



The Genesis of Justice: Ten Stories of Biblical Injustice That Led to the Ten Commandments and Modern Morality and Law

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Alan Dershowitz is one of America's most famous litigation experts. In the Genesis of Justice he examines the Genesis narratives to bring to the reader an insight into the creation of the ten commandments and much of what is now law.

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From Reader Review The Genesis of Justice: Ten Stories of Biblical Injustice That Led to the Ten Commandments and Modern Morality and Law for online ebook

Jack Townsend says

Read this after a recommendation from a Christian member of our Torah Study Group. Very good read. I was particularly interested in the justice / legal presentation that he makes. He does good Torah midrash in this book.

Rachel Garber says

This is an interesting book. I have not finished it

Enrico says

Fantastic book. I liked a lot all the citation of the commentaries, thru the centuries, of the Bible and Genesis (and by Jews, Christians and Muslims).

Ginni says

Never thought about justice the way this author presented it. Thought-provoking.

Lesley says

Interesting to see the stories of Genesis from a legal point of view. Dershowitz concludes that these tales of extreme family dysfunction point out the need for a society based on law.

Daryl says

Very interesting ideas such as the bible would make more sense if god was not omniscient. Basically, he challenges preconceived attributes on god.

Michael Walker says

Allan Dershowitz is a noted American law professor. Unfortunately, his training does not extend to the

spiritual implications of the book he intends here to explicate.

Dave says

An interesting and very well written book. I love deciphering the mysteries of what people have come up with and this discussing a book or set which has caused just about every war on the planet- cool stuff.

Shira says

This book, despite the fact that I do not agree with the adversarial system of law which we use in the United States, was an excellent work. He shows in engaging ways how the stories of vice and victimhood lead directly to the laws enacted in more or less response to those earlier problems. Very interesting comparisons and contrasts are made between the various Abrahamic religious traditional ways of dealing with vice and law-giving, and finally a wonderful 'borrowing' is described in response to the lack of immediate consequence to law-breaking as he puts it, in the Torah.

Leon says

Dershowitz's exegesis seems very unorthodox at points but his logic is compelling. A very interesting take on Genesis.

Kurt says

This is a curious book to read as someone from a Christian background. I have read Genesis many times, and I have heard many sermons and written analyses about these stories, but I was still challenged by Professor Dershowitz's approach to the material. Essentially, he analyzes the book of Genesis as a prologue to the books of the Law that follow it - stories of injustice are less to illuminate some quality of God, more to show why the legal system developed is so necessary. As a law professor, Dershowitz's perspective is understandable, if occasionally disingenuous and self-serving (for example, when God holds back the immediate punishment promised to Adam and Eve after they eat the forbidden fruit, most commentators I have read/heard took the opportunity to praise God for His mercy, but Dershowitz explores how inconsistent punishment is bad parenting and a shaky basis for a criminal justice system, and I have a hard time believing that this is the primary purpose of the story).

I think this is a valuable book for people who have not seriously studied Genesis, as it draws out new perspectives on culturally familiar stories and highlights less popular tales as well. I think many Christians will have a hard time relating to the tone - the book lacks a reverence for God, portraying him as a bumbling fool, stumbling through Genesis and flailing toward a legal system that would be perfect if He would just check in with those of us who live in a more enlightened era. Also, Dershowitz sets up personal standards of Good and Evil (reasonable ones, but personal all the same) and judges God for failing to fit in these constructed categories, rather than trusting that God is Good even when we can't understand that. I definitely credit Dershowitz with being aware of his perspective - he specifically points out commentators who play

"defense attorney" for God in the way that I think is common in the Christian church today, and he doesn't claim to be among those commentators. He regards God's, "I'm God, and you're not," interaction with Job as outside the norm, much preferring a no-holds-barred academic engagement with the divine over unthinking fundamentalism, to a degree that I think will be unpleasant for people with a background in, for example, evangelical Christianity, and although I am not personally comfortable with this posture toward God, I love that Dershowitz is so honest and articulate about his own views.

Tzippy says

Warning: Yeshivish ahead

Kfiratastic!

It's hard to rate this book, because do I rate it on a scale of how much is it kfira, or how interesting it is, or how compelling an argument it makes, or what? It's interesting and readable and, well...

On a kfira scale--one being VaYoel Moshe (kidding! Just kidding!) and ten being, say, the New Testament--this is about a six. Really, this book didn't *need* to be kfira. It was mostly just the first 3-4 chapters, and the book would still have worked without them. The argument made in this book about the development of Biblical justice could have been made without including the idea of an imperfect God. (But then again, Dershowitz isn't Orthodox, and he wasn't trying to write an Orthodox book, and so I can't really judge the book on an Orthodox scale.)

As an aside, I have to admit, the man knows his sources. He quotes Rashi, Rambam, Ramban, Ibn Ezra, the Bavli, Midrash Rabba, rishonim, achronim, etc. like they're going out of style. However, he seems to deliberately misinterpret Rav Kook on the akeida--in order to disagree with the misinterpreted point. Which bothers me. (Basically, Rav Kook is saying that the akeida is distinguished from the Molech practice of child-sacrifice. Dershowitz says, But if Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son then it's the same thing! Deliberately missing the point: That the akeida is a *lesson* and that it's fairly significant that God stopped it from happening, in order to show that child-sacrifice is wrong, something that in a idolatrous civilization doesn't go without saying and needed to be stated explicitly.)

On a chapter-by-chapter level, the questions he brings up are interesting, but the answers are not quite as interesting. He says in the introduction that he doesn't use the multiple authorship theory when it comes to this book, because if you're trying to answer kushyot on the text, saying that the two stories were written by different authors isn't a satisfying answer and it doesn't add anything. Okay, but asking "How could such-and-such have done this" and answering "Such-and-such shouldn't have done this" is also not such an interesting answer. It all ties together eventually, which is kind of interesting. Kfira, but interesting. (I.e. kfiratastic!)

Deborahannndilley says

I listened to this one on audible and I was surprised at how quickly I went through it. This was an excellent book, focusing on the importance of the Book of Genesis as to establishing law. The author sets up the basis of the Torah being the basis of law and the stories of Genesis as an example of life before a justice system

was created and why it was needed. This is one that I will re-listen to from time to time as there was so much good stuff in it.

Doug says

Dershowitz views the OT as a legal document. Genesis displays a unruly group of men and women who need the law to keep them in line. He uses a rabbinical approach of having a conversation with the text along with his background in the law for this interesting reading of the first book of the Bible.

Steven Williams says

Absolutely great. I don't know why, but every book I've read by Dershowitz has been extremely good, and this book is no exception. He tackles the judicial aspects of Genesis, providing a secular analysis of the texts. Very very interesting.
