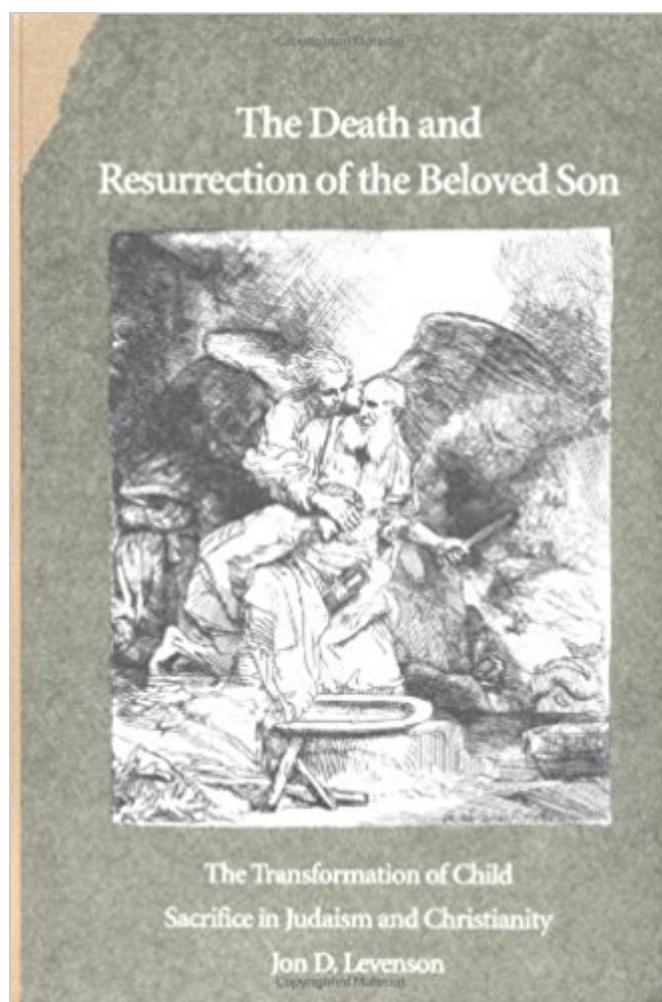


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# The Death And Resurrection Of The Beloved Son: The Transformation Of Child Sacrifice In Judaism And Christianity



## Synopsis

The near-sacrifice and miraculous restoration of a beloved son is a central but largely overlooked theme in both Judaism and Christianity, celebrated in biblical texts on Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph, and Jesus. In this highly original book, Jon D. Levenson explores how this notion of child sacrifice constitutes an overlooked bond between the two religions. Levenson argues that although the practice of child sacrifice was eradicated during the late seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E, the idea of sacrificing the first-born son (or the late-born son whose preferential treatment promotes him to that exalted rank) remained potent in religious literature. Analyzing texts from the ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and rabbinic literature, Levenson shows how tales of the son handed over to death by his loving father in the Hebrew Bible influenced the Church's identification of Jesus as sacrificial victim. According to Levenson, the transformation of the idea of child sacrifice was central to the accounts given by the people Israel and the early Church of their respective origins, and it also underlay the theologies of chosenness embraced, in their differing ways, by the two religions. Furthermore, the longstanding claim of the Church that it supersedes the Jews, says Levenson, both continues and transforms elements of the old narrative pattern in which a late-born son dislodges his first-born brothers. Levenson's book, which offers novel interpretations of several areas crucial to biblical studies, will be essential reading for scholars in the field.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The near-sacrifice and miraculous restoration of a beloved son is a central but largely overlooked theme in both Judaism and Christianity, celebrated in biblical texts on Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob

Joseph, and Jesus. In this highly original book Jon D. Levenson explores how this notion of child sacrifice constitutes an overlooked bond between two religions.

Jon D. Levenson, Albert A. List Professor of Jewish Studies at the Divinity School and the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, is the author of numerous other books.

This is a difficult book for a couple of reasons. One is that this comes out of hard core academia. I have a masters in History - though not near eastern studies - and cross trained in cultural anthropology with a stray semester of Hebrew I picked up along the way. I still struggled at points, wishing I had more grounding in the development of the Hebrew Bible, particularly understanding the various sources of the Book of Genesis. The other difficulty is that this work addresses an essentially taboo topic. Child sacrifice is challenging to face in and of itself. The possibility that child sacrifice was an early practice in Israel is uncomfortable. However it is seeking just this understanding which led me to this book. I wanted to get into the head space of Issac on that day he and his father went to worship the alone - forming the events of the aqedah. Dr. Levenson addresses this topic masterfully, placing it into the context of the culture in which the patriarchs lived. The connecting thread to Christianity was a surprise bonus. As a Christian, I found this connection added a new layer of meaning to key terminology such as "the chosen one" and "beloved son". In the end, this book addressed both my sense of cultural curiosity and a deepening of my faith with appreciation for the connections with Judaism. This gets to go on my "Read Again" shelf. But first I would like to get more grounded in the specific sources and evolution of Genesis and the Hebrew Bible as a whole.

Fascinating story of the development of one ancient tale into another, and how the myths that preceded the binding of Isaac contributed to Jewish tradition and ultimately the Christian faith. He writes in his conclusion, "That relationship, usually characterized as one of parent and child, is better seen as a rivalry of two siblings for their father's unique blessing. Judaism and Christianity are both, in substantial measure, midrashic systems whose scriptural base is the Hebrew Bible and whose origins lie in the interpretive procedures internal to their common Scripture and in the rich legacy of the Judaism of the late Second Temple period. The competition of these two rival midrashic systems for their common biblical legacy reenacts the sibling rivalry at the core of ancient Israel's account of its own tortured origins." I needed to study Dr Levenson's thesis slowly. It was an

extremely rewarding experience to discover both the commonality of both Abrahamic traditions and how they distinguished each other, drawing on the same source. Highly recommended.

I chose this rating as this text is an excellent theology text and deals with child sacrifice in the ancient world. While this is not an easy book to 'browse,' it is a very revealing text on Judaism's and Christianity's views on topics : both their differences and their similarities. Dr. Levenson explores the Abraham/Isaac story with Christ's resurrection as a beloved son. He also tells us that many ancient religions had mythologies (theogonies) of sacrifice and resurrection. I am reading this in preparing for my conversion to Judaism along with the Book of J by Harold Bloom. If you like comparative religions and history of religion this is a fascinating title.

The firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. *Exodus 22:29* Did Israel at one time offer child sacrifice to God? If so, when and how did they overcome this barbaric ritual? Levenson takes seriously the hints throughout the Bible that Israelites once condoned child sacrifice to Yahweh, though he doubts its practice was widespread. The firstborn belonged to God, and the most pious parents considered the most appropriate means of giving him to God was in sacrifice. Levenson argues that the phrase *beloved son* (yahid) seems to have been, at least on occasion, a technical term for the son sacrificed as a burnt offering. This practice was roundly condemned by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and in time worshipers began to understand that God would accept animal sacrifice in place of one's favored son. The story of Abraham and Isaac is a key example. Sibling rivalry is a common Old Testament theme, reinforced often by the outward favoring by the parents of one son over another. One would imagine the *beloved son* to be the firstborn, with all the privileges that go with that station, but the Bible breaks the rules often. Abel over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph, David, the list goes on. The *beloved son* is not only favored by parents but God-chosen, and belongs to God either in sacrifice or by atonement. This theme of the sacrificial death of the beloved son was never purged from the Judaic mindset, even to the point of believing Abraham did put the knife to Isaac. Many midrashic interpretations of the sacrifice of Isaac refer to his blood being spilled. Perhaps all of his blood, depending upon which midrashic commentary you read. Intelligent, deeply researched, and reasonable, this is a look at just about every *beloved son* in the Bible except the one you expect: Jesus. It goes without saying that Jesus is the ultimate beloved son, but he gets only a brief nod here and there. Still, this book will inevitably make you think differently about what the death of Jesus meant. There is a bit of New Testament theology thrown

in, but the focus is really the development of a theme through the Old Testament — the theme of giving the one you love most to God.

Very well written and has copious references and footnotes. It is easy to read and makes some very insightful points

Slower delivery than I'd hoped for, but that was probably down to overseas posting time. Book arrived fine in the end, thank you,

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