



Abraham

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Author Bruce Feiler begins *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* with a desire to know the “largely unknown” Abraham, history’s first monotheist and the “purported *biological* father” of twelve million Jews, two billion Christians, and one billion Muslims. The many legends about Abraham derive from his “Call” in Genesis and its conflicting interpretations.

Early Jewish scholars, such as the historian Josephus, regarded Ishmael as the father of the Arabs and denigrated his descendants, and Muhammad’s first biographers traced his tribe, the Qurysh, back through Ishmael and Abraham to Adam. Jews followed Abraham’s lineage through Isaac, who became a symbol of suffering for faith, and Christians regarded Isaac as a forerunner of Christ, equating Mount Moriah and Calvary.

Separate chapters trace the need each faith felt for Abraham in establishing its legitimacy. Jewish scribes produced the Torah, incorporating stories into a Book that created a tradition. Feiler admits being shocked by the “collective, willful appropriation of Abraham” by Judaism in the Middle Ages. Christians needed Abraham as a non-Jewish link to Jesus, and in claiming exclusive rights to Abraham cut Jews off from their past. And by proclaiming the roots of their faith to be in Abraham, Muslims could claim that “true submission to God predated Judaism and Christianity.”

Feiler is adept at expounding these subtleties in the clearest prose, and his conclusion is straightforward: Abraham is “a physical manifestation of the fundamental yearning to be descended from a sacred source.”

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