NEW BOOKS: BRIEFLY NOTED


This book is a collection of short (5 or 6 page) essays, two for each Torah portion, by prominent Conservative thinker, Rabbi Shai Held. Not just another run of the mill book of divrei Torah or sermons, these are thoughtful essays based on a close reading of the text. Both traditional and not so traditional sources are used, including Christian scholars. Each essay can be read as a mini textual study. Well written and innovative in the ideas presented, with extensive notes, bibliography, index and a very helpful “Note on Biblical Commentaries”, introducing the reader to modern Bible scholars, both Jewish and Christian.


Half of the Book of Genesis revolves around the life of Jacob, and this book provides a comprehensive in depth study of the life of the forefather of the nation of Israel. Chapters are devoted to Jacob as a twin, the theme of deception, his wives, his dreams, and his interactions with God and with angels. Entire sections are devoted to the Dinah story, the Joseph story and the Apocryphal Testament of Jacob. The author takes the position that “examination of the stories shows that they were organized in a systematic way, which excludes any possibility that they were patched together” (xix), and makes use of both traditional Jewish exegesis and contemporary academic scholarship.


This book discusses the ethical teachings and lessons to be learned from Biblical “prophetic” figures, some are prophets in the classic sense, others are described as “filled with the spirit” of God, such as Shiprah, Caleb and Tirzah. Each chapter begins with a short retelling of the Biblical episode discussed from the first person perspective of the Biblical figure, followed by the actual verses from the Bible, an analysis and the lesson learned for our lives today. An inventive and insightful book, appropriate for group study and discussion.