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The S. R. Hirsch Torah Commentary Set (6 Volumes + Haftoroth)

Translated into English by Dr. Isaac Levy

The **S. R. Hirsch Chumash** is one of the most respected and enduring Torah commentary sets in the modern Jewish world. Originally written in German by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888) and translated into English by Dr. Isaac Levy, this seven-volume collection offers a unique blend of philological insight, ethical clarity, and literary depth. For students of the Torah seeking a commentary that is both intellectually rigorous and spiritually grounded, the Hirsch set stands as a major work worthy of serious consideration.

Overview of the Set

This review pertains to our 1971 2nd edition, completely revised, published by Judaica Press. The Hirsch Chumash consists of **six volumes on the Torah**, with **Leviticus divided into two volumes**, and a **seventh volume containing the Haftoroth**—the traditional prophetic readings associated with weekly Torah portions in synagogue practice.

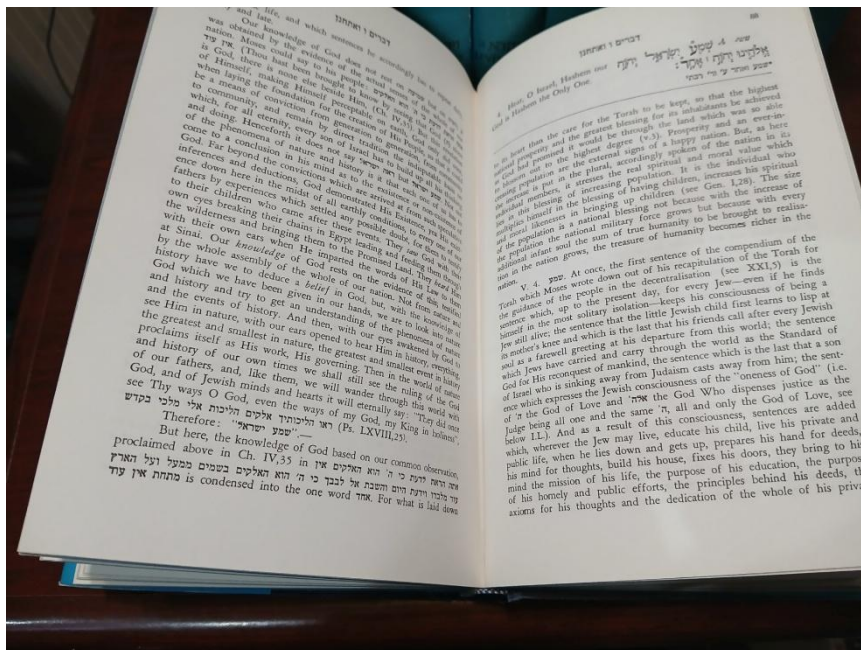
Volumes 1–6: Torah Commentary

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus I
- Leviticus II
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

Volume 7: Haftoroth

This volume contains the rabbinic selections from the Prophets (Nevi'im) traditionally read after the Torah portion, accompanied by Hirsch's commentary on each passage. Consider this volume's value based upon commentary of the Prophetic writings of the Tanakh rather than it's Rabbinic additions.

Commentary Style and Approach



Rabbi Hirsch's commentary is distinctive among Jewish exegetical works. His approach can be summarized in several key characteristics:

Philological Depth

Hirsch places strong emphasis on Hebrew roots, word structure, and linguistic nuance. His analysis often begins with the meaning of a Hebrew term and expands outward to illuminate the verse or passage.

Ethical and Rational Interpretation

Rather than relying heavily on midrashic or mystical traditions, Hirsch focuses on the ethical and moral dimensions of the text. His commentary is grounded in reason, clarity, and practical application.

Non-Mystical

Unlike commentators such as Ramban or later Kabbalistic writers, Hirsch avoids mystical speculation. His work is rooted in the plain meaning (peshat) of the text, enriched by philosophical reflection.

Readable and Structured

The English translation by Dr. Isaac Levy preserves Hirsch's clarity and structure. The commentary is accessible to both lay readers and scholars, making it suitable for personal study, teaching, and reference.

The Haftoroth Volume

The seventh volume contains the traditional **Haftarah readings**—prophetic passages selected by rabbinic tradition to accompany weekly Torah portions. While these readings are not part of the Torah itself, they still provide valuable insight into how Jewish communities historically connected Torah themes with the Prophets.

Hirsch's commentary on these passages offers:

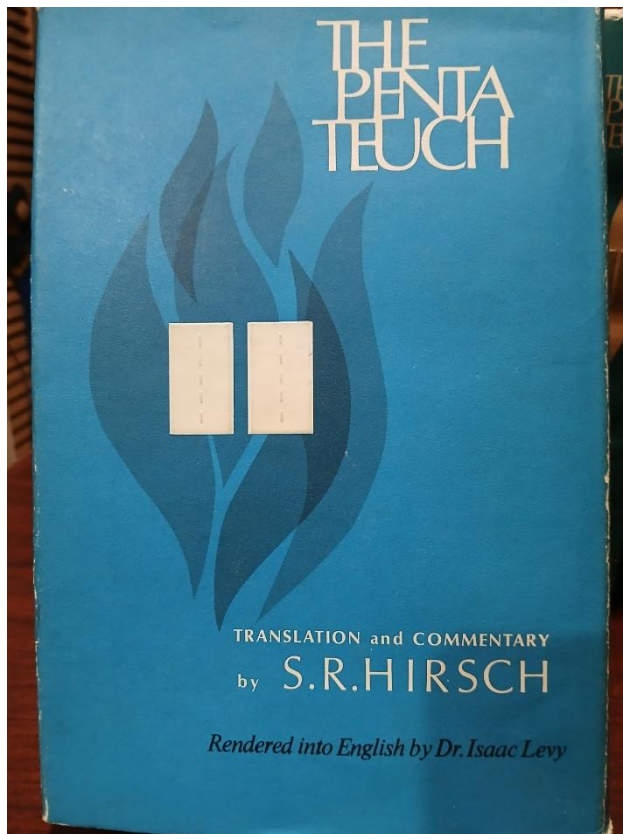
- Contextual background
- Ethical interpretation
- Literary analysis
- Thematic connections to the Torah portion

For readers interested in prophetic literature, this volume adds significant value to the set.

Reasons to Consider Acquiring This Set

1. One of the Clearest Torah Commentaries Available

Hirsch's writing is exceptionally clear, logical, and text-anchored. Readers seeking a commentary that respects the integrity of the Torah without overwhelming them with rabbinic tradition as well as no Christian influences on the text, will find this set highly beneficial.



2. Avoids Mystical and Midrashic Excess

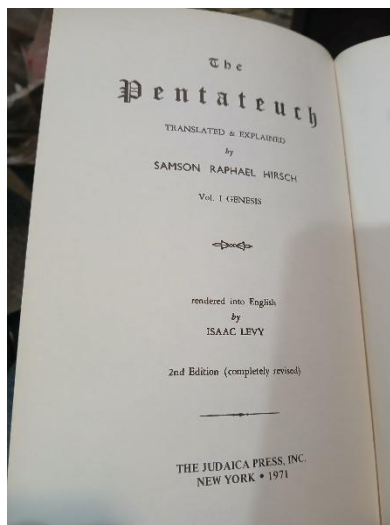
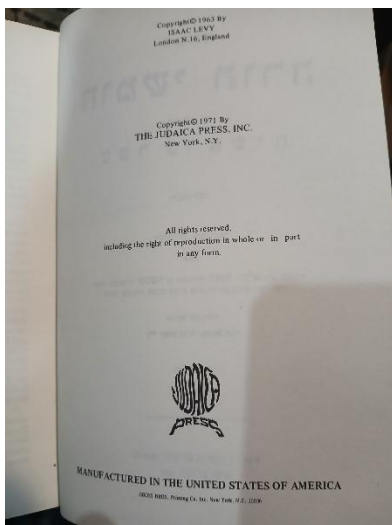
Many traditional commentaries rely heavily on midrash or mystical interpretation. Hirsch's work remains grounded in the text itself, making it ideal for readers who prefer a rational, ethical approach.

3. High Academic Value

The Hirsch Chumash is widely used in universities, seminaries, and Jewish studies programs. It is considered a major contribution to modern Torah scholarship.

4. Excellent English Translation

Dr. Isaac Levy's translation is smooth, accurate, and readable. The English edition retains the structure and tone of Hirsch's original German work.



5. Durable, High-Quality Volumes

The set is well-produced, with sturdy bindings and quality paper. It is designed for long-term use and will hold up well in a personal or institutional library. Our set still has the dust jackets included.

6. Valuable Prophetic Commentary

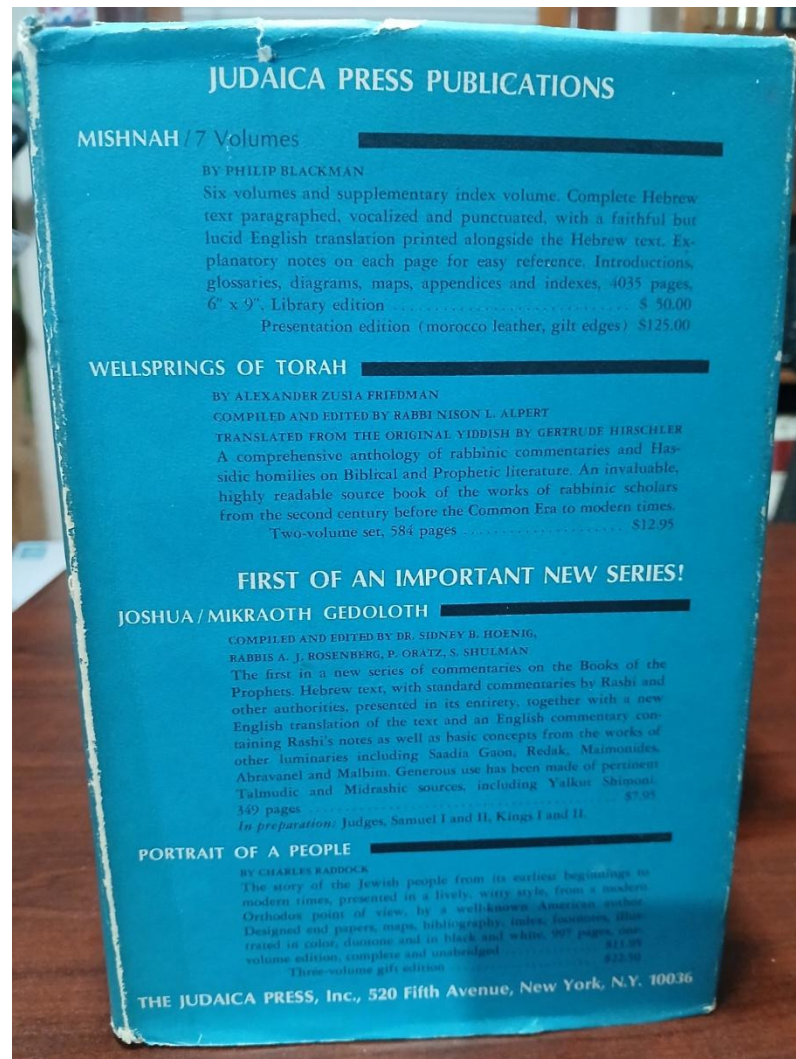
The Haftoroth volume expands the set beyond the Torah, offering Hirsch's insights into key prophetic passages. This is especially useful for readers who want to deepen their understanding of the Nevi'im.

Pros

- **Text-anchored, rational commentary**
- **Deep linguistic and philological analysis**
- **Ethical and philosophical clarity**
- **Readable and accessible**
- **Non-mystical and non-midrashic**
- **High academic respectability**
- **Includes commentary on Prophets (Haftoroth)**
- **Beautiful physical production**
- **Suitable for both beginners and advanced students**
- **No Christian influence on the texts or commentary**

Cons

- **Still a rabbinic commentary** Hirsch occasionally defends rabbinic tradition, though far less than other commentators.
- **Not a historical-critical commentary** Readers seeking archaeological or Ancient Near East-focused scholarship will need supplemental sources.
- **The Haftoroth volume is based on rabbinic tradition** While valuable for study, the Haftarah cycle is not part of the Torah's own instructions.
- **Can be expensive or difficult to find** Complete sets in good condition may require patience to acquire.



Where Hirsch Stands Among the Great Torah Commentaries

Among traditional Jewish commentaries, Hirsch occupies a unique position:

Top Tier (Text-Anchored and Rational)

- **Samson Raphael Hirsch (In our library)**
- **Ibn Ezra (Partial works in our library)**
- **Radak (Kimhi)**
- **Soncino Chumash (In our library)**

Middle Tier (More Rabbinic or Mystical)

- **Rashi**
- **Ramban (Nachmanides)**
- **Sforno**
- **Malbim**

Modern Academic Tier

- **JPS Torah Commentary (In our library)**
- **Anchor Bible Series (Partial works in our Library)**

Hirsch stands near the top for readers seeking clarity, linguistic depth, and ethical insight without heavy reliance on midrash or mysticism.

Conclusion

The **S. R. Hirsch Torah Commentary Set** is one of the most valuable and accessible Torah commentaries available in English. Its combination of philological precision, ethical clarity, and literary depth makes it a standout work in both traditional and modern Jewish scholarship. The inclusion of the **Haftoroth** volume adds further richness, offering insight into prophetic literature and historical Jewish practice.

For readers seeking a commentary that honors the text of the Torah while remaining clear, rational, and deeply thoughtful, the Hirsch Chumash is an outstanding addition to any library.