

Doing Jewish Theology - God, Torah and Israel in Modern Judaism by Rabbi Neil Gillman.
Jewish Lights Publishing 2008.

Neil Gillman has the stamp of the Jewish Theological Seminary running through him just like a stick of Blackpool rock; he started there as a student in 1954, obtained semikhah in 1960, and has been a teacher there ever since. During his student days he was privileged to study with some giants, Will Herberg, Louis Finkelstein, Mordecai Kaplan and Abraham Joshua Heschel, to name but three.

What suffuses all of Gillman's writing is an enthusiasm and eagerness for knowledge that is remarkably fresh, considering his years and experience, and he notes in the introduction that he has started an engagement with neuroscience in an attempt to understand how the brain's processes can/may lead to an appreciation of God.

Doing Jewish Theology, as its title implies, is divided into three sections: God, in which Gillman engages with a range of related issues, including faith in God, the dynamics of prophecy as expressed in the writings of Heschel, and the concept of the afterlife and bodily resurrection. In Torah, the latter two of the four sub-sections are especially interesting, dealing with the religious education of American rabbis (an essay that has multiple applications on this side of the Atlantic too) and the teaching of that iconic bible story, the Binding of Isaac. In Israel, Gillman considers the creation of a conservative theology for the 21st century and Judaism's theological and ritual resources for coping with chaos, not just in individual life but also in the life of a nation.

Unsurprisingly for a teacher of his experience, Neil Gillman has a knack of expressing complex ideas with clarity, eloquence and encouragement to the reader to engage further, and this combines to make Doing Jewish Theology into a perfect book for lay person and rabbi, scholar and student alike.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh