

BOOK REVIEW

Links to Our Legacy, 236 pp, Mitchell First (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kodesh Press, 2021). Reviewed by Simcha Rosenberg.

This is one of those books that has an interesting fact, insight or tidbit on just about every page. Mitchell First is a first rate scholar and talented writer who has a column in the *Jewish Link*, a news publication in Teaneck, New Jersey. This book collects over sixty of these columns, divided into three categories, Hebrew Roots, History and Liturgy. Each column runs about three or four pages in the book. Many of these are of interest to students of Tanakh, particularly the Hebrew Roots section, where the meanings of many words in the Tanakh, often misunderstood and mistranslated, are dealt with.

The author covers many topics here, and just about every one sheds new light on the subject at hand. He makes use of both traditional commentaries like Rashi, Radak and Ibn Ezra, as well as modern biblical scholarship and ancient Near East studies, using Akkadian and Ugaritic cognates to help explain obscure and difficult words in Tanakh, and even some common words whose derivation is generally left unexplored. If you are the kind of person who is curious about how the word *yareach* came to mean the moon, or what the word *nes* (usually translated as miracle) is derived from, this is the book for you. On multiple occasions I found myself taking screen shots of certain paragraphs and sending to friends in order to share an insight or a novel idea.

There is however a problem with the book, which is really that of the publisher and editors at Kodesh Press, and not that of the author. This book, as the previous collection of First's columns, *Roots and Rituals* (2018) has no index. This renders the book almost useless for future reference and research. The publisher should have, at the very least, provided an index to the biblical verses referred to in the text. Additionally, the author signs off each column with "Mitchell First is a personal injury attorney and Jewish history scholar" followed by a witty comment related to that column. For some reason this is repeated here after each and every item (over sixty times!), just as it was in the *Jewish Link*. I would recommend that future collections do not include this.

Also, no effort was made to avoid repetition between the columns reproduced here, so you run into the same information in consecutive chapters (for

example p. 112, note 3 repeated on p. 117) and a constant feeling of déjà vu. It appears that the columns were taken as is from the *Jewish Link* and put in book form, which to me detracts from the book. I would also recommend that the cute jokes scattered in the footnotes (for example, from his son, p. 6, note 19; from himself, p. 20, note 59; and from his friend Yehuda Miller, p. 83, note 259) do not need to be reproduced in a scholarly work of this nature.

Having said that, and perhaps the good people at Kodesh Press can make the appropriate adjustments in future collections of this kind, this book is highly recommended. It is extremely interesting and informative, with summaries given when the matter gets confusing (for example, p. 18 discussing *ayelet ha-shachar* and p. 73 discussing the word *netzach*). Truly, a remarkable work of scholarship. Write your own notes and index as you read it.



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