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The Complete Jewish Bible

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Understanding the Complete Jewish Bible: A Bridge Between Testaments

For centuries, readers of the Bible have been accustomed to the familiar structure of the Old and New Testaments. However, a growing number of believers and scholars are turning to a unique translation and arrangement known as **The Complete Jewish Bible**. This version offers more than just a different title; it provides a culturally rich, contextually grounded perspective that restores the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. Whether you are a long-time student of Scripture or someone curious about the historical and linguistic background of the Bible, understanding what The Complete Jewish Bible is, how it is organized, and why it matters can profoundly deepen your engagement with the sacred text.

In this article, we will explore the origins, translation philosophy, unique features, and spiritual significance of The Complete Jewish Bible. We will also compare it with other popular English translations and offer practical advice for reading it effectively.

What Is The Complete Jewish Bible?

The Complete Jewish Bible (often abbreviated as CJB) is an English translation of the entire Bible—both the Tanakh (the Jewish Scriptures, commonly called the Old Testament) and the New Testament (known in this version as the *Brit Chadashah*). It was translated by Dr. David H. Stern, a Jewish believer in Yeshua (Jesus), who sought to produce a version that faithfully reflects the Jewishness of the original texts.

Unlike many traditional translations that use terms such as “Old Testament” and “New Testament,” The Complete Jewish Bible uses the Hebrew names for books (e.g., *B’reisheet* for Genesis, *Sh’mot* for Exodus, *Vayikra*for Leviticus, and so on). The New Testament is presented with Hebraic names for key figures: Yeshua (Jesus), Miryam (Mary), Yochanan (John), and Sha’ul (Paul). This intentional use of Hebrew and transliterated terms helps readers connect with the cultural and linguistic world in which the Bible was written.

Origins and Translation Philosophy

Dr. Stern, who was both a Messianic Jewish theologian and a linguist, began his work out of a deep desire to bridge the gap between Jewish tradition and the Christian faith. He recognized that many English translations had inadvertently obscured the Jewish context of the New Testament, often through Greek-based transliterations and theological terminology that carried centuries of Church tradition.

The Complete Jewish Bible is not a formal equivalence translation like the King James Version (KJV) nor a dynamic equivalence one like the New International Version (NIV). Instead, Stern aimed for a balance: he maintained a high degree of accuracy to the original Hebrew and Greek texts while rendering the English in a readable, contemporary style. He also included explanatory footnotes, cultural notes, and an introductory glossary to help readers unfamiliar with Jewish customs.

Key Features That Set It Apart

• Use of Hebrew Names and Terms: Books of the Tanakh retain their Hebrew titles. For example, the book of Psalms is Tehillim, and Proverbs is Mishlei. This adds a layer of authenticity and connects the reader directly to the original language.

• Restored Jewish Order of the Tanakh: The CJB arranges the Old Testament books according to the traditional Jewish order (Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim), rather than the Christian canonical order. This reveals a different thematic flow and highlights the centrality of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

• Hebrew Names for New Testament Figures: Instead of "Jesus," you read "Yeshua"; instead of "John" you read "Yochanan." This helps readers recognize that the New Testament is, in fact, a Jewish document written by Jews about the Jewish Messiah.

• References to Jewish Customs and Prayers: The translation often includes Hebraic expressions such as "Baruch ha'ba b'Shem Adonai" (Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord) and explains the context of first-century Jewish practices.

• Use of the Tetragrammaton: The divine name YHWH (often rendered as "LORD" in other Bibles) appears in the CJB as Adonai or sometimes as Yahweh in transliteration, depending on the passage.

The Structure of The Complete Jewish Bible

The CJB follows the three-part division of the Hebrew Scriptures:

1. Torah (The Law): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.
2. Nevi'im (The Prophets): Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1 & 2), Kings (1 & 2), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets.
3. Ketuvim (The Writings): Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles (1 & 2).

Following the Tanakh, the CJB presents the *Brit Chadashah*(New Covenant) in its entirety, with the books arranged in the traditional Christian order. However, throughout the translation, Stern inserts cross-references and explanatory notes that link New Testament passages back to their Tanakh foundations, often highlighting how Yeshua and the apostles drew upon Jewish Scriptures.

Why the Jewish Order Matters

One of the most striking differences for a typical Christian reader is the ordering of books. In the Jewish tradition, the Tanakh ends with 2 Chronicles, which recounts the decree of Cyrus allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem. This ending points forward to hope and restoration. In contrast, the Christian Old Testament ends with the prophet Malachi, emphasizing the need for a coming messenger. By using the Jewish order, The Complete Jewish Bible invites readers to see the overarching narrative of God's covenant with Israel in a different light—one that culminates in the promise of the land and the rebuilding of the Temple, which sets the stage for the arrival of the Messiah in the New Testament.

Benefits of Reading The Complete Jewish Bible

1. Deeper Cultural and Historical Insight

Because the translation retains Hebrew terms and explains Jewish customs, readers gain a richer understanding of the practices and beliefs of the first-century world. For instance, when Yeshua refers to the "Kingdom of Heaven," the CJB often includes the Hebrew phrase *Malkhut Shamayim*, which carries specific rabbinic connotations. This makes the teachings of Yeshua resonate more deeply within their original context.

2. Clarifies the Jewishness of the New Testament

Many Christians are unaware that the New Testament is filled with allusions to the Tanakh, rabbinic arguments, and early Jewish liturgical patterns. The CJB brings these connections to the surface. For example, the Sermon on the Mount becomes even more powerful when you realize Yeshua is reinterpreting Torah in a style reminiscent of the great rabbis. The footnotes in the CJB often point out these parallels, making it an excellent

resource for Bible study.

3. Bridges the Gap Between Jewish and Christian Readers

The Complete Jewish Bible is a valuable tool for Messianic Jews, who see themselves as part of both Jewish heritage and the body of believers in Yeshua. It also helps Christians understand why Jews might have difficulty with certain traditional Christian interpretations. By presenting Scripture in a way that respects Jewish tradition, the CJB fosters dialogue and mutual respect.

4. Fresh Perspective on Familiar Passages

Reading a translation that uses “Sha’ul” instead of “Paul” or “Miryam” instead of “Mary” can be disorienting at first, but that very disorientation can break old patterns of reading. Familiar verses seem new again, and the reader is forced to pay closer attention. This can lead to fresh insights and a more thoughtful engagement with the text.

How The Complete Jewish Bible Compares to Other Translations

Compared to the King James Version (KJV)

The KJV is a majestic, formal translation from 1611, relying on the Textus Receptus for the New Testament. The CJB is a modern translation with a very different goal. While the KJV uses “Jehovah” and “Jesus,” the CJB uses “Adonai” and “Yeshua.” The KJV obscures many Jewish nuances, whereas the CJB highlights them. For a reader interested in the history of the English language, the KJV is invaluable. For a reader interested in the original cultural context, the CJB is superior.

Compared to the New International Version (NIV)

The NIV is a widely used dynamic equivalence translation that reads smoothly in modern English. It does not attempt to retain Hebrew names for books or figures, and it generally uses “the LORD” for the divine name. The CJB is less smooth in places because it intentionally retains Hebrew syntax and vocabulary. However, this makes it a more thought-provoking translation for study. Many readers use both the NIV for daily reading and the CJB for deeper study.

Compared to the Tree of Life Version (TLV)

The TLV is another Messianic Jewish translation, produced by the Messianic Jewish Family Bible Society. It is similar in philosophy to the CJB, but it uses slightly different transliterations (e.g., “Yeshua” vs. “Yeshua”—both are similar). The TLV has a more committee-based approach, while the CJB is the work of a single translator, which gives it a more consistent voice. Both are excellent, but the CJB remains the pioneer in this field.

Practical Tips for Reading The Complete Jewish Bible

- Start with the Explanatory Notes: The CJB includes a helpful introduction and glossary. Read these first to understand why certain translation choices were made.
- Read Aloud: Many of the Hebrew names and terms become easier to pronounce and internalize when spoken. This also enhances the worshipful aspect of Scripture reading.
- Use a Bible App or Parallel Bible: If you are accustomed to another translation, consider reading the CJB side-by-side with your usual version. This will highlight differences and expand your understanding.
- Focus on One Book at a Time: Because the CJB uses unfamiliar names, it may be challenging to jump around. Try reading through a shorter book like Ruth (Rut) or Jonah (Yonah) to get acclimated.
- Journal Your Insights: Write down any passages that strike you in a new way. The CJB often clarifies verses that had previously seemed obscure.

Potential Criticisms and Considerations

No translation is perfect, and The Complete Jewish Bible has its limitations. Some scholars argue that Stern's use of Hebrew names in the New Testament is somewhat artificial, since the original manuscripts were written in Greek. Others point out that the translation occasionally leans toward a Messianic theological perspective, which may not be acceptable to all readers. Additionally, the lack of a formal translation committee means that individual biases may appear.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of illuminating the Jewish context of the Bible, the CJB is an invaluable resource. It is not intended to replace other translations but to complement them. As Stern himself wrote, "The CJB is not the only Bible you should ever use, but it is a Bible you should use."

Conclusion: A Bible That Restores the Jewish Heart of Scripture

The Complete Jewish Bible stands as a unique and powerful translation that invites readers to encounter the Scriptures with fresh eyes. By restoring Hebrew names, following the Jewish order of the Tanakh, and providing cultural notes, it draws us closer to the world of the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and Yeshua himself. Whether you are a Jew seeking to understand the New Covenant Scriptures, a Christian wanting to explore your faith's Jewish roots, or simply a lover of biblical history, the CJB is a translation worth owning and studying. In a world where the Bible is often read through centuries of tradition, The Complete Jewish Bible peels back those layers and reveals the vibrant, Torah-filled foundation upon which the entire story of redemption rests.

If you have never read a passage from The Complete Jewish Bible, open it to the book of *B'reisheet* or *Mattityahu*(Matthew) and let the ancient words come alive with the sounds of Hebrew. You may never read the Bible the same way again.

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