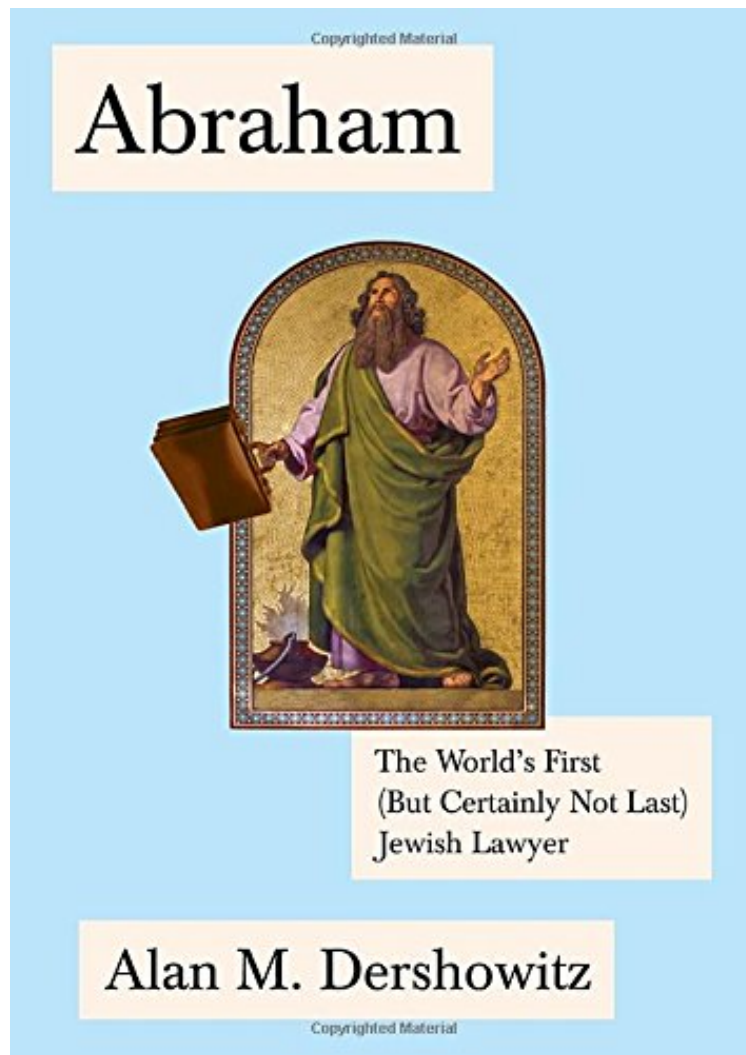


[Library ebook] Abraham: The World's First (But Certainly Not Last) Jewish Lawyer (Jewish Encounters Series)

Abraham: The World's First (But Certainly Not Last) Jewish Lawyer (Jewish Encounters Series)

Alan M. Dershowitz

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Alan M. Dershowitz : Abraham: The World's First (But Certainly Not Last) Jewish Lawyer (Jewish Encounters Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Abraham: The World's First (But Certainly Not Last) Jewish Lawyer (Jewish Encounters Series):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Book Not Just Legal, But PersonalBy LUCINDA FRANKSReaders talk about how the author explores different aspects of the law and lawyers in this fascinating book, but I gleaned something much more personal and inspiring from the portraits of these great Jewish leaders. For

example, Dershowitz's interpretation of the life of Abraham affected me deeply not as a lawyer but as a spiritual human being. I have always considered God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son as counterintuitive behavior. There are several different interpretations among Jewish scholars about the order to kill Isaac. The New Testament implies that Abraham did not argue with God but submitted because he thought his command a test of Abraham's paramount loyalty and love for the Lord. But some Torah interpreters believe that Abraham did argue with God vehemently and that God was using the command as a test of Abraham's love and loyalty to his son, especially since he had mistreated his other son. The iconoclastic Dershowitz provides evidence for this view by offering affirming quotes from Kant and Bob Dylan. Well, that is good enough for me. As a Judeo-Christian who believes in the absolute love of God for his children, the Old Testament has made me nervous and caused me to sometimes question God's goodness. But now I intend to go back and read the first part of the bible symbolically, and with new more forgiving eyes.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The first 40 pages are excellent, His legal dissection of the sodom incident is ...By Craig ScottThe first 40 pages are excellent, His legal dissection of the sodom incident is masterful. The Issac incident is tortured and confused, also it is filled with understandable personal anger at the suffering of the Jewish people. However, the poetic paralels fo this with the Issac incident are weak, unconvincing and confusing. I flipped forward a read a few of the brief profiles of famous Jewish legal minds then stopped reading.

Hello recycle bin.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Starts out well, and peters out a bitBy operafanThe middle of the book,. about Jewish lawyers after Abraham, seems to be mostly filler, a sort of afterthought to the thorough and impressive analysis of Biblical and related sources. The last paragraph about Jewish lawyers in the recent past strikes a chord, and is well done. Overall, it does not quite live up to its billing.

Part of the Jewish Encounter seriesOne of the worlds best-known attorneys gives us a no-holds-barred history of Jewish lawyers: from the biblical Abraham through modern-day advocates who have changed the world by challenging the status quo, defending the unpopular, contributing to the rule of law, and following the biblical command to pursue justice. The Hebrew Bibles two great examples of advocacy on behalf of problematic defendantsAbraham trying to convince God not to destroy the people of Sodom, and Moses trying to convince God not to destroy the golden-calf-worshipping Children of Israelestablished the template for Jewish lawyers for the next 4,500 years. Whether because throughout history Jews have found themselves unjustly accused of crimes ranging from decide to ritual child murder to treason, or because the biblical exhortation that justice, justice, shall you pursue has been implanted in the Jewish psyche, Jewish lawyers have been at the forefront in battles against tyranny, in advocating for those denied due process, in negotiating for just and equitable solutions to complex legal problems, and in efforts to ensure a fair trial for anyone accused of a crime. Dershowitz profiles Jewish lawyers well-known and unheralded, admired and excoriated, victorious and defeatedand, of course, gives us some glimpses into the gung-ho practice of law, Dershowitz-style. Louis Brandeis, Theodor Herzl, Judah Benjamin, Max Hirschberg, Ren Cassin, Bruno Kreisky, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Irwin Cotler are just a few of the idol smashers, advocates, collaborators, rescuers, and deal makers who helped to change history. Dershowitz's thoughts on the future of the Jewish lawyer are presented with the same insight, shrewdness, and candor that are the hallmarks of his more than four decades of writings on the law and how it is (and should be!) practiced.

At once frank and wry, Dershowitz demonstrates how the Jewish value of the rule of law, and the actions of Jewish lawyers themselves, have contributed to the pursuit of justice. Clear and accessible, with endnotes to please scholars, this book will likely appeal to both Jews and non-Jews.

Publishers WeeklyThis is the biblical Abraham as you have never seen him before: as the father of a long line of Jewish lawyers. Here is a story told with wit, verve, and penetrating insight by one of the great Jewish lawyers of our timethe fearless, peerless Alan Dershowitz. A brilliant, entertaining, and wonderfully stimulating book. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, author of Not in Gods Name We live in a period of dangerously escalating tensions among religious communities, with old hatreds and stereotypes making ominous comebacks. In this corrosive atmosphere, as Jews, Christians, and Muslims try to sort out the intricate relationships among their traditions so that a mutually respectful atmosphere can be created, no single figure is more significant than Abraham. The ancient patriarch is respected as the Father of Faith by all three communities, but how well is he understood? Alan Dershowitz deftly reveals him in a fresh light, as the Jewish lawyer par excellence, enabling us to appreciate the man from Ur of the Chaldees in a new and lively way. Harvey Cox, Hollis Research Professor of Divinity, Harvard University, and author of How to Read the BibleThe wit of the books subtitle continues in this sparkling history of the worlds first Jew and the worlds first lawyer. You dont have to be Jewish, or a lawyer, or even a believer in the existence of Abraham and his main legal adversary to be entertained and informed by this delightful book.

Steven Pinker, author of The Language Instinct and The Better Angels of our Nature, and Rebecca Goldstein, author of Betraying Spinoza and Plato at the GoogleplexAbout the AuthorALAN M. DERSHOWITZ is the New York Times best-selling author of more than thirty books. His articles have appeared in hundreds of publications, including The New York Times Magazine, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Huffington Post, Harvard Law , The Yale Law Journal, The Jerusalem Post, and Haaretz. He is the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law,

Emeritus, at Harvard Law School, and has worked for more than fifty years in the areas of civil liberties, human rights, and criminal law. Honors he has received include the Anti-Defamation League's William O. Douglas First Amendment Freedom Award. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Introduction The Jewish Lawyer Abraham, the world's first Jew, was also the world's first lawyer, arguing with God on behalf of the doomed sinners of Sodom. He was thus the first in a long line of Jewish lawyers. Joseph soon followed, serving as a counsel to the powerful, as many Jewish lawyers have done since. Then came Moses, who was not only a lawgiver but also an advocate on behalf of Jews who had rejected him, his laws, and his God. Daniel, who in the Apocrypha serves as a defense lawyer to Susanna, perfected a technique of cross-examination that is still effectively used today. And Deborah the judge dispensed justice under a palm tree. But Abraham was the first, and this book is about him and his progeny: the numerous Jewish lawyers who for better or worse, but in my view mostly better, have changed the world by challenging the status quo, defending the unpopular, contributing to the rule of law, and following the biblical command to pursue justice. The story of Abraham is the account of a complex man whose actions and inactions reflect the very different archetypes of the Jewish lawyer over time and place. No one knows, of course, whether the Abraham we know from the Bible ever really existed or whether he is a mythical or composite figure. Nor would it ever be possible to challenge the biblical account of Abraham historically, because unlike the New Testament and Quranic accounts of Jesus and Muhammad it takes place well before modern recorded history. In any event, it really doesn't matter, unless one is a biblical literalist. Neither does it matter, for purposes of this book, whether the Bible was written by the singular hand of God or by multiple human authors. What matters is that the biblical Abraham has been and remains one of the most influential characters in history, whether or not he was an actual historical figure. His story stands as a cornerstone of three great religions and has influenced, and continues to influence, billions of people. Abraham matters to Jews, to Christians, to Muslims, and to all who study the Bible or the Quran. And so this book will treat the biblical narrative as gospel (or, as lawyers might put it, the transcript of testimony). The biblical account of the patriarch of the three great Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—comprises several overlapping subplots, some of which are in the text itself, while others are based on midrashic and other authoritative commentaries. Each of these subplots reflects a different characteristic of lawyers in general and Jewish lawyers in particular. The biblical Abraham, like so many Jewish lawyers throughout history, was an immigrant. He left his parents home and, along with his nephew Lot, made aliyah to a promised Jewish homeland, thus also becoming the world's first Zionist. Like other immigrants, he changed his name from Abram to Abraham. He also changed his religion, shattering his father's idols (according to a midrashic addendum to the text of the Bible) and making a covenant with a new God. By destroying these icons, Abraham became the first iconoclast, a term applied to many Jewish lawyers throughout history who have shattered idols both religious and secular ever since Abraham showed the way. Why have so many Jewish lawyers broken with tradition and challenged established doctrines? Perhaps understanding Abraham will give us a clue. Before long, Abraham challenged the authority, indeed the morality, of his new God and accused Him as so many Jewish lawyers have accused authority of applying a double standard of justice and acting hypocritically: How dare You, the Judge of all the world, not Yourself do justice! In speaking to God in this manner, he demonstrated the quintessential characteristic that has come to be associated with the Jewish lawyer: *chutzpah*. Indeed, the word *chutzpah* is first used to describe Abraham's challenge to God. In the Aramaic words of the Talmud, Abraham demonstrated *chutzpah klapey shmayachutzpah* even in his dealings with the heavenly. In later years, Jews have put God on trial for breaking His covenant with the Jewish people and for allowing crusades, inquisitions, pogroms, and the Holocaust. Although God has not fared well in these moot court proceedings, those who put Him on trial generally continued to believe in Him, as Abraham did. Others, however, lost faith in a God who could stand idly by such evil. Why did some choose Abraham's path while others chose its opposite? Understanding Abraham may offer an explanation. Because he argued with God on behalf of the sinners of Sodom, one would surely have expected Abraham to argue with those who would order the deaths of innocent children. But Abraham twice remained silent in the face of immoral demands that he engage in acts that risked the lives of his two innocent sons. The first demand came from his wife, Sarah, to cast out his son Ishmael born to his Egyptian handmaid Hagar into the wilderness, where the child faced likely death. Although the demand was displeasing to Abraham, he followed it because God told him to do whatever Sarah asked (thus invoking the stereotype of the henpecked Jewish husband; there is an old joke about the Jewish kid who tells his mother that he was cast in the role of the Jewish husband in a school play, to which the disappointed mother replies, I was hoping you would get a speaking part). God also assured him that the progeny of both Isaac and Ishmael would become great nations, and God eventually intervened to save Ishmael and Hagar. The second immoral demand came directly from God: that Abraham offer to sacrifice his (and Sarah's) beloved and totally innocent son, Isaac. Abraham again remained silent in the face of God's outrageous command that we'll deserved the rebuke Abraham had previously directed at God if He were to sweep away the innocent along with the guilty. Suddenly Abraham, the radical iconoclast and *chutzpahnik* lawyer, appears to transform himself from one willing to challenge his God into a compliant fundamentalist who elevates dogma over reason, faith over morality. He willingly follows orders that will result in the death of the innocent, thereby becoming a Jew who is willing to sacrifice other Jews indeed, his own flesh and blood in order to remain in the good graces of an

authority figure whom he fears. Abraham succeeded in that regard, earning for his refusal to speak morality to authority the praise of Gods angel: For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me. Tragically, this cowering before power has characterized far too many Jewish lawyers throughout history. This dichotomy between standing up for the rights of others in this case the sinners of Sodom while refusing to help fellow Jews has also been characteristic of some Jewish lawyers who have rejected the wise teaching of Hillel to balance the support for others with advocacy for ones own people. The question is why. Perhaps by exploring the answers suggested by commentators on the Abraham story, we can begin to understand the broader paradox with regard to Jewish lawyers and leaders. As we will see in the chapters to come, Abrahams actions reflect other characteristics, both good and bad, long associated with the Jewish lawyer: he is clever, somewhat conniving, a good negotiator, a sharp real estate lawyer, a man who knows how to manipulate the law and the facts and how to use irony to make a point. He is also a lawyer who knows when to stop arguing when to settle a case in order to secure a partial victory. We will see how these characteristics have become stereotypesome positive, some negativeemployed with respect to Jewish lawyers and Jews in general. When it comes to Jews, even the most positive of traits have been turned into negatives. The question again is why. Exploring in depth the complexity of the worlds first Jewish lawyer may provide some clues. If Christianity is a religion of grace and Islam is a religion of submission, then Judaism is a religion of law. To be an observant Jew, one must obey the rulesthe 613 biblical mitzvot plus the thousands of rabbinic rules designed to build fences around the core prohibitions. Jewish law is highly technical, with about half of it constituting detailed prohibitions, while the other half concocts equally detailed ways around the prohibitionsomething like the Internal Revenue Code. No wonder so many Jews become lawyers. Is it in their DNA? In their religious training? In their experience? Or in a combination of these? It is certainly in their history of being the victims of persecution. The Jewish peopleindividual Jews and now the nation-state of the Jewish peoplealways seem to be on trial for something. One prominent commentator on the Bible titled his book *The Last Trial*, but the trial of Abraham was only the first of countless trials in which the Jewish people have been placed in the dock of justice or injustice. The Jewish people have been accused of killing Jesus. The Jews of Spain and other countries were put on trial during the Inquisition. In the Middle Ages, there were the infamous disputations, which were a form of trial. Then there were the blood libels, which were centered in Europe but extended to other parts of the world. In France, there was the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, and in America, of Leo Frank, in which individual Jews were in the dock, but the Jewish people were also on trial. During the Holocaust, European Jewry was executed without even being put on trial, while many in the world tried and condemned the victims for going like sheep to their deaths. During the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Stalin placed many Jewish intellectuals and leaders on trial, allegedly for being cosmopolitans and nationalists but really for being Jews. In the 1960s, Hannah Arendt used the trial of Adolf Eichmann as a vehicle for placing Jewish leaders in the dock for their actions and inactions during the Holocaust (without mentioning her own love affair and rehabilitation of a leading Nazi intellectual, Martin Heidegger). During the 1970s and 1980s, many Soviet Jews were placed on trial for being refuseniks and dissidents. Most recently, the nation-state of the Jewish people seems always to be on trial, both in the court of public opinion and before international tribunals and the United Nations. Why have Jews been singled outchosen?for persecution, for trials, and for the application of the double standard? Is it because they proclaim their chosenness? Is it because they have been so successful in the most visible of professions? Is it because they have endured so many trials? Is it because for so many centuries they were incapable of fighting back? Is it now becausefinallythey have a powerful nation-state that is capable of defending itself and fighting back? Is it simply because we are Jews? Whatever the reasons, the reality is that we Jewsmore than othersneed advocates such as Abraham to defend us against these and other false charges. Fortunately, we have always had our defenders, generally Jewish lawyers, sometimes not. Will we continue to? Or will Jewish lawyers, like other secular Jews, begin to disappear through assimilation? Whether because of our religious training, our history, or other factors, many Jewsit turns outmake darn good lawyers. In every nation in which Jews have had a significant presence, they have been among the leaders of the bar (as well as of other vocations, ranging from medicine to comedy). That is certainly true today in the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, South Africa, and other Western nations. But it was also true in North Africa during the first half of the twentieth century, in Weimar Germany, in czarist Russia, and in many parts of central Europe. Weve had a lot of practice, as a people, in defending ourselves, but also in defending others. Jews have been at the forefront not only of the commercial bar but also of the human rights, civil rights, and civil liberties movements. We have also been leaders in the continuing effort to promote the rule of law as a universal principle of justice. It all began with the worlds first lawyer, Abraham, whose life, as narrated in the Bible, the Quran, and the commentaries, I now recount.