

ז"ל, Rabbi Moshe Greenberg

הרב משה בן הרב שלמה ובתיה גרינברג ז"ל

Born: July 10, 1928, Philadelphia, PA
Died: May 15, 2010/ע"ש"ב, סיון תש"ע, Jerusalem, Israel

Rabbi Moshe Greenberg was one of two sons born to Rabbi Simon and Betty Greenberg. In 1949 he received his B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania and married his high-school sweetheart, Evelyn Gelber, whom he met in confirmation class at Har Zion Temple. In 1954 he received his Ph.D. from Penn and was ordained as a rabbi by the Jewish Theological Seminary. He taught Bible and Judaica at Penn from 1954 until 1970, when he and his family settled in Israel where he was a professor of Bible at the Hebrew University until retiring in 1996. In 1994 the State of Israel awarded Moshe the Israel Prize, its highest award for personal achievement and public service.

Moshe was one of the most influential Jewish scholars of the 20th century. His impact extended far beyond the academy due to his lifelong commitment to sharing the results of scholarship with the Jewish public in newspaper and magazine articles, through his impact on rabbis, teachers and other students during decades of teaching in the United States and Israel, and through service on the Jewish Publication Society's Bible translation committee, which completed its translation (*Tanakh*) in 1982. In Israel he co-founded *Mikra Le-Yisrael*, a visionary series of scholarly commentaries on the Bible, written in Hebrew and addressed to the educated public.

The first Jewish Biblical scholar appointed to a position in a secular university in post-war America, Moshe had an important influence on the development of Biblical scholarship. Previously, the teaching of the "Old Testament" was largely in the hands of Protestant scholars who taught it as something separate from the Jewish tradition. Moshe brought to the field a mastery of both ancient Near Eastern and Jewish sources, and he developed what he called a "holistic" method of interpretation which pays careful and patient attention to how all the elements of a text fit together. Accepting the Documentary Hypothesis about the composition of the Torah, he argued that scholarship has not completed its task until it goes on to ask why the original sources were put together as they are in the final version of the Torah and what its message is as a whole. For this task he found midrashic sources and medieval Hebrew commentaries, with their sense of the unity of the Bible, invaluable. Later, in his path-breaking commentary on the book of Ezekiel (Doubleday, 1983, 1997) the same method led Moshe to understand that book's origin differently. Modern scholars held that the original prophecies of Ezekiel had undergone extensive updating by later disciples of the prophet, so that the present book is a patchwork of original prophecies and later additions. In Moshe's view, the book's style and logic show "a consistent trend of thought expressed in a distinctive style" and that there are very few passages that were not composed by Ezekiel himself.

In addition to his academic publications, Moshe also wrote for a broader audience, particularly on theology. He argued that a critical reading of the Bible can be harmonized with Jewish tradition and with religious veneration for the Bible, that faith and criticism can coexist without being sealed off in separate compartments of the mind. His ideal was the “sober believer” whose faith does not prevent an open-eyed, critical examination of both life and tradition. He argued that a Scripture-based religion can and must avoid fundamentalism by being selective and critical in its reliance on tradition and by re-prioritizing values. In 1995 the Jewish Publication Society published some of his most notable essays in a volume called *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought*.

Moshe maintained a lifelong interest in Jewish education. He wrote numerous articles for educators and served as an advisor to Israel’s Ministry of Education on how to bring the results of modern scholarship into the required teaching of the Bible in public schools. In 1996 he received the Hebrew University's Rothberg Prize for Jewish Education.

A superb teacher, in 1968 Moshe received Danforth Foundation’s Award for Gifted Teaching, presented at the White House. His students experienced first hand his profundity, his reflective, analytical mind, his devotion to them and his character as a human being. He was a magnetic teacher, but he never used soaring rhetoric. What he brought to the classroom was meticulous preparation, methodical analysis of every issue, small or large, and an unfailing ability to convey the intellectual importance of everything he taught. Whatever he taught, he elevated. His students saw him as a role model.

Moshe is survived by his wife, Evelyn, their sons Joel, Raphael, and Eitan and their wives, nine grandchildren and his brother Daniel Greenberg. His memory and his life-work will endure as an inspiration and blessing to all who knew him personally and to those who knew him through his scholarship.