

זרמים
Zeramim

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SPECIAL ISSUE:

BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

AS A MODERN JEWISH HERMENEUTIC

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Dear readers,

In the 19th century, coming on the heels of Jewish emancipation in a newly nationalized Europe, the antecedents of modern biblical scholarship ruptured the Ashkenazic world. Thus, for example, Rabbis Abraham Geiger, Zacharias Frankel, and Samson Raphael Hirsch (whose names would later be affiliated – albeit somewhat anachronistically – with the three most populous Jewish denominations today), each responded differently from one another as each sought to reconcile the drive that infused meaning in their developing Jewish identities intersected with the wedge of intellectual arguments that attempted to erode any ‘divine’ imprint in the Hebrew Bible. Geiger and his early Reform colleagues accepted the challenge of distancing themselves from the conception of the Torah as an authoritative document for contemporary guidance; Frankel focused his academic criticism on early rabbinic sages and the interpretation of and translations of Biblical texts (paralleling, perhaps presciently, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America’s hesitation even to teach the Pentateuch or the documentary hypothesis during most of the institution’s first century of existence); and Hirsch, championing an enlightened traditionalist camp, wrote a full Torah commentary peppered with the occasional polemic against historical-critical approaches to Judaism’s sacred scriptures.

Two centuries later, the greater academy of Jewish studies and Jewish communities that view themselves as modern across the world struggle to make sense of the social, intellectual, and spiritual roles that the Hebrew Bible ought to play in the life of a Jew. Furthermore – especially in light of the critiques that scholars have raised in their study of this ancient anthology – how a modern Jew should appropriately respond to the words of this writ continues divide Jewish circles from one another in their search for meaning in modern Biblical interpretation. Such distinctions have yielded a wide range of beliefs about Sinaitic revelation and a variety of attitudes towards Jewish religious authority – all resulting in questions, answers, and even quips that have defined the character of Jewish movements and institutions today.

This special issue of *Zeranim* opens with David Frankel’s reflection on “Contemporary Jewish Theology in Light of Divergent Biblical Views on Revelation’s Content.” Highlighting the Hebrew Bible’s conflicting records of the words and ideas conveyed at Sinai,

Frankel provides suggestions as to how one might find religious meaning in the 'polyphonic' nature of some of the *Tanakh's* contradictory teachings and might attune one's ears for a divine voice amidst the multivocality.

Reflecting on the work of Bible scholars who have written on ancient Israelite or contemporary Jewish theology, Alan Mittleman critiques the gaps left in the philosophical turns of several oft-cited writers in biblical studies. In his "Reconstruction and Retrieval: On Historical and Philosophical Interpretations of Scripture," Mittleman suggests both that the lessons taught by historical-critical scholars will be strengthened by familiarity with dominant trends in philosophy and that scholars attempting contemporary Jewish philosophical writing must be prepared to learn from the historical-critical school.

The second half of our issue focuses on the transmission of the Hebrew Bible among English-speaking people of faith. Providing a brief introduction to the greater contextualization of how the *Tanakh* has been translated for Jewish audiences, Adele Berlin's "On Bible Translations" promotes the study of translations as an entry point for discovering the nuances in, or read into, the Masoretic text.

This special issue closes with an early, advance presentation of, and an appended excerpt from, Martin S. Cohen's forthcoming ambitious 'targumic' translation of the 'Five *Megillot*' (i.e., Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther) and the Torah, the latter of which is presented in accord with the ancient Palestinian triennial lectionary cycle (the divisions of which have been restored by such scholars as Shlomo Naeh, whose work supports Cohen's organizing principles). Cohen's "Introducing *Humash Kol Ha-Tor* and *M'gillot Kol Ha-tor*: Some Preliminary Considerations" provides our readers with insight into some of the particular challenges of conveying the full emotional and intellectual range—as presented in prose and poetry, of texts from many centuries ago—for a modern audience of English readers seeking to delve more deeply in their study of *Tanakh*.

In retrieving the old, *Zeramim* (meaning "Streams"), representative of a wide range of Jewish thought, seeks to help readers find new meaning in the oldest of Jewish sacred writings—in this special issue and in all our issues, indexed by RAMBI (The Index of Articles on Jewish Studies), and archived on our website at www.zeramim.org. The editors of our journal are honored to publish this issue, shedding

some new light on how modern lenses reading the Tanakh can shape Jewish thought today.

With gratitude,

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The editors of Zeramim receive and solicit submissions from a range of authors diverse in age, gender, and denominational identity. For information on how to submit original works to Zeramim, please see the back of this issue.