



# Abraham's Curse: The Roots of Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

By Bruce Chilton

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When they arrived at the place which God had indicated to him, Abraham built an altar there, and arranged the wood. Then he bound his son and put him on the altar on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to kill his son . . .” —The Book of Genesis

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this thought-provoking study, Bard College professor Chilton (*Rabbi Jesus*) asks how the Abrahamic faiths have understood Genesis 22, the story of the binding of Isaac. All three religions include a strand of interpretation that reads the binding of Isaac as valorizing the sacrifice of human life. Some rabbinic texts, for example, suggest that Abraham did in fact nick Isaac's neck, shedding the boy's blood, and that Isaac offers a model for the necessary readiness for martyrdom. Christianity has seen Isaac as prefiguring Jesus' crucifixion, and Christians, too, find in both these sacrificial stories an approval of martyrdom. In Islam, Chilton finds a range of interpretations, some of which gradually make Ibrahim more and more aggressive, to the point that Allah could only prevent the slaughter... by miraculous means. These interpretations appear to underwrite violence, but Chilton also finds within Jewish, Christian and Islamic sacred texts a corrective: a clear insistence that God does not want human beings to sacrifice ourselves or our children. Today's violent fundamentalists, Chilton claims, overlook those correctives and take their cues from readings of Genesis 22 that seem to favor human sacrifice. Chilton produces yet another creative and very relevant historical account. (Feb. 19)

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Review

Praise for *Rabbi Jesus*

“Bruce Chilton’s masterpiece of religious narrative marks a genuinely new and important step beyond the now-faltering historical Jesus movement.” —Jacob Neusner, *Jerusalem Post*

“Open this book and see Jesus as you’ve never seen him . . . This is one heck of a good read.” —*National Catholic Reporter*

“Engaging and lively . . . Chilton has done an admirable job of taking us into Jesus’ world and witnessing the life of one of history’s most important figures.” —*Charlotte Observer*

“*Rabbi Jesus* is a scholarly pursuit that reads more like a novel. The biography flows with the fluidity of an adventure tale, rich in characters, texture, and detail.” —*The Herald-Sun* (Durham, North Carolina)

Praise for *Rabbi Paul*

“A worthwhile exploration of a life that has richly touched all of ours.” —*Dallas Morning News*

“[Chilton’s] inviting prose, ability to recreate the cultural contexts of Paul’s life, and deep affection for the Apostle bring new life to a tale that has been told many times before.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“An eloquent biographical masterpiece.” —*Jerusalem Post*

Praise for *Mary Magdalene*:

“A compelling portrait of Mary . . . Graced by both power and wit, Chilton’s book aims to reshape and reorient the imagination of a new generation.” —*The Christian Science Monitor*

“Chilton is an eloquent, erudite, insightful, and pastorally sensitive biblical scholar. He has produced a profoundly affecting biography of Mary Magdalene.” —*America*

“An intriguing portrait of a woman strong enough to break through cultural misogyny . . . fascinating reading.” —*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

#### About the Author

BRUCE CHILTON is the Bernard Iddings Bell Professor of Religion at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson and Rector at the Church of St. John in Barrytown, New York. He is the author of many scholarly articles and books, including the acclaimed *Rabbi Jesus* and *Mary Magdalene*.

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