The Book of Revolutions
The Battles of Priests, Prophets, and Kings That Birthed the Torah

EDWARD FELD

The Torah as an emblem of pluralistic belief born of revolutionary moments

The Torah is truly the Book of Revolutions, born from a military coup (the Northern Israelite revolution), the aftermath of an assassination and regency (a Judean revolution), and a quiet but radical revolution effected by outsiders whose ideas proved persuasive (Babylonian exile). Emerging from each of these were three key legal codes—the Covenant Code (Exodus), the Deuteronomic Code (Deuteronomy), and the Holiness Code (Leviticus)—which in turn shaped the Bible, biblical Judaism, and Judaism today.

In dramatic historical accounts grounded in recent Bible scholarship, Edward Feld unveils the epic saga of ancient Israel as the visionary legacy of inspired authors in different times and places. Prophetic teaching and differing social realities shaped new understandings concretized in these law codes. Revolutionary biblical ideas often encountered great difficulties in their time before they triumphed. Eventually master editors wove the threads together, intentionally preserving competing narratives and law codes. Ultimately, the Torah is an emblem of pluralistic belief born of revolutionary moments that preserved spiritual realities that continue to speak powerfully to us today.

Edward Feld is senior editor of Siddur Leu Shalem, the Rabbinical Assembly prayerbook for Sabbaths and festivals, and its sister High Holiday volume Mahzor Leu Shalem. He is the author of The Spirit of Renewal: Faith after the Holocaust and Joy, Despair, and Hope: Reading Psalms.

“Outstanding. Feld breaks through simplistic notions of a monolithic biblical and later Jewish religion to reveal its multiplicity and richness. I learned quite a bit from his insights.”—Stephen A. Geller, Irma Cameron Milstein Professor of Bible, Jewish Theological Seminary

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The Messiah Confrontation
Pharisees versus Sadducees and the Death of Jesus
ISAAC KNOHL

A revelatory perspective on why Jesus was killed

The Messiah Confrontation casts new and fascinating light on why Jesus was killed.

Grounded in meticulous research on the messianism debates in the Bible and during the Second Temple period, biblical scholar Israel Knohl argues that Jesus’s trial was in reality a dramatic clash between two Jewish groups holding opposing ideologies of messianism and anti-messianism, with both ideologies running through the Bible. The Pharisees (forefathers of the rabbinitic sages) and most of the Jewish people had a conception of a Messiah similar to Jesus: like the prophets and most psalmists, they expected the arrival of a godlike Messiah. However, the judges who sentenced Jesus to death were Sadducees, who were fighting with the Pharisees largely because they repudiated the Messiah idea. Thus, the trial of Jesus was not a clash between Jewish and what would become Christian doctrines but a confrontation between two internal Jewish positions—expecting a Messiah or rejecting the Messiah idea—in which Jesus and the Pharisees were actually on the same side.

Knohl contends that had the assigned judges been Pharisees rather than Sadducees, Jesus would not have been convicted and crucified. The Pharisees’ disagreement with Jesus was solely over whether Jesus was the Messiah—but historically, for Jews, arguing about who was or wasn’t the Messiah was not uncommon.

The Messiah Confrontation has far-reaching consequences for the relationship between Christians and Jews.

Israel Knohl is Yehezkel Kaufmann Professor of Bible Studies emeritus at the Hebrew University–Jerusalem and a senior fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. He is the author of The Divine Symphony: The Bible’s Many Voices (JPS, 2003), The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School, and The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Knohl has taught at Harvard University, Stanford University, the University of California–Berkeley, and the Chicago Divinity School.

“For Christians, rejecting the theological anti-Jewishness of their own tradition and embracing the Jewishness of Jesus require radical revisions of basic understandings. The Messiah Confrontation moves this project forward by showing that the defining conflict leading to the death of Jesus took place within Judaism, not against it. Knohl’s bold analysis is compelling, illuminating, and important for Christian and Jewish readers alike.”—James Carroll, author of Constantine’s Sword

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Steve Zeitlin is the author or coauthor of several award-winning books on America’s folk culture, including Because God Loves Stories: An Anthology of Jewish Storytelling and The Poetry of Everyday Life: Storytelling and the Art of Awareness. He coproduced the storytelling series American Talkers for NPR’s Weekend Edition Sunday and Morning Edition and is the recipient of the American Folklife Society’s Benjamin Botkin Award for lifetime achievement in public folklore.

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