

## 5784 – The Torah: A Modern Commentary, Revised Edition

W. Gunther Plaut, General Editor. David E. S. Stein, General Editor, Revised Edition. CCAR Press, 2005.

The publication of the UAHC Torah Commentary in 1981 was a revolutionary event. The first liberal Torah commentary ever produced, this volume brought together the text of Torah with the insights of both traditional commentaries and the best of modern scholarship. The Union's commentary, simultaneously scholarly and accessible, responded to a Jewish revival in North America, bringing the wisdom and relevance of Judaism's most sacred text to hundreds of thousands of Jews.

In the decades that have passed since that first edition, North American Jews are more aware than ever that Torah study drives Jewish life. The Reform Movement has declared that the goal of our Movement is “Torah at the center” – that is, keeping Torah at the center of our lives as the best path and first step to securing the Jewish future. This new edition of the Torah Commentary is intended to update and improve a volume that has supported countless Jews in the pursuit of their Torah study.

### Translation in the Revised Edition

Chaim Stern's translation of the haftarot, published in 1996, prompted the URJ Press to commission Stern to create a new translation of the Torah. After completing Genesis, Stern fell ill and was not able to complete the other four books before his death in 2001. While the URJ Press had pivoted from publishing a full Torah translation to a standalone volume, they instead decided to incorporate Stern's Genesis translation into the upcoming revised Torah commentary.

For the translation of the rest of the Torah, the URJ Press received permission from JPS to revise their standard translation to reflect gender sensitivity, an important statement of Reform Judaism's commitment to egalitarianism in all areas of Jewish life. This revision, in turn, led to JPS publishing The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the Original JPS Translation translation, using, in part, the URJ's revision of their translation. Today, the CCAR Press is working on a completely new translation of all five books of the Torah.

### Key Translation Revisions

- **God** – This edition uses “the Eternal” to render the divine name of God. Generally, God-language is rendered in gender neutral terms, ex. “[God] said” vs. “He said.”
- **Gender** – This translation aims to represent the text's plain sense more accurately: it is “gender accurate,” but not “gender neutral.”
  - ex. While the Hebrew may be grammatically masculine, the meaning is the same if it is gender neutral. Deut. 1:17 “fear no *one*” vs. “fear no *man*.”
  - ex. When gender is contextually important, the gender of the Hebrew is maintained in translation. Exod. 30:12 “take a census of the Israelite *men*” vs. “take a census of the Israelite *people*.”

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### Reading This Book

The Torah: A Modern Commentary is a *chumash*. The word *chumash* comes from *chamesh*, meaning “five,” and refers to the five books of the Torah. A *chumash* contains the entire Torah, divided up by the weekly portion (or *parasha*), as well as additional study materials. Alongside the Hebrew text and English translation, there are elements that accompany each *parasha*:

1. **Introduction** – outlines and brief thematic overviews of the *parasha*. They appear before each *parasha*. There are additionally longer introductory essays to each book of the Torah.
2. **Commentary** – explanations for the text without going into deeper interpretations. They are arranged by verse number and appear below and immediately following the text.
3. **Essays** – modern and classic interpretations that attempt to explain the Torah’s intent. Essays reflect on selected themes. They are grouped together at the end of each *parasha*.
4. **Gleanings** – selections from world literature that have a bearing on the text. Gleanings contain classical commentary, contemporary observations, and a wide array of writers. They are brief to suggest a range of responses to Torah. They are grouped together at the end of each *parasha*.
5. **Notes and References** – endnotes which cite all sources that are not Biblical passages. They are indicated within the comments and essays by bracketed numbers.
6. **Haftarot** – usually located together with its appropriate *parasha*, whereas those suited for holidays and special occasions are placed at the end of the book.