



The Book of Abraham

Marek Halter, Lowell Bair (Translator)

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A family saga with a difference.

The Book of Abraham opens on the backdrop of a burning Jerusalem in 70 AD as Abraham the Temple scribe flees the destruction of his home. Two thousand years and a hundred generations later, another Abraham perishes, immolated in the fires of the Warsaw Ghetto.

But the chain that links these two Abrahams--a chain that stretches from Jerusalem to Warsaw through Rome, Alexandria, France and Greece--is one of family ties, and the unforgettable, powerful and poignant story that is told is that of one family--the author's own.

The Book of Abraham Details

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Papa says

In all, I liked this book. There were places that seemed to be an echo of what came earlier, but I think that this is part of the subtext of the story. I'm left with a few questions concerning the amount of historical foundation for the early generations in this family, but it is billed as fiction, so I can't demand that it adhere to standards higher than that.

Alexis says

I really enjoyed this book, I wish I could really understand how much was true and how much was made up. I began this book with the intent of supplementing my study on Abraham from the Book of Genesis. Considering Halter has written fictionalized, but historically and culturally accurate (as much as is possible) stories about biblical characters, I thought this was the same. (Clearly I did not even read the dust jacket, or I would have known better!). But I must say, I was proud of myself being as familiar as I was with the history portrayed.

If you have an interest in Jewish history and want the twist of a family story, I would highly recommend this. I look forward to reading more by Halter, I have 4 more by my bedside now, but first I am on to a study of the Gospel of John for a stretch.

Nancy Ellis says

Very long but powerful book, beautifully written and expertly translated from the Polish. (Not that I know Polish, but the translated version did the story full justice!) The author traces his family's story beginning with his ancestor Abraham's flight from the sacking of Jerusalem in 70 AD, a scribe who began the scroll of the family name. The story continues all the way through the 20th Century, bringing to life the struggles of the family as they are forced to relocate time after time, eventually living in Warsaw through the time of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. It's a sobering but inspiring story of faith overcoming adversity and also of the importance of family.

Audrey says

I read this book many years ago. It was amazing how the author chronicled his family history of two thousand years.

Jessie says

Piecing together bits of family lore and careful historical research, Halter traces a line of Jewish men for

millenia. We see moments of many generations in ritual, weddings, births, and deaths, but most of all the persistent, malignant persecution of the Jewish people in political inequality, social injustice, pogroms, burnings, rape, pillaging, isolation and exile. While many people are familiar with the Holocaust, not as many understand that it was but a culmination of historical atrocities. I wish more people would read this book. As deeply critical as I am of Israel, it is hard not to be sympathetic to the desperate urge for a homeland (which doesn't mean you force someone out of theirs just because a book of magic tells you it's yours). It is also difficult to come away from this book without feeling bitter toward the Church and suspicious of the intentions of Christians toward Jews even if there has been an official move away from the stance that Jews killed Christ.

Naturally it is disappointing the way women are marginalized in this book, but when they do pop up they are dealt with as though they are complex intelligent people. Given that the author has in other places dealt compassionately and substantively with women in the Bible, I think the position of women here should be seen as a DEPICTION of patriarchy, not as its continuation.

Joe Stack says

Jewish history through the generations of one Jewish family based on the actual genealogy of the author's family. I found the first half slow and somewhat repetitive. The pace picked up in the second half that focused on the 20th Century. This is a good book to learn about and appreciate some of the Jewish customs and rituals. It is definitely a good way to learn about the Jewish diaspora. The story is not for the faint hearted. The reader, like the members of the family and their associates, go through good times and then bad times, often at the will of one person, a king, lord, Pope, someone wealthy, who can turn a community against the Jewish community. The author does a good job in relating events to different attitudes within the Jewish communities. His interjections about his research into his family's long history and personal thoughts about the meaning to the values he learned, and what the reader learns, makes this story of generations of one family different from other generational stories.

Gary says

In this epic work of Jewish history, Marek Halter uses an ancient document passed down from generation to generation through the centuries, and fleshed it out to create an exciting and informative epic novel.

Beginning in 70 CE (AD) Halter begins with the flight of a Jew called Abraham from the burning city of Jerusalem, together with his family, during its destruction by the Romans.

Taking us through the history of a Jewish family from Jerusalem to North Africa to Spain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia and Poland, This is a history of Halter's family and of the Nation of Israel.

The words of the book are permeated with words of wisdom such as "A dream of cake is a dream, not a cake, but a dream of a journey is itself a kind of journey" as well as the prayers of the Jews through the millenia: "May the Almighty protect us from those who persecute us, and against those who speak evil of us. Blessed be the Almighty". These words are as pertinent today as ever. The book deals with questions such as why the Chumash started with the creation. And sayings such as Sof Tov Hakol Tov- All's Well That End Well"-Now we know how Shakespeare got the name for the play of that title.

We read of the cruel decrees of the Roman Emperor Hadrian, outlawing circumcision, observance of the Sabbath and study of the Jewish Law, in the Land of Israel, creating a situation where being a Jew in the Land of the Jews was punishable by death.

Hadrian went so far as changing the name of Judea to Palestine, after the enemies of the Jews who had once occupied the environs of Gaza, the Phillistines.

We learn of the massacres perpetrated during the crusades, the Spanish Inquisition and the bloody pogroms of Chmielnicki in which thousands of Jewish men, women and children were cruelly slaughtered. Of the struggles of the Nation of Israel: " Do not fear the venom of the wicked...aim your arrows and strike down the evildoer..."

The book speaks of the yearning through the exile, of the Jews for the Land of Israel and Jerusalem, and we are introduced to historical figures as diverse as the false messiah Shabbatai Tzvi, the beautiful Marrano Dona Gracia (Nasi), and the apostate Uriel Acosta.

We read of the loves and the struggles of the lives of the real life figures in this epic.

finally the book ends with the account of the Abraham who perished in the flames of the Warsaw ghetto, where the Jews fought a valiant battle against the Nazi monstrosity, always longing for freedom in their own land, the Land of Israel.

Stephanie says

I ended up enjoying the later half of the book more than the first half, mostly because we stuck with characters longer and got to know them better. Halter did a great job researching this book, paying close attention to detail through the generations depicted in the book. It's quite an achievement to weave a tale spanning nearly two centuries.

Amy says

Fairly boring. I love historical fiction but it's too hard to follow the many Abrahams, Solomons, etc, and to remember which one did what. This is not necessarily the fault of the author since they are real people. It has a very anti-Christian view, and seems pro-Muslim, which is odd for a Jew. It has gone into the recycle bin. I don't want anyone else to read this crap.

Hannah says

Absolutely amazing! Really made me think about my own ancestors and where we came from. It is really amazing to me how long the Jewish people have survived and are still thriving. As I read about each generation, I wondered what my own generation would be remembered as- tolerance and acceptance, or becoming too integrated and straying from Judaism? What I learned from this book is that we always have periods of peace, but they never last. How long until the next crusade, inquisition, pogrom, holocaust? Is that what we're seeing in the Middle East now? Scary...

Bravo to you, Marek Halter. Can't wait to read his other books.

Graciela says

Great read!! History at its best!!!

Jane Libson says

Enyone who has anyting to do with Judaism should read this book... Great prespective on future generations. I loved how the author is using real historical events and connects it with the fictional elements of his family's history to fill in the blanks - genious...

Definlity read the sequel "Children of Abraham" (not as good as the "Book of Abraham", but still a great read)

Susie Rosson says

An interesting, yet sad saga of the Jewish people. I learned a lot about Jewish culture and perspective. Hard to follow so many characters that don't last more than a chapter or two, though. Glad I read it. Quite a commitment of time.

Sharon Delevie says

So not for me. I'm not a big non-fiction reader, and this read like a bad non-fiction book for me. I like the idea of chronicling 100 generations in one family, but more often than not, this felt like a list of people, without getting any sense of the people themselves. At times it was nothing more than a whole lot of what felt like "begat, begat, begat." Just as I would start to get interested in a character, he died and three more generations followed. I think I like characters and plot development and a story arc more than this book provided. I know it is an "important" book, and it was certainly ambitious. But I found it a slog.
