

NEW BOOKS: BRIEFLY NOTED

Zohar Harakia, translated by Philip J. Caplan. Academic Studies Press, 2012, 465 pp.

A new translation of Rabbi Shim'on ben Tzemah Duran's (1361-1444) work, first printed in 1515. This book is a summary of the early rabbinic approaches to enumerating the 613 commandments of the Torah, to which Duran added his own system. Translated and annotated, it includes an introduction and indices, constituting a fundamental work for those interested in this topic.

The Jewish Annotated New Testament, edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler. Oxford University Press, 2011, 637 pp.

Mention of the New Testament often evokes a negative feeling among Jews, who associate it with missionaries, persecutions, and anti-Semitism. This groundbreaking work, by a team of senior Jewish scholars, brings out the Jewish context of the New Testament, both biblical and talmudic. Extensive introductions, annotations, and nearly one hundred pages of scholarly essays make this a valuable academic work. It treats examples of anti-Judaism, stereotypes, and mistranslation head-on and honestly.

Vision From the Prophet and Council From the Elders, by Hayyim Angel. Orthodox Union Press, 2013, 367 pp.

A collection of Rabbi Angel's essays and articles relating to each book of the Prophets and Writings, many of which were first published in the *Jewish Bible Quarterly*. Those of us familiar with Rabbi Angel's writings know what to expect: deep textual and thematic analysis combining both traditional rabbinic commentaries and academic scholarship, all written in an engaging style. This volume is highly recommended for scholars, clergy, and interested laypeople.

Awesome Creation, by Yosef Bitton. Geffen Publishing House, 2013, 226 pp.

Rabbi Bitton undertakes a very thorough and extensive analysis of the first three verses of Genesis, primarily using semantic and linguistic analysis as well as traditional rabbinic sources. In his introduction the author explains

"that what we presently know about our physical universe is perfectly compatible with the Torah's narrative of Creation," and a correct understanding of the text leads to this approach. His book will be particularly useful to laymen who seek a deeper understanding of these cryptic verses.

The Land of Canaan and the Destiny of Israel: Theologies of Territory in the Hebrew Bible, by David Frankel. Eisenbrauns, 2011, 460 pp.

The author analyzes the relationship between the religion of the Israelites and the territorial connection to the Land of Israel. Among the issues he explores are whether it is biblically imperative for all Jews to live in Israel and whether the Torah precepts carry the same weight outside the land. He suggests that different books of the Bible represent different views of the relationship between religion and land. This scholarly work, employing biblical criticism, is thorough and thought-provoking, with possible ramifications for our own time.

The Biblical Outlook: Topics in Jewish Philosophy, by Shlomo Polachek. Urim Publications, 2012, 463 pp.

The author, an Orthodox rabbi, presents a view of Jewish philosophy based exclusively on the Bible, leaving out all Jewish philosophers but including some talmudic passages. His book covers the main philosophical issues – God's omnipotence, Divine intervention, reward and punishment, repentance, the End of Days, etc. – from a solely biblical perspective and with extensive footnotes. It is a translation of the Hebrew work, *Hashkafat ha-Mikra*, published in 2004.

Gleaning Ruth: A Biblical Heroine and Her Afterlives, by Jennifer Koosed. University of South Carolina Press, 2011, 184 pp.

This eclectic study of the Book of Ruth, from many hitherto untapped perspectives, includes ancient farming customs and methods of food production. It forms part of the "Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament" series. The author contends that the harvest setting of the story is a central feature of its theme. Traditional rabbinic commentaries, anthropological and archeological scholarship, contemporary films and novels, as well as feminist readings are all found in this unusual work, together with dreamlike personal reflections from the author's childhood.