



## Abraham

By Bruce Feiler  
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1. On pages 18 through 19 Feiler writes, "He has no mother. He has no past. He has no personality. The man who will redefine the world appears suddenly, almost as an afterthought, with no trumpet fanfare, no fluttering doves... [Abram]...goes on to abandon his father at age seventy-five, leave his homeland, move to Canaan, travel to Egypt, father two sons change his name, cut off part of his penis, do the same for his teenager and newborn, exile his first son, attempt to kill his second, fight a world war, buy some land, bury his wife, father another family, and die at one hundred-seventy-five." What appeals to you most about Abram/Abraham's life? What part(s) of his life are most difficult to understand or admire?
2. Feiler writes on page 27, "God may have made humans in his image; we humans made Abraham in ours." Who do you think Abraham was? Discuss what it is that makes Abraham important to you.
3. On pages 43 through 44, Feiler writes, "To be a descendant of Abraham is to...glance back at your native land, to peer ahead to your nameless destination, and to wonder, Do I have the courage to make the leap?" Describe Abraham's "Call." What does God ask of Abram? Have you ever had to make such a courageous leap? If so, describe your experience.
4. Sheikh Abdul Rauf tells Feiler, "We should take Abraham's viewpoint toward the world. We should try to be Abrahamic in our being." (Page 46) Rabbi Belzer tells Feiler, "Abrahamism. He's saying it's okay not to be in your native land at all. He left his father's house, knowing his father would always be in his heart. I'll go someplace and try something new. I'll cast my lot with a portable god -- the God of everyone, everywhere." (Page 5) Father John tells Feiler, "The lesson of Abraham...is you have to be willing to risk it all. You have to give up everything for God...The bottom line is if you're too comfortable, or too secure, or too into having control, then you won't be willing to trust God." What is the Abrahamic viewpoint? How does one become "Abrahamic"?
5. On pages 64 and 65 Carol Newsome tells Feiler, "The thing that has always struck me about this story ...is that the moral sympathy of the story seems to be with Hagar and Ishmael, even though the author knows that our primary identification has to be with Abraham, Sarah, and Issac. ...It's astonishing. Rather than having simple identification, we're asked, in a sense to identify doubly." Describe Sarah and Hagar and each woman's relationship with Abraham. With whom do you most identify? Why?
6. Feiler writes on page 75, "Perhaps the most striking feature of the story of Ishmael and Issac is its balance: Neither son is a pure victor, or a pure loser." How are Issac and Ishmael similar; how are they different? Which son do you find most compelling? Why?
7. On page 99 Feiler writes, "Abraham's test [the binding of Issac] is so extraordinary...Issac is us." What feelings does the story of Abraham's binding of Issac evoke in you? Why do you think the story has such eternal appeal?
8. Feiler writes on page 108, "All three monotheistic faiths force their adherents to confront the most unimaginable of human pains: losing a child. The binding, the crucifixion, and the *dhabih* -- often viewed as distinguishing the monotheistic faiths -- actually belie their shared origins." How is the binding of Issac interpreted by the three monotheistic faiths? Why do you think the sacrifice of a child is such a universal theme?
9. In a conversation with Hanan Eschler on pages 133 and 134, Feiler records, "So as a practical matter, what you're saying is that you can read these various interpretations, enjoy them, but in the end you have to find your own meaning in the story." What does the story of Abraham mean to you?
10. Describe how Judaism, Christianity and Islam created a new Abraham for their unique purposes.
11. On page 148 Bishop Theophanes tells Feiler, "A hundred years from now, the serious people will be considered ecumenical. They will understand that Abraham belongs to all humanity." How is Abraham an ecumenical figure, one who belongs to all of humanity?
12. Of all the people Feiler meets on his travels to uncover the story of Abraham, who do you think has the most persuasive argument about Abraham and what his life means? Why?
13. Sheikh Abu Sneina tells Feiler on page 163, "For me, Abraham submitted himself to Allah. He did everything for God. I don't know if he's like me, but I would like to be like him." Would you like to be like Abraham? If so, how? If not, why not?
14. At the end of his book, Feiler claims to have "found" Abraham. What does he mean by that? Describe the Abraham Feiler found on his journey.
15. What would you say is Abraham's legacy to the world today?