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This Is My God



Synopsis

This Is My God is Herman Wouk's famous introduction to Judaism completely updated and revised with a new chapter, Israel at Forty. A miracle of brevity, it guides readers through the world's oldest practicing religion with all the power, clarity and wit of Wouk's celebrated novels.

Book Information

Paperback: 345 pages

Publisher: Back Bay Books; Reprint edition (April 15, 1992)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0316955140

ISBN-13: 978-0316955140

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (74 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #88,740 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #7 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Movements > Orthodox](#) #23 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Theology](#) #43 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > History](#)

Customer Reviews

In 1959, Orthodox Judaism was a dinosaur. Its members didn't have to fight against being arrogant as they must do today. It took a great deal of Chutzpah for Herman Wouk to write this book where he discusses and then dismisses Reform and Conservative Judaism in a chapter. Without rancor or overt criticism he discusses these movements within Judaism but he doesn't accept them as Judaism. That said, this is an excellent book on what Judaism means in regards to marriage, history, Israel, prayer, observance, Torah, Talmud, kashrut and study. He writes in a clear concise style concerning the daily life of an observant Jew as well as the history that went into it. Many times he argues for the education of young Jewish children in Judaism (taking issue with the refrain "they can choose it when they grow up" since it is easy to reject what you've learned but hard to learn something you should have learned when you were a child.) and against the rising tide of assimilation. He tells personal stories about studying Talmud with his grandfather and his time fighting in World War II. One particularly amusing one is how he was disappointed to learn that "an eye for an eye" meant compensatory damage payments as it was one of his best arguments for rejecting observance altogether at age 14 when he would have rather gone to Saturday afternoon movies. A caveat in that if you are an observant Jew, you will probably not learn much from this

book. This is the book that rabbis have conversion candidates read in order to make sure that everyone has a good idea as to what is going to happen if the conversion goes through. This is a great book for non-observant Jews and Jews who consider themselves Reform or Conservative, as Wouk has a talent for saying potentially explosive perspectives with enough humility and candor that you aren't personally insulted if you disagree. This is also a good book for non-Jews wanting to know what Judaism is all about. What makes this book exceptional is that Herman Wouk's perspective is becoming a rare voice in Orthodoxy. Orthodox Judaism is increasingly moving to the right partly as a reaction to the intermarriage and assimilation of the liberal movements within Judaism, partly as a sign of formerly non-observant Jews becoming observant and finding distaste in their old lives. Wouk's perspective was probably a standard voice in 1950s Judaism, but it is one that is not heard often enough in today's Judaism that finds itself pulled between the stark limiting observance of the Haredi and the "whatever-you-think-is-right-is-right" laissez faire of the Reform (including the Renewelists and Reconstructionists). It is easy to condemn. It takes effort to reach out without rancor or snap judgement as Wouk does in this book. This is what makes Wouk's book valuable to people who already know the material

Herman Wouk blends Jewish history, Jewish practice, and personal experience in a wonderful tour for Judaism, appropriate for nonJews, Jews, and even those who think they know it all. While his discussions of Shabbat, Hanukah, and other observances are fine reading, Wouk reaches his peak when discussing his own and his family's experiences--his grandfather, whom he obviously admired a great deal, his father, who spent an immense sum of money (for the times) to buy the honor of reading the book of Jonah on Yom Kippur afternoon. Wonderful images of a time in Judaism gone by. I do not find it limiting that Wouk writes from an Orthodox perspective (he assumes, for example, that only a man would wear a tallit, which is the Orthodox practice, but not the Conservative). Wouk was what he was, and I do not think he should have modified his book to an egalitarian perspective to satisfy the wolves of political correctness. Well worth an annual read and a place on your shelf.

A formidable book, written for everyone, from the pious Chassidim who seems to know all about Judaism to the secular Wall Street Jewish Banker who is far from his faith but feels every now and then the sweet but stern internal calling of his demanding heritage. The best chapters, in my opinion, are related to the experiences related to the secular Jewish people when they got involved in the Jewish religious rituals at the synagogue or at home during childhood, "one feels like he is telling ones own experiences when he was a Jewish kid, so unexplained and uneasy situations at that time

become hilarious Generally speaking, Wouk, who is observant, tried to be very open avoiding dogma and intended to convey to the Jewish reader the precious value of his 4000 years heritage and a way to learn how to feel proud about it. Wouk did not forget the non-Jewish reader either, he wrote this book with simple concepts and language so anyone interested about Judaism can get a good basic introduction through these pages

A must read for all Jews and those considering becoming Jews. Wouk gives, among other things, an understanding of why it is important to observe the Jewish dietary laws and why improvised prayer has meaning. The result is that I am now incorporating more observances into my daily life. For the first time, I see their importance. This book has changed my life.

As a Christian who is very curious to learn about Judaism, this book served as a fine introductory lesson. Herman Wouk researched this field exhaustively and relied on the expert knowledge of ordained rabbis on matters of religious law, and I think he tried to avoid overwhelming or intimidating a newcomer to this field of study with excessive details or exposition. In its directness and lucidity it has the same qualities as his other works, and after having read *The Winds of War & War* and *Remembrance* twice each, I could not resist the opportunity to delve into this book. As Wouk noted, many top quality writers have almost a conversational style - and he certainly does. Wouk's dry sense of humor is very effective. This is worthwhile not only to read through in a few sittings, but also for reference on specific topics. I also appreciated the author's attempts to explain his methods of transliteration from Hebrew, and suggestions on their English pronunciation. I hope to use this book in doing further study. Recommended.

I was interested to understand the Jewish life to understand Buber better. This book is a great help, for a good introduction to Jewish life. Terms like Torah, Kosher are made clear here. The section "Chosen People" was an eye opener to me. I was under the wrong impression about the concept of "Jews" as chosen people. I will repeat his words " But this idea of salvation limited to one group never had place in the Jewish faith and has no place in it today. In Judaism right conduct is the path to God. This path lies open to Jews and non-Jews".

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