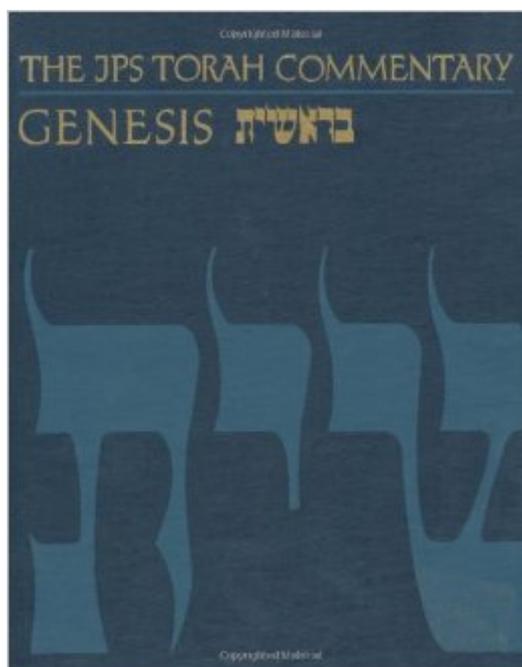


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# JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis



## Synopsis

The JPS Torah Commentary series guides readers through the words and ideas of the Torah. Each volume is the work of a scholar who stands at the pinnacle of his field. Every page contains the complete traditional Hebrew text, with cantillation notes, the JPS translation of the Holy Scriptures, aliyot breaks, Masoretic notes, and commentary by a distinguished Hebrew Bible scholar, integrating classical and modern sources. Each volume also contains supplementary essays that elaborate upon key words and themes, a glossary of commentators and sources, extensive bibliographic notes, and maps.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is simply a magnificent work! This contains the complete Hebrew text of Genesis, the JPS's new English translation, and an extensive original commentary that illuminates the text like a 1000 watt searchlight. On average, each four or five lines of text gets a full page of explanation and commentary, so every subject gets covered in detail. Sarna, like all the JPS Torah commentators, makes use of traditional rabbinic commentaries, and the Mishna, Midrash and Talmud. But it doesn't end here: The commentary goes on to make good use of literary analysis and comparative Semitics; intertextual commentary relating each book to other biblical books, and evidence from modern archaeological discoveries. It manages to be respectful, religious, and authentic to the Jewish tradition, while at the same time rigorously adhering to the highest standards of biblical criticism and intellectual honesty.

I'm just a layperson but have read through several commentaries, The Stone Chumash, The Plaut Commentary, and parts of others, and the J.P.S. Nahum Sarna Genesis Commentary is my favorite. All the commentaries are wonderful to read, but I personally find Mr. Sarna's approach a nice balance of reverence and scholarship. I find it a fascinating mix of historical information, interpretive possibilities, and theological implications. (And I overspent for my copy, buying it in a bookstore).

This book is okay, a competent commentary on Genesis. My only two reservations concern the non-availability of a paperback version (a reasonable consideration if one wanted to buy the whole JPS series on a limited budget), and, perhaps more importantly, the relative lack of specifically Jewish perspective. I couldn't distinguish a lot of the comments from what you might find in more rigorous detail in the Anchor or Word commentaries (two scholarly Christian series with a tendency to higherish criticism). This is particularly noticeable in the pre-Abrahamic section of the book where the commentary is influenced more by modern views on the relation of Genesis to Canaanite myth than by traditional reverence for the text. This is obviously a question of personal preference but I find myself making more use of, and getting more from, Hertz's Pentateuch and Haftorahs. There is not much here in Sarna's Genesis that is not also found in Ephraim Speiser's (Anchor) or George Wenham's (Word).

I love this commentary. I teach Sunday School in a Methodist Church. I love the Jewish exegetical style of study but, since I don't read Hebrew, I have had trouble finding something I could understand. This is geared toward the English reader and is very detailed. Each verse is broken down and gets at least a page of commentary. It's understandable and helps me understand the nuances of the Hebrew language that I just don't get reading the Bible in English. I highly recommend.

I first encountered this series in seminary (Presbyterian). I very much appreciate the layout: Hebrew text and English translation at the top (upper 1/4 to 1/3 of the page), with verse by verse commentary at the bottom of the page. Sarna includes several excursuses (excursi?) at the end of the volume. Sarna seems to employ the historical-critical method in his interpretation, while at the same time offering some speculative reflections upon the psychological states of the patriarchs and other figures of Genesis. As with any commentary, each reader will have to make his or her own decisions as to the helpfulness and insightfulness of the interpretation. I find many of the comments helpful. Coming at the text from a Christian perspective, I especially appreciate Sarna's Jewish

perspective on the text. For readers not used to Hebrew, it may be helpful to note that the commentary, like the Hebrew Bible, reads from right to left ("backwards" for people used to reading left to right).

Nahum Sarna, the general editor of the JPS Commentary series, who passed away just recently, was one of the greatest biblical scholars of the twentieth century and the mentor of many other scholars. He had a keen mind, was extraordinarily friendly to everyone, and was greatly admired. It was a pleasure to talk and learn from him. Sarna offers his readers a great deal of information in this volume. Besides commentaries on every verse which draws from close to a hundred ancient and modern sources, Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and non-religious, he introduces each section with a brief scholarly and interesting summary, over fifty in all. He also includes some three dozen excurses on such subjects as geology, the meaning of the akeda, the moral issue of Jacob's behavior, and the name Israel. Examples of his commentaries include comparing the opening of Genesis with the Mesopotamian Elisha, which shows that the initial verse should be translated "When God began to create heaven and earth." The Hebrew word for "God," Elohim, is not a personal name, but a general Hebrew word for deity and can refer to pagan gods. God's first creation, light, serves as a symbol of life, joy, justice, and deliverance. This light, independent of the sun, became the subject of many rabbinic comments.

While I am a Protestant Christian, I genuinely appreciate Sarna's approach to the Hebrew text. His commentary at many points is sound and his views, from his background, bring a new insight to some Scriptures that cause one to pause and think. He does challenge my views in some areas, but that's greatly appreciated and the value of this work is well worth the price! I highly recommend this book to anyone doing a careful, open study of Genesis!

Prof. Sarna is the foremost Philological Biblical teacher today and this particular edition is unparalleled in its class. Unfortunately, I can't say the same for his production of Exodus as it seemed rushed & therefore lacking in necessary content. Genesis is however first rate from the binding, the topography, the different fonts used, the off white color of the paper (ocularly beneficent), and the texture of the paper is very refined.

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