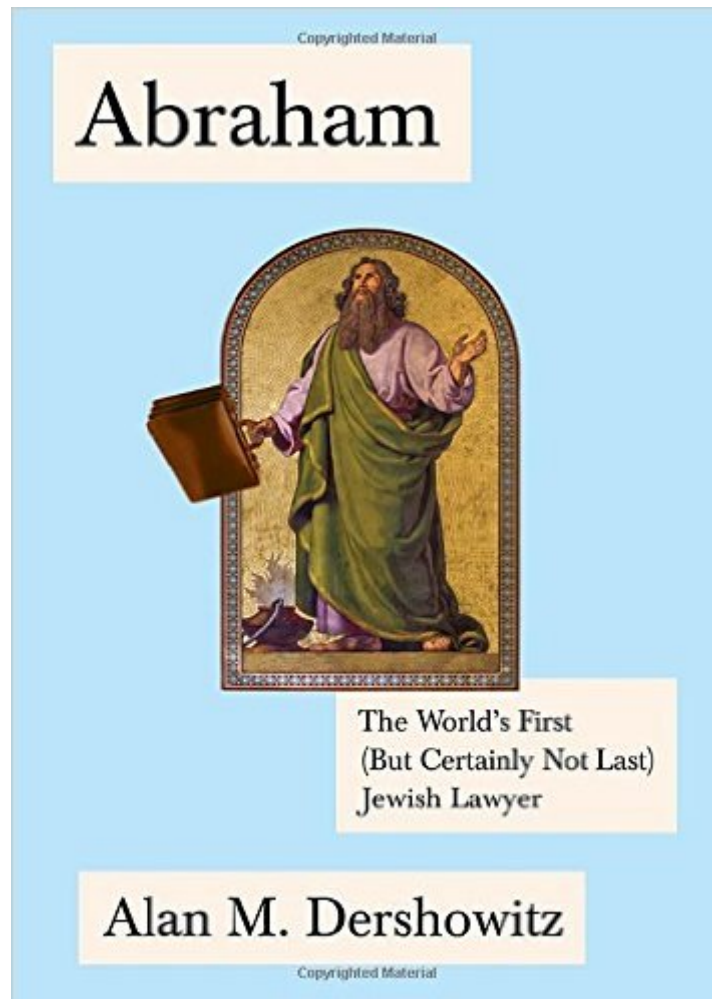


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Abraham: The World's First (But Certainly Not Last) Jewish Lawyer (Jewish Encounters Series)



Synopsis

Part of the Jewish Encounter series One of the world's 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 Bible's two great examples of advocacy on behalf of problematic defendants "Abraham 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 Israel" established 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 deicide 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 defeated "and, of course, gives us some glimpses into the gung-ho practice of law, Dershowitz-style. Louis Brandeis, Theodor Herzl, Judah Benjamin, Max Hirschberg, René 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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I give this amusing and instructive little book five stars because it makes its point so well and with a good deal of humor. Alan M. Dershowitz, himself a Jewish lawyer, in the first part of the book makes his case citing the Biblical Abraham as not only the first Jew, but also the first Jewish lawyer, whose most famous case was when God told him that he was going to destroy the sinful city of Sodom. Abraham begins by asking if he'll do such a sweeping destruction of innocents along with the guilty if there are fifty righteous citizens of the city and persuading the Almighty to spare the city if there are fifty good folks there. He then skillfully talks Him down to promising not to destroy Sodom if there are even fifteen innocent people there. At this point, I'll mention that this book is written for non-Jews as well as followers of the Hebrew religion. Other Old Testament characters are mentioned as also being good lawyers, notably Moses, but also Joseph, Daniel, and Deborah. He also acknowledges Jesus as a notable lawyer. In the second part of the book, he recounts hilarious and yet meaningful conversations along this line with Jewish comedians Woody Allen and Lenny Bruce. Other celebrity figures mentioned are Groucho Marx and Mae West. The second portion portrays notable Jewish lawyers of more recent times. The book is often lightened with Jewish jokes, a couple of which I had heard before but hadn't considered them Jewish. By the way, I'm not Jewish, so you can tell by my enthusiasm for this book that it will definitely appeal to those of any religion or nationality. This is a book that you'll very much enjoy while you're learning about both Old Testament history and also about more recent Hebrew lawyers and their cases.,

Readers 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.

Professor Dershowitz manages to bring a fresh perspective to the ancient stories of the biblical patriarch Abraham: that of Abraham as the first Jewish Lawyer. In the first half of the book, Professor Dershowitz uses the well-known stories of Sodom & Gomorrah, the sacrifice of Isaac, the smashing of the idols, etc., to teach principles of contracts, ethics, and zealous advocacy as Abraham makes deals with and challenges God. In the second half, Dershowitz draws parallels between Abraham and famous modern Jewish and non-Jewish lawyers and how well the latter group has remained true to Abraham as the biblical lawyer. As usual, Dershowitz's work is impeccably researched and superbly written. If you need a good excuse to revisit bible stories with a new twist, I recommend this book for you.

Abraham The World's First but Certainly Not the Last Jewish Lawyer by Alan Dershowitz is a fascinating book. It demonstrates from Biblical times, how Jewish people can reason things and be idol smashers. I highly recommend this book.

Dividing his book into two main sections, Alan Dershowitz begins with a summary of the biblical Abraham, comparing his actions to those of a modern-day lawyer. The second half of the book shows how the groundwork laid by Abraham forms the foundation for many aspects of Jewish involvement with the law. Of particular interest, however, was how Dershowitz pointed out the shocking anti-Semitism and the complete disregard for legal principles that happened not in the time of the Bible, but in modern history. Starting with the Alfred Dreyfus debacle in France and leading up to modern-day institutionalized anti-Semitism in the United Nations, Dershowitz breaks down in easy-to-read language how the Jews have been targeted throughout history. The irony, of course, is that Jewish lawyers and Jewish human rights activists have given their lives to defend the rights of others, and yet it is many of the same people who continue their anti-Semitic propaganda to this day. The relatively short book is packed with information. Read it if you have any interest in the law or in justice.

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