The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: Electronic Version
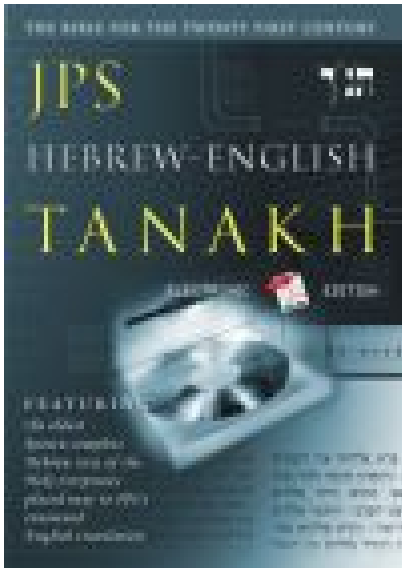
Scholar PDF

Skokie, Ill.: Varda Books, 2003. Pp. 2,068. PDF file available via download or on CD-ROM. $69.95. ISBN 1590450779.

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This electronic edition provides that which it claims to provide. It is a pdf version of the full text of the 1999 *JPS Hebrew English Tanakh,* including the helpful preface to the 1999 Hebrew-English edition and the preface to the 1985 English edition. This being so, with regard to texts and layout, it is no different from the printed edition. An electronic edition, however, allows functionalities that go beyond those of a written text. For instance, pdf texts can be bookmarked to facilitate navigation, can be connected to others by hyperlinks, and can be searched.

Navigation within this document is easy and can be carried in different ways, according to the reader's interest. The pdf file contains a system of bookmarks that goes up to the level of the individual verse. So any reader can go immediately to the verse she or he is looking for. The pentateuchal books show an additional system of bookmarks that leads readers to the individual sections (*parashiyot*) of Jewish (annual) cycle of weekly readings from the Torah. There is a certain and welcome degree of redundancy in this case, because there is an additional independent system of bookmarks that leads readers to particular (Jewish) weekly readings from the Torah ("Index of Torah Readings") and to them and their respective Haftarot ("Table of Scriptural Readings") or to the beginning of any biblical book (by clicking at its name under "Contents"). It is worth mentioning

that the list of Haftarot follows the Ashkenazi tradition, but the Sepharadic cycle is mentioned in parentheses and fully bookmarked as well.

As for hyperlink functionality, N. M. Sarna, *The JPS Commentary: Genesis* (electronic edition) is connected by a series of hyperlinks to this pdf version of *The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh.* These links lead readers in the main to verses mentioned in the commentary or to the Hebrew text to which an English word or a sentence mentioned in the commentary refers. The same will soon hold true for all the volumes of the JPS Torah Commentary series.

The search function in *The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* is as good as that provided in Adobe Acrobat 6.0. In other words, it is good for some purposes but of somewhat limited capabilities. Moreover, I for one was unable to restrict the search to particular books or sections of books (e.g., the book of Nahum, Gen 15). The result is that a search may take a bit more than one is accustomed to in other pieces of software. Much more important, one can only search the English translation. This product, at this stage, does not have any Hebrew search capabilities.

This electronic edition of *The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* can be used very efficiently for Bible study groups and for classes that use the NJPSV (Tanakh) or JPS commentaries as their central textbook(s). In these settings it will be very useful for students, who will have all the relevant texts handy and hypertextually connected.

Instructors may take notice that, unlike some other licenses, the license of this product allows them to use the software "on up to three computers at the same time, for non-commercial use." In addition, instructors may find this electronic version helpful to prepare handouts for classes. One is to keep in mind, however, that the layout of the Hebrew text is that of the printed *JPS Hebrew-English,* or in other words, and to use the explicit language in the preface of the 1999 edition, the prose was arranged according to "its plain meaning, as judged by our translators." Thus this electronic version is less useful to instructors who would prefer to avoid a clearly interpretative Hebrew layout and, needless to say, to those who prefer an English translation other than the NJPSV. (There is no way to edit the layout of the Hebrew text. One may copy it as it stands in the pdf file and paste it in a word processor, but one cannot edit it all.)

On the whole, this is a good product that does very well that which it is set to do. It is a good (bookmarked) pdf version of *The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh.* As such it is very useful in particular settings. To be sure, it is not a Unicode, searchable version of the MT nor a piece of software with search capabilities comparable to, for instance, Gramcord for Windows, Accordance, Bible Works, or Logos Bible software. For one, the Hebrew text

is not morphologically tagged—to the best of my understanding—and in any case, no Hebrew search is possible. But it does not claim or intend to be any of the above, nor is it set to compete with the mentioned pieces of software or seems to me aimed in the main at the target readership.

All this said, a substantial library with good hypertext capabilities may evolve as more and more commentaries, and especially classical Jewish texts, are published (Midrashim, Targumim, etc.) and linked to *The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*. I can only hope that some Hebrew search capabilities will be added soon and that they will allow search not only for words but at least also for roots.