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Aviezer Ravitzky

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*Translated by Michael Swirsky
and Jonathan Chipman*

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Aviezer Ravitzky : Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A good review of Jewish Messianic beliefBy Matthew SmithThe remarkable thing about this book is just how unremarkable I found Messianic Judaism to be. Messianism in Judaism follows the same patterns as the Messianic beliefs in the other Abrahamic religions. These believers follow similar patterns in each religion, whether it be the pacifists of the ultra-Orthodox and Agudath Yisrael who believe it is a sin for anyone to do anything that may be perceived as forcing the end of times, to the Gush Emunim and the Rabbis Kook who believed that they were and are the instruments through which God would bring about the prophecy of the end times, to all those who believe somewhere between these two poles they have their similar counterparts in Christianity and Islam. From the secularist point of view this is very interesting since the similarities between Messianic belief amongst many of the world's religions certainly says something for psychological need in many people to have this final reckoning. It also says something about the individual beliefs between the utopian and dystopian views of the end times. As to the book at hand, the author does a very good job detailing the different beliefs and the leaders of each group. He goes through and provides numerous writings and quotes from leaders like both Kooks, Teitelbaum and Schneerson and many other leading figures that explain their thinking. Many of the most important thinkers, like the above, are gone over in detail and followed from their earliest confrontations with Zionism and how their beliefs developed over time as the reality of the Zionist movement grew over time into an actual state. What is interesting in this is to see how someone like Zvi Yehuda Kook's thinking evolved from the early days before Zionism turned a movement into a state through to seemingly miraculous days of the 67 war to the more ambiguous days of the war of 73 and the Lebanon quagmire. It is interesting to see how the ups and downs of Zionism and the Israeli state affect the different beliefs and changes the requirements for everyone to justify their particular brand of messianism. What is equally interesting in the opposite way is to see those whose belief never changes one iota no matter what happens to the state of Israel. Those whom worldly evidence doesn't affect the metaphysics at all. What this book also does is show the drastic problems that the state of Israel faces with the religious extremism with their fellow Jews. This book describes some of the very real fissures that exist within the state and with Jews throughout the world. These fissures have a more pronounced affect on the state of Israel that does not have separation of religion and state like most other Western nations, and considering Israel's political structure that allows small radical groups to hold the majority of Israelis hostage because the major parties need the backing of small political groups to form and maintain coalitions to remain in power which means these radical groups have a disproportionate amount of influence compared to their electoral power. This remains a huge problem for Israel. While I liked the book and feel it was an important one to read for myself due to my interest in religious extremism and this area, the work is very detailed and focused on minutiae of Judaic law and philosophy. It offers a much deeper look into the religious details and resources that enforced belief than affects of these beliefs on the state and Zionism itself. I was looking for a more secular and mundane look at the real world affects of this belief rather than a deep dissection of Messianism and its wellspring of such beliefs. In the end there is a wealth of information in this book that will give the reader a greater understanding of Jewish religious extremist thought and philosophy. The reader should be aware of what they are getting. This is much more an exegesis of radicalism than a more secular look at the affect of that radicalism.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Original and Well ResearchedBy CustomerOriginal and Well Researched. Best (maybe only) complete intellectual history of Jewish religious views towards Zionism.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. The ultra- orthodox view of the modern state of IsraelBy Shalom FreedmanI read this work in the original in Hebrew. I was impressed by the depth of Ravitzky's knowledge of the ultra- orthodox world, and learned much about Haredi resistance to Zionism , a subject that had always perplexed me. And this because I praying daily the verse 'And return our eyes to Zion with mercy' always assumed that somehow to be religious meant to support a modern Jewish state in the land of Israel. As I know Ravitzky's political position and bias (He is a left- of center religious Zionist,) I have a certain reserve about his writing about Habad , who are in the other camp completely. But this is certainly a work worth reading, and even studying if one wishes to understand the variety of religious positions on the redemptive character and nature of the modern state of Israel.

The Orthodox Jewish tradition affirms that Jewish exile will end with the coming of the Messiah. How, then, does Orthodoxy respond to the political realization of a Jewish homeland that is the State of Israel? In this cogent and searching study, Aviezer Ravitzky probes Orthodoxy's divergent positions on Zionism, which range from radical condemnation to virtual beatification. Ravitzky traces the roots of Haredi ideology, which opposes the Zionist enterprise, and shows how Haredim living in Israel have come to terms with a state to them unholy and therefore doomed. Ravitzky also examines radical religious movements, including the Gush Emunim, to whom the State of Israel is a divine agent. He concludes with a discussion of the recent transformation of Habad Hassidism from conservatism to radical messianism. This book is indispensable to anyone concerned with the complex confrontation between Jewish fundamentalism and Israeli political sovereignty, especially in light of the tragic death of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

