



Judaism and the Interpretation of Scripture: Introduction to the Rabbinic Midrash

Jacob Neusner

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In the first six hundred years of the Common Era, Jewish scholars used several different methods to review and commentate on earlier rabbis' understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures. By about 200 CE, these perspectives had been recorded and gathered together to form the Midrash (which is now the first section of the Torah.)

Midrash is more than a book, however. Midrash as a process defines the way Judaism reads scripture. Rabbinic Midrash—as set forth in canonical documents from rabbinical sages in the first 600 years CE—mediates scripture to those who, by faith, meet God in the whole Torah of Sinai, oral and written.

Judaism and the Interpretation of Scripture introduces the Rabbinic Midrash compilations and their theology, exploring the effects of this written/oral tradition on Judaism's interpretation of Scripture. It also acts as an introduction to Neusner's twelve-volume translation and commentary *The Rabbinic Midrash*. Judaism and the Interpretation of Scripture draws on sample texts from each of the major works within the large corpus of *The Rabbinic Midrash*, providing ample illustrations from that work with detailed explanations of the hermeneutics of the rabbis. The book offers beginners as well as more seasoned readers fascinating insights into Jewish scriptural interpretation and understanding.

"Jacob Neusner is the most productive and creative scholars of rabbinic Judaism of recent times. He has transformed our understanding of the history, literature and theology of ancient Judaism. No scholar has done more to illuminate not only the logic of its documents but also the piety of its rabbinic authors. How does he achieve this? He insists on a clear, logical and critical approach to the sources: 'what we can't show we don't know'. But he also looks for the 'problematic', the critical agenda that drives each document or collection. Under that scrutiny emerge an array of 'statements' of the Judaism of the Two Torahs. And underlying all these 'statements' emerges a profound piety that defines the essence of Judaism's view of God, Israel and the world.

"This huge intellectual achievement is illustrated in this book through a characteristically lucid analysis of midrashic documents, each treatment illuminating various aspects of 'how Judaism reads scripture': a book that shows its author not just as a fine scholar but also a profound theologian and a first rate teacher."

—Philip Davies, Professor of Religious Studies, University of Sheffield

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