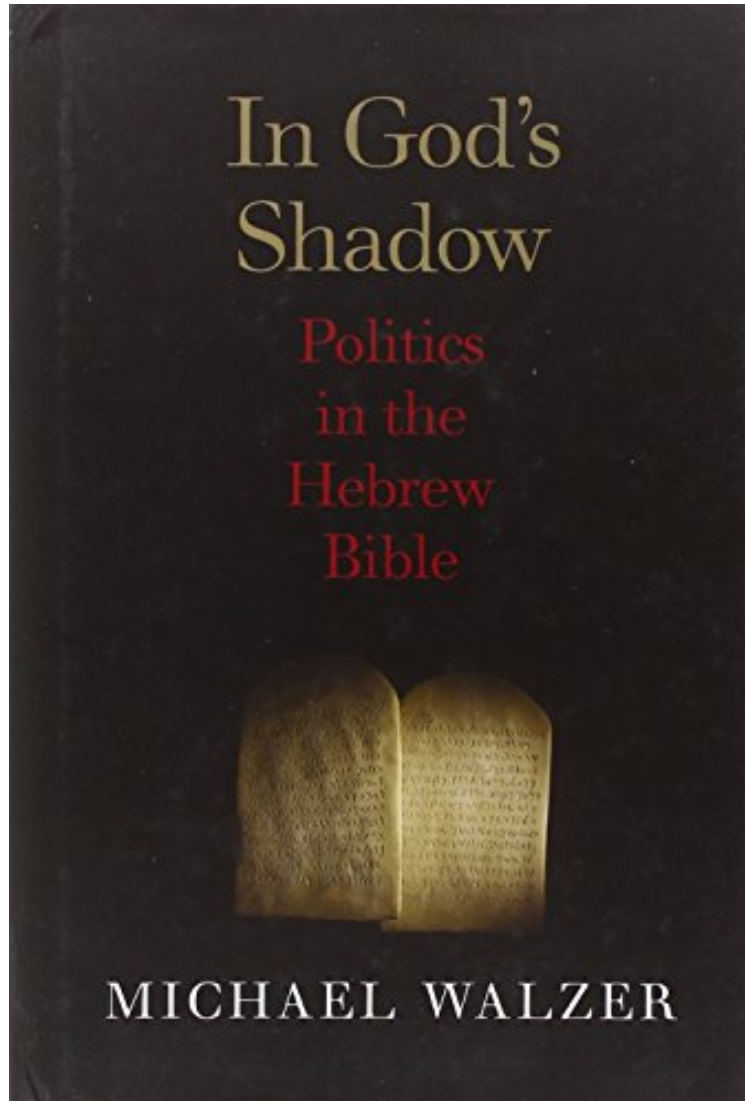


[FREE] In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible

In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible

Michael Walzer

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Michael Walzer : In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible:

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review in Foreign Affairs not expecting such an indepth revelation of the Hebrew Bible. Excellent book and I recommend it highly to any who are interested in the Hebrew Bible and how it is mis-interpreted by our politicians to their own benefit. 26 of 32 people found the following review helpful. Is the Hebrew Bible a political and historical dead-end? By C P Slayton From the moment I heard of Michael Walzer's latest work I was itching to read it. The combination of Biblical literature, politics and Walzer's depth of experience were enough for me to order an early copy. Walzer begins his review of politics in the Hebrew scripture with the obligatory mention of his approach to Biblical interpretation. According to Walzer and his sources (many from the Jewish tradition) the Bible's historical accounts and detailed religious codes are not always what they seem. In addition, the author is skeptical of any political lessons to be reaped from the Bible, especially in light of a divine, interfering "ultimate ruler". Walzer is writing in an age where religion is being re-introduced to the fields of politics and international relations. Authors such as Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler are pushing for religion's front-line recognition. Douglas Johnston's strategy of interfaith dialogue is influencing foreign affairs. Esteemed editors, Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook use the Biblical era to study the theoretical branches of international relations. Admittedly, Walzer mentions that his topic is influenced by, but notably veers away from other Biblical political studies like that of Aaron Wildavsky. The increased hype around finding political solidarity in religious engagement, keeping in mind the Biblical approaches in recent and distant works, demand that any reader of "In God's Shadow" not be confused or distraught by Walzer's very critical, at times revisionist, approach. The main question addressed in Walzer's study is not 'how' we learn from the examples of Biblical politics but in truth are there 'any' intended political endorsements to be noted at all? Certainly one could study regime change (as Wildavsky did under Moses' political leadership) or the foreign relations described in the reign of Israelite kings. As Walzer argues, the Bible meets each instance of political meddling with condemnation. At this juncture Walzer appears to criticize the way in which the Bible stifles its political take-aways. Walzer regards the prophets, first active in the kings' courts and with later transition to public preaching, as passive critics of political pragmatism. The prophets were the enemies of human wisdom. Their only advice was to do nothing in the face of domestic and especially external threats. Indeed, Walzer defends the pragmatic politics of alliance and asserts that the kings fulfilled their duty if even in disobedience to God's commandments. Is this intended to be the role of kings (the purpose of political leaders) to be the only acceptable source of religious disobedience for the sake of national interest? Walzer continues to investigate the Biblical stance on political entities through a somewhat linear account from the covenant in Moses' time, to the conquest of Canaan, to the reign of the kings, through exile and various forms of Messianism. It is a lot of material to cover and Walzer does so very neatly. He doesn't allow his sources to control the flow of his own ideas and theories but instead gives his thoughts clarity and intrigue, if still controversy. Apparently no political study of the Bible would be complete without a look at the Bible's support or lack thereof for democracy. When many Biblical scholars cite the activity of the Israelite elders as proof of a constitutional, if not democratic process, Walzer looks at the elders and exclaims, "where were they"? Walzer explains that God's sovereignty, the leadership of the priests and the proclamations of the prophets all support the idea that the Bible was not intended to allow any political party, not even the elders, a descriptive role in Israel's social organization. If anything, what the Bible does support in way of politics is social justice, a community covenant for social welfare. Even the "passive" prophets supported this ideal. Israel lived under a sovereign God but with human freedom, "lay participation". Walzer called it "religious democracy", "formless democracy" or perhaps an "almost-democracy". Ironically, Walzer shows favor towards the political success of Solomon and the kings of Israel, exercising political alliances in favor of national interest and protection. He does this even while he holds the Bible's message to be apolitical or even counter-political. Where many scholars use the Bible to support the necessity of less-than-perfect politics, Walzer first declares there is no Biblical support for political human wisdom and then allies himself with the practice he just argued was condemned. Walzer writes in a very tangible manner and raises many items of discussion, especially in light of the many scholars debating religion's influence; its history, its polarization its potential wisdom and its conflict. But I couldn't help but feel that Walzer sees the Hebrew scriptures as a political, and in some ways, historical dead-end.

In this eagerly awaited book, political theorist Michael Walzer reports his findings after decades of thinking about the politics of the Hebrew Bible. Attentive to nuance while engagingly straightforward, Walzer examines the laws, the histories, the prophecies, and the wisdom of the ancient biblical writers and discusses their views on such central political questions as justice, hierarchy, war, the authority of kings and priests, and the experience of exile. Because there are many biblical writers with differing views, pluralism is a central feature of biblical politics. Yet pluralism, Walzer observes, is never explicitly defended in the Bible; indeed, it couldn't be defended since God's word had to be as singular as God himself. Yet different political regimes are described in the biblical texts, and there are conflicting political arguments and also a recurrent anti-political argument: if you have faith in God, you have no need for strong institutions, prudent leaders, or reformist policies. At the same time, however, in the books of law and prophecy, the people of Israel are called upon to overcome oppression and let justice well up like water, righteousness like an unfailling stream.

"Walzer brings a fresh voice to the most studied text of the Western tradition. I found myself marking up passage after passage as I followed his learned observations about the political implications of the Bible...I constantly found myself reaching new levels of insight as a result of his erudite points of provocation. This book is highly recommended for all those who take the legacy of the Bible seriously." Gary Anderson, Hesburgh Professor of Catholic Theology, University of Notre Dame, author of *Sin: A History* (Gary Anderson 2011-11-11) "Was there room in the Biblical kingdom of an omnipotent God for a political constitution or political responsibility? Walzer's guide through the text of the Hebrew Bible is magnificent: a many-layered, elegant, sympathetic but unapologetic examination of covenants, legal codes, kingship, prophecy, exile, holy war, and social justice in God's shadow. It is nothing less than an account of how the Israelites came to define themselves as Jews." Nancy Rosenblum, Department of Government, Harvard University, and author of *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship*