*The Intention of the Torah and the Intention of Its Readers: Episodes of Contention* surveys the ways in which traditional Jewish exegesis throughout the ages coped with the literary and topical difficulties found in the Torah, in light of the belief in the Torah’s divine source and sanctity.

“All problems stem from expectations.” Readers and exegetes of the Torah throughout the ages supposed, and many continue to suppose, that the Torah is perfect and flawless. They expect the Torah to reflect superior and timeless standards of morality, as well as precise and eternal theological principles. Clearly, they think, everything written in the Torah is true, essential, and well thought out. We can demonstrate the history of Torah scholarship, from the end of the Second Temple period until our day, as an uninterrupted continuum of challenges which this unique and, frankly, impossible level of expectations forced upon its readers and exegetes. These are glorious attempts to bring the Torah nearer the time and place of its devotees, and to adapt its meaning to theirs.

This book is the first attempt of its kind to examine the history of the enterprise of Torah exegesis from a distance. It contains an examination of dozens of key texts from the end of the Second Temple period, from Talmudic and Midrashic sources, dicta of medieval Sages, and the reflections and research penned by scholars of the Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) and modern eras. A bird’s eye view blurs the details which differentiate between these texts, enabling us to more easily focus upon the similarities; however, this view also allows us to note on the central crossroads of change and development which characterize each of these periods.

This is a basic book for those who are interested in the changing nature of biblical exegesis over the generations.