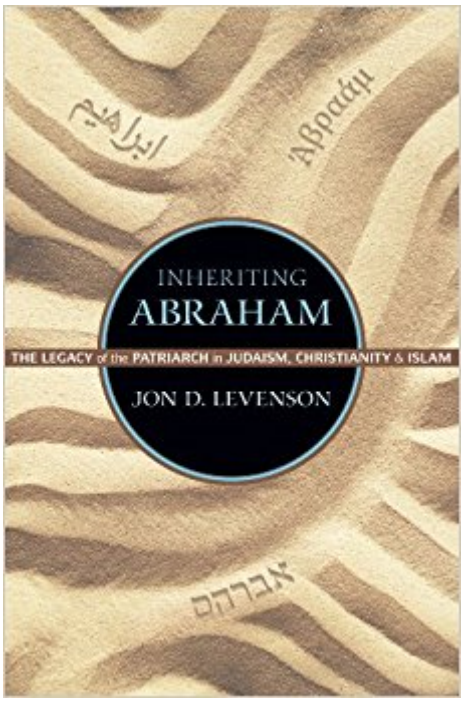
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Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy Of The Patriarch In Judaism, Christianity, And Islam (Library Of Jewish Ideas)



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Synopsis

Jews, Christians, and Muslims supposedly share a common religious heritage in the patriarch Abraham, and the idea that he should serve only as a source of unity among the three traditions has become widespread in both scholarly and popular circles. But in Inheriting Abraham, Jon Levenson reveals how the increasingly conventional notion of the three equally "Abrahamic" religions derives from a dangerous misunderstanding of key biblical and Qur'anic texts, fails to do full justice to any of the traditions, and is often biased against Judaism in subtle and pernicious ways.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Best Nonfiction Jewish Book of 2012, Jewish Ideas Daily.comOne of Choice's Outstanding Academic Titles for 2013"[T]he figure of Abraham has more often been a battleground than a meeting place. This is the brilliantly elaborated theme of Levenson's book, which retells the Abraham story while examining the use made of Abraham in later Jewish, Christian, and (to a lesser extent) Muslim thought."--Adam Kirsch, New York Review of Books"Levenson, a well-known biblical studies scholar and professor of Jewish studies at Harvard, makes a contrarian argument against those who would oversimplify the differences between the three religions that claim Abraham as a seminal figure. . . . Educated general readers interested in biblical studies may be awed by how closely Levenson reads the text."--Publishers Weekly"Levenson's book will be acutely sobering for those who favor easy accommodation between traditions. . . . And no one has been more effective than Levenson in calling Christian interpreters to a more honest self-awareness."--Christian

Century"[A] learned, lucid and luminous examination of the distinctive character of Abraham."--Glenn C. Altschuler, Jerusalem Post"Written very well, argued delightfully, with deep insights, . . . Inheriting Abraham makes a superb contribution to our understanding and perception, opinion and insight, of the figure of Prophet Abraham."--Tauseef Ahmad Parray, Islam and Muslim Societies"Levenson's literary skill and encyclopedic grasp of the exegetical traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam makes this volume a valuable exercise in comparison. But the book also makes a strong and controversial argument about what that comparison actually reveals about the role of Abraham in the relationship between the three 'Abrahamic' religions. . . . [Levenson's] study encourages us to look unflinchingly at the limits of difference and commonality within and across religious traditions."--Martin S. Jaffee, Jewish Review of Books"The best Jewish book in each category this past year? Inheriting Abraham is the most impressive work of Jewish scholarship published during 2012. For more than three decades, Jon Levenson has been quietly developing a biblical theology that would revolutionize Jewish understanding and worship, if only more Jews were to learn of it. Inheriting Abraham is his most accessible book yet--a model of how exacting scholarship can be written for the well-educated layman."--D.G. Myers, Jewish Ideas Daily"[E]xcellent. . . . Inheriting Abraham is informed throughout by Levenson's characteristically great learning. . . . [G]raceful and clear."--Hillel Fradkin, Commentary"Jon Levenson's superb book demonstrates that despite some simplistic and ill-conceived attempts to harmonize the three Abrahamic faiths, and some lingering supersessionist antagonisms, we live in a period remarkable for serious and thoughtful dialogue among these cousin religions. It is a dialogue grounded in responsible awareness of the complexity, beauty, and defining commitments of each one. Working from this awareness is our best hope of developing the vital mutual respect and harmony our divided world requires."--Donald Senior, Commonweal"This well-conceived, elegantly written book traces how the figure of Abraham known from Genesis came to be understood in unique ways by the later Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. While many speak of Abraham as a figure shared by these three traditions, Levenson shows how each tradition's image of Abraham reflects its own distinct theological assumptions. . . . Rather than grounding interreligious dialogue in various conceptual false cognates in hopes of finding the lowest common denominator, Levenson has led the way in showing how true interreligious understanding can be achieved only if one grasps the nuanced theological grammar of each religious tradition."--Choice"[E]asily accessible to a wide readership. . . . [Levenson's] book is a masterful corrective to the ever more popular, pat and misleading myths that have emerged under the 'Abrahamic' banner."--Allan Nadler, Moment Magazine"[E]rudite and readable. . . . His book will indubitably be valuable for undergraduate

courses in scriptural exegesis, interreligious dialogue, and comparative religion."--Mara Benjamin, Religious Studies Review"Simply put, Jon D. Levenson is one of those rare scholars whose every word repays careful reading. Inheriting Abraham is no exception."--Matthew Thiessen, Anabaptist Witness"While Levenson displays expertise in all three religions, his particular strength lies in his treatment of the numerous, varied and even contradictory Jewish traditions on Abraham and in showing the contrasts between Jewish, Christian and Islamic views of Abraham, thereby questioning the validity of the existence of an authentic, unified supra-Abraham."--Rivkah Fishman-Duker, Jewish Political Studies Review"Levenson is a seasoned scholar of this material and his learning, here lightly presented, shines through."--H.G.M. Williamson, Journal of Jewish Studies

"In Inheriting Abraham, one of the world’s leading Bible scholars, Jon D. Levenson, has given us an incisive and deeply challenging account of the three Abrahams of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theology. It may be, he suggests, that we are divided by a common ancestry and that we need to understand our differences no less than our commonalities. A brilliant, well-argued, and much-needed work."--Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth"In this groundbreaking book, Levenson gives us a close reading of the Abraham narratives in Genesis and explores how Jews, Christians, and Muslims have construed Abraham from antiquity to today. His thought is crisp and nicely provocative, his writing is lucid, witty, and accessible to the nonspecialist. Inheriting Abraham is an eye-opening and compelling read."--R.W.L. Moberly, Durham University"Levenson’s fine book on the intertwined hermeneutics of Abraham throughout the ages among Jews, Christians, and Muslims deals elegantly with the complex relationship of texts and communities. It offers an excellent starting point for the comparative study of the three religions harking back to Abraham."--Guy G. Stroumsa, author of A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason"Levenson provides a masterful reading of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thinking that yielded three different portraits of Abraham. He sets the record straight about the biblical patriarch."--Sidney H. Griffith, author of The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam"Well-written and beautifully argued, this book makes an outstanding contribution to our understanding of the figure of Abraham. The educated public often labors under the grave misunderstanding that the three great monotheistic faith traditions share a common ancestor in Abraham. As Levenson demonstrates in this unique and timely book, Abraham has been shaped by each of the traditions to reflect the ideas and ideals of their own theology."--Gary A. Anderson, author of Sin: A History

Jon Levenson’s excellent Inheriting Abraham unravels the myth of a common Abrahamic faith, joining historical analysis with an understanding of transcendent religious values. His approach to the biblical persona of Abraham is a refreshing contrast with both a narrow religious mentality and a "scientific" massacre of religious text. Levenson’s prose style is a model of clarity and elegance.Levenson asks penetrating questions about the religious psychodrama of Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of Isaac, and while offering many intriguing explanations he is modest in not pretending to give final answers. His careful deconstruction of the misunderstandings about the concept of "chosen people" is illuminating for those who mistakenly believe that this idea implies some kind of superiority. Scattered here and there are nice touches of humor like "implanted like a microchip in his kidney" about the origin of Abraham’s recognition of God.It is instructive to learn about Paul’s use of pre-Mosaic Abraham to argue for the irrelevance of Jewish law, a fundamental divergence of Christianity from Judaism. And for Christians, Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his beloved son prefigures the central Christian drama of the Divine sacrifice of Christ.Islam’s claim to Abraham as a Muslim, many centuries after the appearance of Abraham in the Biblical account, and its view of both Christianity and Judaism as perversions of the real Abraham, are helpful in understanding the basic gulf between the religions. While not ignoring some common ground, Levenson emphasizes the fundamental differences which make the idea of an umbrella Abrahamic faith unacceptable. He makes the strong point that describing Christianity or Islam as Abrahamic is to accept the Christian or Islamic theologic position.Traditional Jews may not be happy with Levenson’s notion that the figure of Abraham in the later rabbinic texts is a development related to, but separate from, the Abraham of the Bible. The classic Jewish tradition holds that an oral legacy parallels the written word of the Bible, and this oral dimension of Judaism was eventually written down in the centuries beginning around the time of the destruction of the Second Temple. How Levenson sees the relationship of Sinaitic revelation to rabbinic or Second Temple Judaism is not clear in this book. Did midrash and Mishnah evolve much later or did they exist, like an oral genetic code, from the beginning only to become manifest later?In sum, Inheriting Abraham is a fascinating and timely book. As we see Islam in conflict with other faiths in Europe, Africa and Asia, Levenson’s superb study illumines at a radical level why peaceful co-existence will need to find a more solid foundation than a common understanding of the meaning of Abraham.

An excellent work. Scholarly researched yet very readable. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim readers will discover things that challenge their beliefs but also enlighten them.

A+

This will give you a great perspective on Abraham from the point of views of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Well written, readable, and very fair. It also contains one of the best appreciations i've seen of the theology of the Apostle Paul. Abraham is a perfect starting point for diving into each of those three religions.

Eye opening and thought provoking. Presented in an extremely readable manner which, however, is overly repetitive.

This book is very interesting and makes you look at the subject of the old testament in a different light. I have read the bible cover to cover many times but will now read it differently, looking for some of the subtile relationships the characters display. However, you need to keep a good dictionary next to you while reading. I have a law degree and think I know the English language pretty well, but not like Mr. Levenson does.

Fascinating insights, and Levenson covers a great deal of ground. However, sometimes the amount of information and analysis is somewhat overwhelming.

Intellectually exciting and logically sound with careful exacting argument. fulfilled my expectations after hearing his lecture some 2-3 years ago.

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