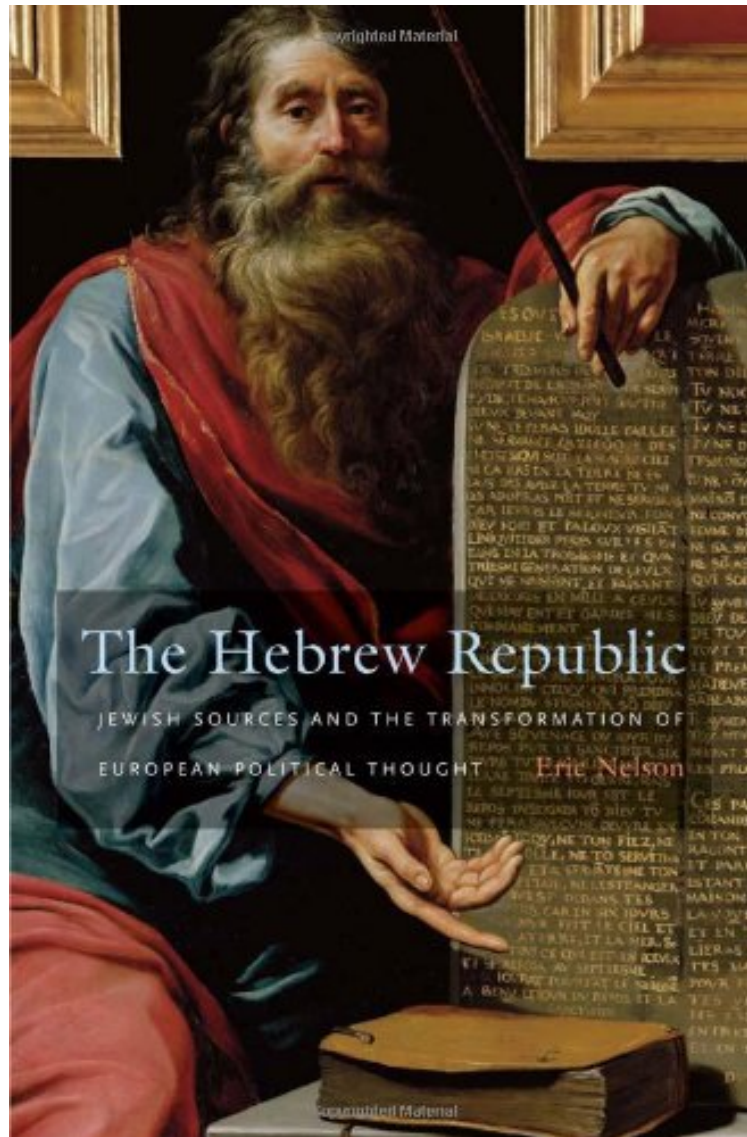


(Free) The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought

The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought

Eric Nelson

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Eric Nelson : The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Political Science of the FutureBy HonestOpinEric Nelson at once

provides a highly focused look into our political past, while at the same time, unknowingly provides a glimpse into our political future. The Reformation radically changed the way men approached political science. As Nelson points out, "It became the central ambition of political science to approximate, as closely as possible, the paradigm of what European authors began to call the *respublica Hebraeorum* (republic of the Hebrews)." Previous authors had looked elsewhere for political guidance, now they would have to look to "the perfect constitution designed by the omniscient God." Old Testament Israel was now seen as the Divine model to imitate in political affairs. Nelson focuses on three major political areas impacted by the "Hebrew Revival" as he tags it: exclusive republican government, the inseparable link between land distribution and political liberty, and religious toleration. Nelson does not extrapolate his excellent study into the future, but it will become obvious to the student of history that the American colonies were major beneficiaries of the "Hebrew Revival", continuing its trajectory long after European counterparts had jumped ship. The radical politics of Thomas Jefferson can be seen as rooted in the study of God's Law, as Jefferson drank deeply from James Harrington, a major player in the period under Nelson's scope. After reading the Hebrew Republic, it will become apparent where Jefferson got his desire to distribute 50 acres of land to practically every adult male in Virginia in order to secure widespread political liberty. What happened? Nelson locates the demise of the "Hebrew Revival" in the demise of faith in the God of the Old Testament Scriptures, a product of the 18th Century Age of Reason. I would add it was later joined by the Age of Escape, as Christian theology abandoned the transformation of planet earth in the name of Christ, and morphed into escapism. Nevertheless, if we are to believe the God of the Old Testament Scriptures, the "Hebrew Revival" is not just a thing of the past, for it is the ultimate destiny of all nations. I highly recommend Hebrew Republic, and commend Eric Nelson on his work. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. How the Reformation introduced Hebrew studies, and how Hebrew studies informed our Constitution. By charlene at Dosido Bookshelf I have always heard that the founding fathers designed a new form of government drawn from long study of classic sources and debate among learned scholars. But I never questioned who were these sources. Eric Nelson, in this 229-page book (including notes and index), introduced me to many of these classic Greek and Roman sources by way of analysis alongside the introduction of classic Hebrew sources. I agree with others who comment that it is a vast subject to compress in under 300 pages. But Eric Nelson writes well and I appreciated the brevity, since I would not be able to tackle a much larger work. I have tagged a dozen pages with quotes to share with friends; and bracketed many sections to review before I shelve the book. I think it is worth keeping as a good reference work. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Origin of our democracy. By A happy purchaser A very good analysis of our western culture and morals and ethics, showing that its origin was largely from the bible as well as Greco-Roman institutions.

According to a commonplace narrative, the rise of modern political thought in the West resulted from secularization—the exclusion of religious arguments from political discourse. But in this pathbreaking work, Eric Nelson argues that this familiar story is wrong. Instead, he contends, political thought in early-modern Europe became less, not more, secular with time, and it was the Christian encounter with Hebrew sources that provoked this radical transformation. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Christian scholars began to regard the Hebrew Bible as a political constitution designed by God for the children of Israel. Newly available rabbinic materials became authoritative guides to the institutions and practices of the perfect republic. This thinking resulted in a sweeping reorientation of political commitments. In the book's central chapters, Nelson identifies three transformative claims introduced into European political theory by the Hebrew revival: the argument that republics are the only legitimate regimes; the idea that the state should coercively maintain an egalitarian distribution of property; and the belief that a godly republic would tolerate religious diversity. One major consequence of Nelson's work is that the revolutionary politics of John Milton, James Harrington, and Thomas Hobbes appear in a brand-new light. Nelson demonstrates that central features of modern political thought emerged from an attempt to emulate a constitution designed by God. This paradox, a reminder that while we may live in a secular age, we owe our politics to an age of religious fervor, in turn illuminates fault lines in contemporary political discourse.

Rarely -- all too rarely -- one reads a book that can really transform a major field of study. Eric Nelson has produced such a book -- and he has done it with lucidity, economy, and grace. The Hebrew Republic teaches us to read early modern political thought in a radically new way. (Anthony Grafton, author of *Worlds Made By Words*) Eric Nelson's deep knowledge of the Hebrew, as well as the Greek and Latin, sources of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century political thought is brilliantly deployed in this book. Nelson provides a provocative and persuasive account of the remarkable effects of taking biblical and rabbinic texts seriously. (Michael Walzer, Institute for Advanced Study) Deeply learned and thought-provoking... No doubt specialists will be debating the arguments of *The Hebrew Republic* for some time to come -- which is a testimony to Eric Nelson's profound and original book. (Adam Kirsch *Tablet Magazine* 2010-03-16) [A] magnificent book... The Hebrew Republic boldly claims that the secularism-as-modernism narrative is incomplete at best, and at worst totally backwards... Not only has [Nelson] significantly revised the history of some key concepts in early modern European political thought. It may be that he has written a paradigm-shifter, the kind of book

that fundamentally realigns the way scholars look at a period as a whole...The Hebrew Republic demonstrates unforgettably that we need to understand piety to comprehend politics. This will not be news to scholars working on the Middle East or the Middle Ages. But for many historians of European and American politics and political thought, The Hebrew Republic may help force belief--not just religious institutions--back into the center of the story. (Nathan Perl-Rosenthal New Republic online 2010-05-05)Many of the political freedoms that we enjoy today have their roots in the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinical commentaries that explained it. Eric Nelson outlines this in his brilliant new book *The Hebrew Republic*, showing, for example, how the triumph of republican government over monarchy is in large part thanks to the Bible and the rabbis. (Daniel Freedman Forbes.com 2010-07-22)Nelson powerfully argues that [the 17th century] had as its driving force an intense scholarly interest in the Israelite constitution, occasioned by the discovery of new Rabbinic texts and the growth of Hebrew scholarship in Europe. Nelson's account is remarkable because it shows just how serious great political thinkers of the 17th century were about the details of an ancient polity that many or most Christian scholars of the time believed was God's approved constitution for all time. No matter how much contemporary political thought really is a product of the 17th century, Nelson explains, modern political theory has deeper theological roots than is generally believed. (J. John Choice 2010-11-01)In *The Hebrew Republic* Nelson has thrown down the gauntlet of a revolution. He means to overturn the accepted foundations of modern intellectual history by re-evaluating the early modern period and asking whether biblical and Jewish ideas were as foundational as Greek and Roman thought in creating the modern world. And Nelson, in being persuaded that the Bible was a motive force in early modern political history, is not alone. (Diana Muir Appelbaum Jewish Ideas Daily 2012-02-06)About the AuthorEric Nelson is the Robert M. Beren Professor of Government at Harvard University.