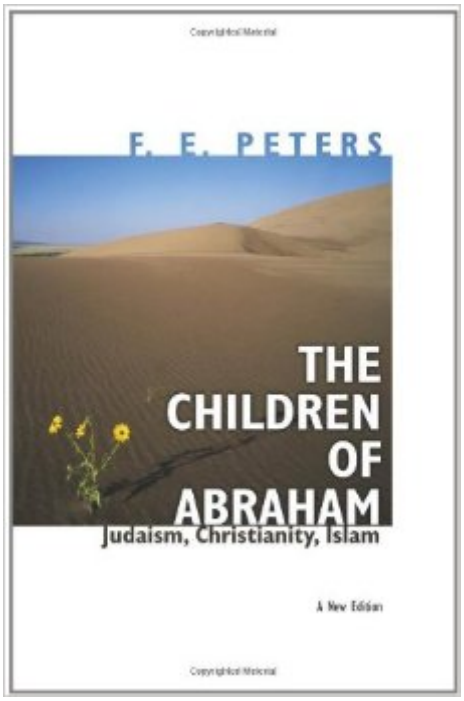
The Children Of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam (Princeton Classic Editions)



Synopsis

F.E. Peters, a scholar without peer in the comparative study of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, revisits his pioneering work after twenty-five years. Peters has rethought and thoroughly rewritten his classic The Children of Abraham for a new generation of readers-at a time when the understanding of these three religious traditions has taken on a new and critical urgency. He began writing about all three faiths in the 1970s, long before it was fashionable to treat Islam in the context of Judaism and Christianity, or to align all three for a family portrait. In this updated edition, he lays out the similarities and differences of the three religious siblings with great clarity and succinctness and with that same remarkable objectivity that is the hallmark of all the author’s work. Peters traces the three faiths from the sixth century B.C., when the Jews returned to Palestine from exile in Babylonia, to the time in the Middle Ages when they approached their present form. He points out that all three faith groups, whom the Muslims themselves refer to as "People of the Book," share much common ground. Most notably, each embraces the practice of worshipping a God who intervenes in history on behalf of His people. The book’s text is direct and accessible with thorough and nuanced discussions of each of the three religions. Updated footnotes provide the reader with expert guidance into the highly complex issues that lie between every line of this stunning and timely new edition of The Children of Abraham.

Book Information

Series: Princeton Classic Editions

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: Princeton University Press; New edition (September 10, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0691127697

ISBN-13: 978-0691127699

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 5.8 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.5 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (20 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #406,743 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #292 inÂ Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > History #310 inÂ Books > History > World > Religious > Islam #335 inÂ Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > History

Customer Reviews

This is a good introductory survey and comparative study of the three major religions to develop

from the early Abrahamic traditions. According to scholar John Esposito, the revised edition of this book is more important than ever given the international attention drawn to the relationship between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. According to Esposito, for too long has the 'Judeo-Christian' school ignored the fact that Islam, too, comes out of this same source of origins, and that there is a Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition that can be identified and studied.Author Frank Peters describes a three-strand tradition that sometimes works together and sometimes is at odds and warfare against each other, but neither intention is the case with his text. His purpose is to underscore both shared aspects and distinct elements, and to pull these back together to their common source. This is in large degree sacred history, which has its own aspects unique from secular and modern history. It draws together the history of revelation (both in scripture and in oral and practical traditions) as well as the history of the community of believers (the people, the church or Church, etc.). Later peoples had to strive to remain faithful to these strands of history and the earlier visions, to show how their actions and identities were consistent with them.Peters explores the earliest foundations of Judaism as the starting point, it being the oldest of the three monotheistic Abrahamic religions. He develops a brief history involving both scriptural and archaeological/historical research, but brings in the interpretative framework of Christianity and Islam regularly where those traditions differ either as to the 'facts' or the interpretation of similar stories.

F.E. Peters, Professor Emeritus of Middle Eastern Studies, History, and Religion at New York University has written extensively on the comparative studies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the early 1980s, he published a short book suitable for lay audiences titled "The Children of Abraham." Then, in 2006, Peters edited "The Children of Abraham" published it in this new edition together with a short introduction by John Esposito, University Professor of Religion and International Affairs and Founding Director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Walsh School of Foreign Services, Georgetown University.The book offers a short yet erudite and thoughtful overview of the history and interrelationships of the three Abrahamic religions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Peters writes, were "born of an event that each remembers as a moment in history, when the One True God appeared to an Iron Age sheikh named Abram and bound him in a covenant forever." These thre religions "grew to adulthood in the rich spiritual climate of the Middle East, and though they have lived together all their lives, now in their maturity they stand apart and regard their family resemblances and conditioned differences with astonishment, disbelief, or disdain." The religions share in common their Abrahmic origins. Equally important, they share the belief in monotheism and worship the one and the same God.

This book attempts to explain the main features and developments of the three monotheistic religions. Though it treats nothing in depth, it gives good summaries of some points and provides tantalizing details which might be new even for people with some knowledge of the subjects. It is copiously footnoted and readers are encouraged to examine the listed sources for more detail.Of course, being a broad survey, it does contain errors and questionable simplifications, some more serious than others. This isn't the place to get into all of those, but a couple points could be mentioned.First Esposito noted the timeliness of this book in its foreword: inter-religious understanding is now more important than ever. Regrettably some opportunities to clear up misunderstandings were missed. Pp. 114-115, for example discusses martyrs, noting that Husayn, grandson of Mohammed, is the prototypical martyr of Islam. The Shiites see it that way, but do Sunnis also recognize Husayn as the prototype of a martyr? That's new for me. But when I read of Islamic martyrs, I think of Yasser Arafat , who called suicide bombings martyrdom operations. Peters had a good chance here to clarify the notion of martyrdom in Islam, but he didn't. So the question remains, at least for me: How do real Muslim scholars define a martyr?Perhaps the most flagrant evasion of an issue is the discussion of Muslim asceticism, which follows a rebuke of Christian mortifications, esp. pp. 118 and 121. When the subject turns to Mohammed, he is seen as being more balanced. "He seems neither excessive nor particularly abstemious in his behavior. ... Nor did he preach to others any discernible degree of voluntary self-restraint or self-denial with respect to the legitimate pleasures in life (p. 121).

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