

# BIBLE BOOKS

## BIBLE REVIEW

### Facsimile Edition of the Kennicott Bible

(Facsimile Editions: London, 1984) 922 pp., \$4,700

In 1476, during the infamous years of the Spanish Inquisition and just 16 years before the Jews of Spain were expelled from their homeland, a Jew of La Coruña undertook an elaborate and expensive effort to perpetuate his heritage. Isaac di Braga of La Coruña commissioned the scribe Moses Ibn Zabara and the artist Joseph Ibn Hayyim to execute a lavishly illuminated copy of the Bible. The result is one of the world's most sumptuous medieval illuminated Hebrew manuscripts. Kings and prophets, animals and geometric designs, painted in rich colors and often embellished with gold and silver leaf, appear on 238 of the Bible's 922 vellum pages. The manuscript, in an excellent state of preservation, has now been reproduced in a limited edition of 550 copies by Facsimile Editions of London.

All the brilliant colors of the original are captured in the facsimile. Craftsmen added gold and silver leaf by hand to the photographically reproduced illustrations. The paper on which the facsimile is printed is practically indistinguishable from vellum, both in its appearance and in its feel, and the manuscript is handbound in a replica of the original box binding. Craftsmen handcut brass dies to emboss the intricate geometric designs that appear on six sides of the binding's Moroccan goat skin.

Called the Kennicott Bible for the English Hebraist Benjamin Kennicott who acquired it in 1771, Ibn Zabara and Ibn Hayyim's masterpiece is now a treasure of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, England. Until the facsimile edition was published, the only way to study the Kennicott Bible was to visit the Bodleian Library or to examine the reproductions of a few

pages of the manuscript that have appeared in scholarly books.

The text of the Bible and of David Kimchi's famous grammatical treatise *Sefer Mikhlol* that accompanies it are written in clear Sephardi script (Sephardi refers to the writing style and other traditions of Jews from Spain and Portugal and is distinguished from Ashkenazi traditions of central and eastern European Jews.)

Those who order the facsimile will also receive a separate leather-bound introduction to the Kennicott Bible written by Bezalel Narkiss, founder and director of the Centre for Jewish Art, and by Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, author of *The Making of a Manuscript*. The introduction explains how the scribe and the artist produced the manuscript, analyzes the content of each illumination, and discusses Joseph Ibn Hayyim's place in the history of Spanish art. For more information write to Facsimile Editions, 35 Hamilton Terrace, London NW 89RG, England.

### Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives

Phyllis Trible

(Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1984) 128 pp., \$7.95 paperback

There are several different ways to study "woman and the Bible" in order to reveal important insights. The first step is to realize that the Bible, which has shaped so much of our thinking, is to some degree culture-bound. It was itself shaped by men who were "patriarchal," which is to say androcentric (male-oriented) if not misogynous (women-hating). The Bible's "patriarchy" can easily be demonstrated; studies have shown the legal subordination of women, their greater vulnerability to impurity, restriction of the roles they played in society, and even their inferior valuation



First column of the Book of Kings.

monetarily.

It is equally important to realize that not all statements in the Bible are misogynistic, that some portrayals of women are more sympathetic, that women are sometimes depicted as having a more nearly equal role than traditional interpretation has admitted. When Biblical texts are read with a fresh eye, unburdened by traditional interpretations of the text, the portrayal of women does not appear as misogynistic as had been previously thought. "Depatriarchalizing" the Bible consists of finding sympathetic portrayals of women that have been ignored, or reinterpret-



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