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Review

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About the Author

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There is no question that the Torah has had an enormous influence on Western Civilization. It is the source of widely known characters like Joseph, Moses, and Noah, and timeless stories such as the Garden of Eden and the Exodus. Jointly authored by professors of Judaism and Christianity, The Torah: A Beginner's Guide takes a unique approach, exploring the interplay and dynamics of how these two religions share this common scripture. Drawing on both scholarly and popular sources, Kaminsky and Lohr examine the key debates, while simultaneously illustrating the importance of the Torah in western jurisprudence, ethics, and contemporary conceptions of the family, morality, and even politics. Joel S. Kaminsky is Professor in the Department of Religion at Smith College where he teaches courses on the Hebrew Bible and on ancient Jewish religion and literature. Joel N. Lohr teaches in the areas of Bible and Old Testament at the department of religious studies at Trinity Western University, Canada.

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Most helpful customer reviews

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful.Best Introduction for BeginnersBy Anthony Le DonneIf you're looking for a classroom text, look no further.

Having taught "Introduction to the Bible" to university students several times, I hear the constant complaint that textbooks simply fly over the heads of my students. Most scholars are oblivious to the obstacles put up by their jargon and inaccessible grammar. Further problems arise when my students are exposed to the controversial issues related to the first five books of the Bible. My students become suspicious of the ideological agendas of such books. Most introductions to biblical literature are not transparent enough to establish trust with their readers.

Not only does this book avoid these common problems, it opens up several access points to very complex topics. The authors are clear. They write clearly and they are clear about their religious perspectives. This book doesn't pretend to be an objective and unbiased assessment. Rather, this book achieves academic honesty. Because the authors demonstrate mutual respect for each other, the product is as balanced as one could hope from a textbook.

The authors do not suggest that Christians and Jews are the basically the same. They are careful to point out the key differences between traditionally Jewish and traditionally Christian interpretations. Students who use this text will come away with a better understanding of themselves and how other perspectives differ.

Finally, this book is written by two of the finest Hebrew Bible/Old Testament scholars in the world. Kaminsky and Lohr do not neglect questions of authorship, nor do they spend too much time on that issue. They acknowledge that the voices of rabbis and Christian theologians through the ages are important. In fact, not only would this be an ideal "Intro to Bible" text, it would be optimal for classes on Jewish-Christian relations, Christian Origins, and Scriptural interpretation.

You will not find a better book on these subjects.

Anthony Le Donne, PhD (jesusweblog.com)

of 1 people found the following review helpful.
Great for Beginners
By Amazon Customer
Guess that's why they call it a beginners guide. Read this for a Pentateuch course in seminary and being that

I was a "beginner" this was an EXCELLENT RESOURCE! Here's a snippet of by book review:

As one being introduced to the entire framework of the Torah, I found this book to be very beneficial. The Jewish-Christian authorship was unique and did not present any difficulty in the presentation of the information. It was not, a one would expect, controversial or competitive, but rather it was extremely conversational in lieu of the bilateral perspectives. I believe that the authors were successful in achieving the premise of the book and continue to highlight the influence and continued relevance of the Torah. Admittedly, prior to reading this book I held no previous knowledge of the Pentateuch, the meaning of the term or even an understanding of the importance of the material it encompassed. I highly anticipated having a hard time trying to digest the exposition of each book of the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch or even the Old Testament in general, does not get the treatment that the New Testament does in this post-modern age. Initially I held the New Testament in a greater light than the Old Testament. After engaging the material in this book, I understand the significant role that the Pentateuch has played in setting the framework for the New Testament as a whole. I also gained a thorough knowledge of how the law codes that were instituted in the Pentateuch are still used in many traditions, including Jewish and Christian. In chapter seven on the book of Numbers, Kaminsky and Lohr discuss the priestly blessing found in Number 6:22-27. I found the discussion on the Christian use of this passage as a way to conclude the worship service to be insightful due to the reason that my own pastor uses this priestly blessing as the benediction in our church. Another asset to this book is its use of dialogue boxes that briefly look at topics such as "The Meaning of Purity," "Monotheism vs. Monolatry" and "The Voice of Women in the Torah" and many more. These tables served as great references and an addition to the information discussed in each chapter. I would definitely recommend this book to new students entering biblical studies or anyone being introduced to the Torah as a whole. By engaging this book, one will become, as I have, very aware of the Torah, its themes, narratives and its overall relevance for believers in Christ Jesus whether Jewish or Christian.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Begin here

By Joel L. Watts

A book which begins by noting that it is written in an ecumenical spirit is one which, well, worries me, especially when it comes to the Old Testament. Can it be critical enough to give an accurate impression of the Torah if I assume it has to appease all sorts of belief systems? They even mention that a secular atheist could use this book of all people! However, in the same introduction, the authors note that one is Jewish and one Christian, and that while they are writing this book with a critical eye, they still hold to their respective convictions and thus one will find a sympathetic ear; therefore, my fears are allayed.

One of the most satisfying elements of this book is the fact the authors are able to present historical critical material in a sympathetic fashion. Unlike the more dry textbooks, Kaminsky and Lohr are able to tackle subjects such as JEDP and certain ideological strains found in modern scholarship of the Torah, with the touch of a believer. In other words, the usual criticism which students level at most critical books will not be found here. While not `preaching' historical criticism, it takes a stand that the theories are accepted by scholars and helps to show a way for believers to accept them. In doing so, the authors easily handle objections, such as supposed Mosiac authority, and other factors. Added to this is a view of how both Jews and Christians, along with a brief section on Islamic views at the beginning, view the Torah and this is done so without polemics. I don't want you to get the impression that this book is a dumbed down version of a real book which seeks to placate all views; it's not. It presents critical theory, modern interpretation, and religious differences in clear, concise language so that a reader can be informed.

The first three chapters deal with the basics such as exactly what the Torah is, the Torah as religious book, and modern interpretations. Lines aren't easily drawn, with various criticisms, such as historical, ideological,

literary and even canonical criticism, having a chance to be heard. From there, the authors move to devote a chapter to each of the five books of the Torah. What has been set up is now exemplified when they begin to examine the books individually. Over all, they are fair to modern scholarship as well as historical (both Jewish and Christian) interpretation. My concern, and the only real issue, actually, is with the interpretative perimeters given to Genesis 1-11, and more expressly, the Creation account. While the authors show themselves to be knowledgeable of, or make allowance for, the various trends in interpretation and scholarship, here it seems they have have failed to include recent works by Walton, or even older works, by Levenson which point to Genesis 1 as being understood differently. They allow that the ancients would have seen Genesis 1 as an actual creation story of a young earth. Of course, I disagree with this, but this difference is in no way a turn off for me from this book. Indeed, there is such an ocean of knowledge in this short book that my one quibble makes barely a ripple. Each book of the Torah is given an overview, some regard as to modern controversies, a summary of the various passages with detail towards what an English translation misses, as well as Jewish and Christian uses of the book. Not every chapter is cookie-cutter either, with each book being handled as if it stood alone. For example, the book of Leviticus is given a different treatment from Exodus with brief essays on various topics which should be drawn from that book, as it is the center of the Torah and indeed, one of the most (badly) used books. In other words, the authors know the issues which surround each book and in a short space, seek to provide insight in how to approach them.

I would recommend this book to seminary students who are seeking an Mdiv as it helps to address critical issues with a sympathetic hear. Further, for the price and brevity, all students would do well to pick the book up. For those interested in historical criticism as well as an ecumenical approach to the Torah, this book should be in your pocket.

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