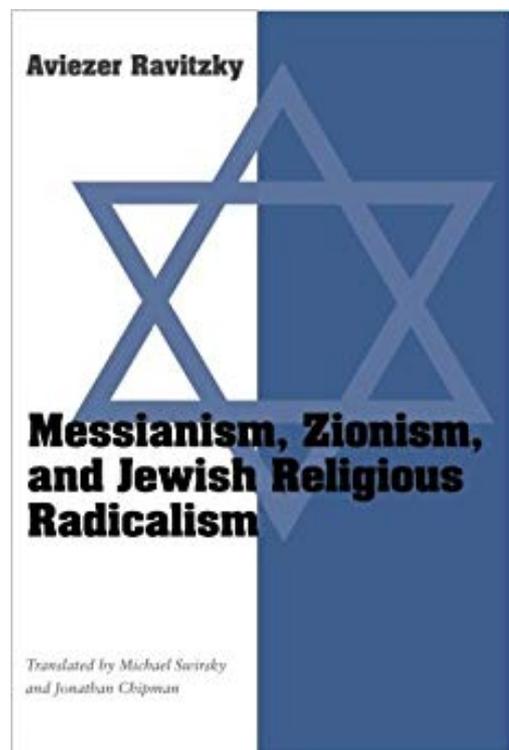


Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism) by Michael Swirsky, Jonathan Chipman, Aviezer Ravitzky



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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.



Reviews of the [Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism \(Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism\)](#) by Michael Swirsky, Jonathan Chipman, Aviezer Ravitzky

Landamath

The 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 prophecied 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 religion 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 Schneersohn 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 seperation of religion and state like most other Western nations, and considering Israels political structure that allows small radical groups to hold the majority of Israelis hostage because the major parties need the backing of small politcal 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.

Mikale

Unbelievably amazing! Ravitzky is extremely objective when portraying every side. Very thorough. I would strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in the different sides of Messianic Zionism.

Asher

Original and Well Researched. Best (maybe only) complete intellectual history of Jewish religious views towards Zionism.

Melipra

I 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.

Ieslyaenn

It is a shame that such a truly critical subject as the Jewish right and its Messianic pretensions, has at this point, only one good resource in English, and this is it. More specifically, The Ultra-Orthodox right, has found it's chronicler in Avi Ravitzky and his history of their Messianic thought. He provides a comprehensive historical summary of the Messianic idea, going all the way back to the Destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, then moves the discussion to the subjects of radical anti-zionism, religious zionism, contemporary Messianism in the various ultra-orthodox sects, and their continuing relavance in Jewish religious politics.

Especially important are the "Three Oaths" which the Rabbis developed to forestall Messianic Zionism, after 70 AD. These were so successful, they prevented Zionism from developing in times when it could have, and made the 20th century development of it much more difficult. However, the Three Oaths were only one strand of Jewish Messianic thought, which to a large degree still ignores the stupendous developments of the past 60 years as having no significance.

However, for this writer, the Holocaust and the birth of Israel, are exactly what would seem to an untrained observer: the arrival of the Messianic age. In my recent book, "Jewish History and Divine Providence" I provided an integrated Messianic view of Jewish history from a Liberal point of view. However, I begin from the point of view of Maimonides, whose messianic views were as sober and rational as the rest of his thought. In addition, the Kabbalah and its special rationality, is also critical in my analysis.

Ravitsky provides one side of the Messianic debate. However, until now a liberal side to this debate has been lacking. Those who read both Ravitzky and "Jewish History and Divine Providence" will get the full story.

Malojurus

Aviezer Ravitsky has done great work covering the history and beliefs of the full spectrum of religious responses to Zionism. From those who believed that Zionism was evil because of its secular nature and attempt to replace Divine Redemption with political redemption, to those who believe that the establishment of the State of Israel was preparation for Divine Redemption. He explains the differing points of view in such an unbiased and understanding manner that you are left wondering who is right. This was a mind-bending trip, and in my specific case, greatly helped me understand the beliefs and concerns of the Satmar Hassidim, whom my family left behind two generations ago in Satmar.

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