

# GERSONIDES

*Judaism within the Limits of Reason*



SEYMOUR FELDMAN

Oxford · Portland, Oregon

**The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization**

2010

# Contents



<i>Note on Transliteration</i>	ix
<i>Note on Sources</i>	xi
<b>1. Introduction: Life and Works</b>	
Life	1
Works	3
Philosophical Environment	7
Motives and Methods	14
<b>2. The Story of Creation</b>	28
Gersonides' Cosmological Conundrums	28
The World Is Not Eternal: It Was Created	31
The World Is Indestructible	44
Creation <i>Ex Nihilo</i> Is False	48
Philosophical Cosmology and Biblical Exegesis	55
<b>3. God and his Attributes</b>	59
How Can the Existence of God Be Proved?	59
How Can We Speak about God?	69
<b>4. Divine Omniscience</b>	81
Rabbi Akiva's Dilemma	81
Gersonides' Solution to Rabbi Akiva's Dilemma	82
<b>5. Divine Providence</b>	104
The Case for Individual Providence	104
Why Do the Innocent Suffer?	115
The People of Israel and Divine Providence	124
<b>6. Divine Omnipotence</b>	131
'Is Anything Impossible for the Lord?'	131
Gersonides' Theory of Miracles	134

<b>7. Prophecy</b>	<b>145</b>
What Does Philosophy Have To Do with Prophecy?	145
Gersonides' Theory of Prophecy	147
Moses, the 'Super-Prophet'	159
Are Prophets Infallible?	166
<b>8. Humanity and its Destiny</b>	<b>172</b>
Philosophical and Religious Background	172
Gersonides' Theory of the Intellect	180
The Immortality of the Intellect	185
Gersonides' Critique of Immortality as Conjunction with the Agent Intellect	189
<b>9. The Torah</b>	<b>198</b>
Do We Need the Torah?	198
How Should We Read the Bible?	208
The Commandments	216
Is the Torah Immutable?	221
<b>10. Conclusion</b>	<b>224</b>
<i>Bibliography</i>	237
<i>Works by Gersonides</i>	237
<i>Primary Sources</i>	238
<i>Secondary Sources</i>	241
<i>Index</i>	251