists and Israelis recovered the Bible as a centerpiece of national life, how the challenge of reading the Bible meaningfully has been addressed in an era of doubt, to the celebration of the Bible as an ethnic touchstone in America, he helps explain how the Bible became the connective tissue of Jewish life even as it served as a vehicle for expressing contemporary values. This book is a valuable guide to anyone interested in understanding the Hebrew Bible today. (David Ariel, President of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies)With refreshing breadth and accessible prose, Alan T. Levenson illuminates the political, social, and religious tensions that shape modern Jewish approaches to the Bible. This wide-ranging and engaging study blends scholarly acumen with a gifted teacher's knack for clarity. Levenson guides the reader to see what is at stake, for some of the most important figures in modern Jewish intellectual history, in how Jews read their sacred text. (Mara Benjamin, St. Olaf College)This is a combination of a careful reading of and original thinking about a group of Bible scholars never before examined together. In his learning and his originality an all-too-rare combination Alan Levenson is matchless. He is a scholar in command of his sources as well as the extensive literature about these sources, who knows how to speak continually to his readers. (Marc Lee Raphael, Nathan and Sophia Gumenick Professor of Judaic Studies, College of William and Mary)This is a terrific book that fills a real need in the Jewish Studies and Biblical Studies Academy: an original history of modern Jewish scholarship on the Bible. The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible will be great for course use as well as general reading. Levenson writes in an elegant style: learned yet with a personal touch, strong and clear from an academic perspective, yet reader-friendly in voice. The book is carefully planned and presented: a conscientious piece of work by an experienced scholar who also cares broadly about this project. 'The Jewish Bible' has arrived as a distinct and distinguished topic for study and appreciation. (Peter Ochs, Edgar Bronfman Professor of Modern Judaic Studies, University of Virginia)In The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible, Alan Levenson has given us a sweeping and detailed panorama of one of the most significant cultural, intellectual and social endeavors in modern Jewish history. This is not merely a history of Jewish Bible scholarship over the past three centuries, nor of modern Jewish translations of the sacred text, but of how Jews in three major centers of Jewish life - Germany, Israel, and the United States - related to and identified with the Bible and gave it a new place in their lives. Levenson's account is a tour de force of scholarship based upon a wide range of sources in German and Hebrew as well as English. He is willing to take sides in passionate scholarly and cultural debates, while at the same time giving a balanced presentation of all sides. Levenson's felicitous and highly accessible writing style makes the book a pleasure to read for scholar, student, and general reader alike. It is an impressive achievement. (Norman A. Stillman, Schusterman/Josey Professor of Judaic History, University of Oklahoma)The Jewish Bible and the distinctly Jewish approach to Bible study is as popular as ever among scholars and laypeople, believers and secularists alike. Those who had a hand in "making" the modern Jewish Bible from Ezra the Scribe to Spinoza, Mendelssohn to Buber, Nechama Leibowitz to Nahum Sarna come to life in this engaging book. Levenson's accessible study of the creative forces of biblical translation and scholarship in Germany, Israel, and in twenty-first century America, explains why the Bible continues to be the indispensable point of entry into classical Jewish learning. (Abigail Gillman, Boston University)About the Author Alan T. Levenson is the Schusterman/Josey Professor of Jewish Intellectual and Religious History at the University of Oklahoma. He is the author of several books, including Modern Jewish Thinkers: An Introduction, The Story of Joseph: A Journey of Jewish Interpretation, and Between Philosemitism and Antisemitism. Defenses of Jews Judaism in Germany, 1871-1932.