

Text & Texture

Tradition's Blog of Orthodox Jewish Thought

<http://text.rcarabbis.org/books-of-interest-new-writings-on-the-torah/>

The logo for 'TRADITION' features the word in a large, white, serif font, centered within a blue rectangular background that has a subtle gradient from light to dark blue.

Books of Interest: New Writings on the Torah

October 7, 2009 by [Shlomo Brody](#)

Filed under [Books of Interest](#)

Joshua A. Berman, [*Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought*](#), Oxford University Press, 2008. 222 pages + bibliography & indices.

Yitzchak B. Gottlieb, [*Order in the Bible \(Yesh Seder La-Mikra\): The Arrangement of the Torah in Rabbinic and Medieval Jewish Commentary*](#), Bar Ilan University Press & Magnes Press, 2009. 423 pages + bibliography and indices. [Hebrew]

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, [*Covenant & Conversation: Genesis – The Book of Beginnings*](#), Magid Press & The Orthodox Union, 2009. 356 pages

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, [*Torah Lights: Bereshit – Confronting Life, Love, & Family*](#), Magid Press, 2009. 327 pages.

[*JPS Illustrated Children's Bible*](#), retold by Ellen Frankel, Illustrated by Avi Katz. Jewish Publication Society, 2009. 240 pages.

[*JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: Pocket Edition*](#)

Created Equal, a 2008 National Book Award finalist, presents a fascinating read of the social and political consequences of Biblical theology. Rabbi Berman's fundamental thesis claims that the theological and economic structure of the Torah presented a radically different socio-political understanding of man that offered equality to greater numbers of people. The book proves this historical point by detailing the economic and

political structures of other societies in antiquity and the theological frameworks that justified these systems. Berman, a professor at Bar Ilan university and fellow at the Shalem Center, employs socio-critical theories which are somewhat complex, but his lucid and well-structured writing make this insightful and thought-provoking work accessible to scholars and lay readers alike. This is a welcome addition to the growing literature of Biblical scholarship that addresses the socio-political implications of the Bible's teachings. ¹

Yitzchak Gottlieb's book is a very impressive systematic presentation of the concept of *ein mukdam u-meuchar ba-torah* as found in Chazal, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Ramban. Gottlieb analyzes each figure on their own terms, explaining their perspectives on the schematic order and conjunction of the Torah's laws and narrative. Additionally, Gottlieb separately lists and briefly explains each time these figures employ this concept. This book is a valuable resource toward helping us understand this central question of Biblical interpretation.

In recent years, there has been a growing number of divrei Torah on the Torah portion written for newspapers or email distribution. Two of modern Orthodoxy's finest writers have now collected their respective essays into books.

***Covenant & Conversation* is a compilation of 4 short essays on each parasha from Chief Rabbi Sacks. Frequently philosophical, yet almost ending with a homiletical message, the essays draw on classical Jewish sources as well as contemporary religious thinking. As with all literature of this nature, I found some essays more insightful than others, but overall the work is deep and inspiring. Concise yet profound, these frequently poetic ruminations make for perfect reading for the lay person or scholar who wants something deeper out of his weekly supplemental parasha reading.**

***Torah Lights* is a collection of Rabbi Riskin's weekly parasha columns that have regularly appeared in *The Jerusalem Post* and other Jewish newspapers. Rabbi Riskin employs a number of different interpretative strategies, yet always finds a way to deliver a timely message that appeals to a broad audience.**

Also of Interest: *The JPS Illustrated Children's Bible* is a noble attempt to summarize for children major Biblical stories, from creation until Daniel. Frankel includes an

interesting short essay discussing the difficulties of “translating” Biblical stories for children.

JPS has also recently reissued their beautifully designed Hebrew-English Tanakh, the most frequently cited English translation in academic literature, in a “pocket edition” convenient to carry in a backpack or briefcase, with a series of options for cover colors.

Here is last year’s books of interest on Sefer Bereishit:

- Shlomo Brody