

The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture

What if the Hebrew Bible wasn't meant to be read as "revelation"? What if it's not really about miracles or the afterlife, but about how to lead our lives in this world?

The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture proposes a new framework for reading the Bible. It shows how the biblical authors used narrative and prophetic oratory to advance universal arguments about ethics, political philosophy, and metaphysics.

It offers bold new studies of the biblical narratives and prophetic poetry, transforming forever our understanding of what the stories of Abel, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and David and the speeches of Isaiah and Jeremiah were meant to teach.

The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture assumes no belief in God or other religious commitment. It assumes no previous background in Bible. It is free of disciplinary jargon.

Open the door to a book you never knew existed. You'll never read the Bible the same way again.

Yoram Hazony is Provost of the Shalem Center in Jerusalem and a Senior Fellow in the Department of Philosophy, Political Theory and Religion (PPR). Hazony's previous books include *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul* and *The Dawn: Political Teachings of the Book of Esther*. His essays and articles have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *New Republic*, *Commentary*, *Azure*, and *Ha'aretz*, among other publications. He is author of a regular blog on philosophy, Judaism, Israel, and higher education called *Jerusalem Letters*. Hazony received a BA in East Asian Studies from Princeton University and a Ph.D. in Political Theory from Rutgers University. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and children.

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For Yael Rivka

זְכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ
אֶהְבֵּת כְּלוּלְתֶיךָ
לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר
בְּאַרְץ לֹא זְרוּעָה:

ירמיה ב, ב

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Acknowledgments

Is there something crucial missing in our understanding of what the Hebrew Bible is all about? This question, along with some preliminary answers to it, can already be found in my doctoral dissertation, “The Political Philosophy of Jeremiah” (Rutgers University, 1993), and in my book *The Dawn: Political Teachings of the Book of Esther*, first published in 1995. This means that I have been trying to develop an answer to this question for twenty years now – the answer that is presented in this book. And during all these years I’ve been subjecting friends, colleagues, and family members to a steady stream of invited and uninvited lectures on the subject, as well as article drafts and more article drafts. In return, they’ve offered me encouragement and instruction – a *great* deal of instruction, without which I would never have dared attempt a book of this kind. I wish here to mention in gratitude the names of those who have made it possible for me to bring this project to fruition.

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To Yael, my best reader, with whom I've raised nine children, this book is dedicated with love.

Note on the Text

I have made every effort to make this book accessible to a general educated readership. I don't think this has required too many compromises. One, however, does bear mentioning: I've given up on trying to discover a system of transliteration that would permit me to render Hebrew words and names in a way that would be both internally consistent and sensible to the average educated reader of the English language. Instead, Hebrew terms are rendered in one of two ways: The most common biblical names follow their standard English-language usage. Thus I write Moses (and not "Mosheh") and Jerusalem (and not "Yerushalaim"). Other Hebrew terms and names, however, appear using a simple system of transliteration whose purpose is to make them as readily pronounceable by English-language readers as possible, with modern Hebrew pronunciation as a benchmark. I realize that the use of this dual system may be a bit annoying to some readers at first. But it has a number of advantages over the alternatives. And you get used to it.