

God and Politics in Esther

A political crisis erupts when the Persian government falls to fanatics, and a Jewish insider goes rogue, determined to save her people at all costs.

God and Politics in Esther explores politics and faith. It is about an era in which the prophets have been silenced and miracles have ceased, and Jewish politics has come to depend not on commands from on high, but on the boldness and belief of each woman and man. Esther takes radical action to win friends and allies, reverse terrifying decrees, and bring God's justice into the world with her own hands.

Hazony argues that the story of Esther was meant precisely to speak to a generation like ours – one which doesn't tend to see God in the world and isn't waiting for miracles. The biblical God, we learn, is an emergent God, who appears in history and in our lives through those who choose to act, and so build God's kingdom on earth.

This is a thoroughly revised and expanded edition of *The Dawn* (1995), with three controversial new chapters addressing the astonishingly radical theology that emerges amid the political intrigues in the narrative.

Yoram Hazony is President of the Herzl Institute in Jerusalem. He is founder and past president of the Shalem Center, now Shalem College. His books include *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul* (2000). Hazony directs the John Templeton Foundation's project in Jewish Philosophical Theology and is a member of the Israel Council for Higher Education committee on liberal studies in Israel's universities.

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Praise for Yoram Hazony's *God and Politics in Esther*

“Extraordinary. Yoram Hazony reads the book of Esther as it has never been read before. Beautifully written, brilliantly reasoned. *God and Politics in Esther* is a mind-opener.”

Jeff Jacoby, Boston Globe

Praise for Yoram Hazony's *The Dawn*

“A brilliant exegesis of this controversial work ... Esther – wily, courageous, undespairing, loyal – teaches that all of us must help each other seize and defend our freedom.”

William Safire, *The New York Times*

“Hazony makes the book of Esther come alive in a manner that is realistic and fascinating. Details which I had read again and again for the past sixty years, and which made no particular impression upon me, suddenly came alive with a significance that never occurred to me.”

Norman Lamm, President, Yeshiva University

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YORAM HAZONY

The Herzl Institute, Jerusalem



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Preface

Recent decades have seen rapidly growing interest in the book of Esther, both in the popular media and among scholars and theologians. Its plot and characters, theology and political philosophy, are all benefiting from a much-deserved reevaluation. I am pleased to be able to contribute *God and Politics in Esther* to the discussion. I have long considered the Esther story to be an important doorway into the worldview of Hebrew Scripture and of Jewish tradition more generally. In this book, the second in a trilogy of works on the philosophy of the Hebrew Bible that are to appear with Cambridge University Press, I explain why this is so.

My work on Esther began with a challenge many years ago from Rabbi Jay Marcus, to whom I am grateful for commissioning and publishing the earliest version of this book. I am grateful, as well, to Lewis Bateman of Cambridge, who has set the pace for the new storm of academic publishing interest in the area of Jewish ideas. Lew has done perhaps more than anyone else to bring my work to the attention of a broad audience, a debt that I can hardly hope to repay. Thanks, too, to Suzanne Balaban of BMM Worldwide, who has deftly handled publicity for my recent books and added much good spirit to the publishing process besides. I wish to express my appreciation to those who have supported my work on this book, including Michael Murray, John Churchill, and Alex Arnold at the John Templeton Foundation, Barry and Lainie Klein, Seth and Nealy Fischer, Roger Hertog, David Messer, Jack Berger, Bart Baum, Ron Hersh, and Michael Moskowitz.

This book is dedicated to my father, Yehonathan Hazony, whose teachings and ideas are present in each page I write. His ongoing research into the behavior of quantum bodies, and his dissent from accepted theory on this subject despite the hardship of such an unpopular road, is an inspiration to me every day of my life.