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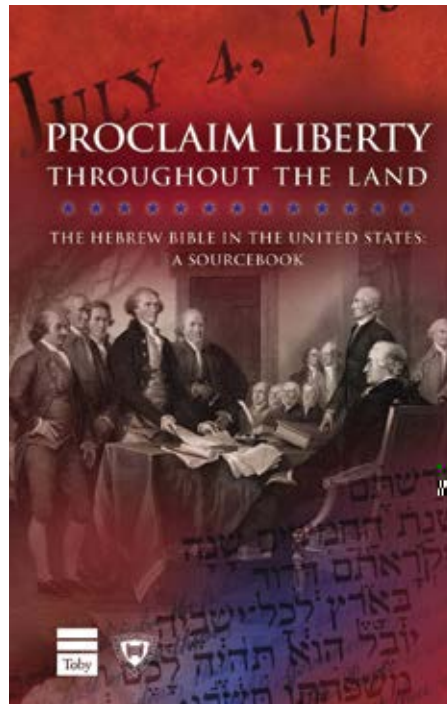
America, Born of the Hebrew Bible

BY LIEL LEIBOVITZ

This book review of the Straus Center's volume Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land: The Hebrew Bible in the United States originally appeared in Tablet Magazine at tabletmag.com and is reprinted with permission.

This idea—that Americans, like the Israelites of old, have been singled out by God and instructed to erect a city on a hill that would shine its light unto the nations—is far from a historical side note. It is, arguably, the engine that drove America to grow from a string of struggling colonies to something much grander and more consequential. The language of divine election may sound too wild for us these days, too rich with perils and prejudice; but even if we no longer wrestle with this idea as our predecessors once had, this idea still, behind our backs, wrestles with us.

Which, again, makes *Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land* such a treasure. Far from a mere compendium of ancient curiosities, it could—and should—be read as a primer on how Americans think, and have always thought, about community and about government, about justice and about faith and about all other topics that move the hearts of women and men. It’s only right, then, that the book ends with Lincoln, a president whose understanding of America’s soul was, perhaps, peerlessly layered. “I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something more than common that those



men struggled for,” he said in an address to the New Jersey State Senate in 1861, “that something even more than National Independence; that something that held out a great promise to all the people of the world to all time to come; I am exceedingly anxious that this Union, the Constitution, and the liberties of the people shall be perpetuated in accordance with the original idea for which that struggle was made, and I shall be most happy indeed if I shall be an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people, for perpetuating the object of that great struggle.”

Seven score and eighteen years later, we remain God’s almost chosen people. Now, at least, we’ve a marvelous book to help us understand our promises and predicaments, both bequeathed to us by the glory of the Hebrew Bible.

Liel Leibovitz is a senior writer for Tablet Magazine and a host of its Take One daf yomi podcast. He is co-teaching a Straus Center course on the intellectual history of modern Israel in Spring 2021.

Esther in the White House: The Scroll of Esther and Surviving Palace Intrigue at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

BY DR. TEVI TROY

The following excerpt is from the introduction to the book, *Esther in the White House: The Scroll of Esther and Surviving Palace Intrigue at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*, published by the Jewish Museum of New York.

tration, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu invoked the Esther story by giving President Barack Obama a copy of the Book of Esther as a gift—as an unsubtle reminder that a



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