The Call of Abraham, edited by Gary A. Anderson and Joel S. Kaminsky, is a collection of essays presented as a sixty-fifth birthday gift to Professor Jon Levenson, the Albert A. List Professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard Divinity School. While it is typical of most volumes of this kind to contain only tangentially related essays, this book encompasses essays pertaining only to the topic of the theological meaning of Israel's election. However, the diversity of scholars and disciplines—representing the fields of Hebrew Bible, Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic literature, New Testament, rabbinics, history of Christian exegesis, and modern theology—match Levenson's wide-ranging scholarship, which spans three decades and continues today. The essays in this volume are penned by Catholics, Jews, and Protestants alike, representing the multivalent approaches and perspectives present in this volume, as well as mirroring the breadth of scholarship produced by Jon Levenson.

At the heart of these essays is Levenson's work that seeks to demonstrate Christianity's amplification, rather than rejection, of the Hebrew Bible's election theology. Until the last few decades of the twentieth century, the consensus of much biblical scholarship portrayed Judaism as an “inherently particularistic religion” that could never fully embrace the type of universalism found in Christianity (1). Jesus and, perhaps even more so, Paul, were understood as opening election to everyone, or universalizing the biblical religion (2). However, many tended to confuse Enlightenment universalism with certain strands of biblical universalism, which proves problematic. Levenson's work, especially his book The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son, corrects this scholarship by demonstrating that “both Judaism and Christianity equally embraced the notion of election, even if they understood the meaning of their elect status in unique ways” (2).

This book is divided into three parts based on discipline:

Part I: “The Hebrew Bible” looks directly at the Hebrew scriptures for insights into the question of ancient Jewish election theology. These five essays are composed primarily by biblical scholars and ask questions of the scriptural text itself. For example, Richard J. Clifford, S.J., demonstrates in the first essay that the election of Israel is inherent in the description of the world's creation in Genesis 1. In the second essay W. Randall Garr looks at the person of Abraham in the Hebrew Bible as an example of election in faith, while Joel S. Kaminsky asks the question “Can Election Be Forfeited?” in the third essay.

Part II: “Reception of the Hebrew Bible” contains eight essays and is the largest section of the book. This section looks at the ways in which Israel's election has been interpreted by writings outside the canonical Hebrew Bible/
Old Testament. This section portrays the depth of the topic historically in both Jewish and Christian contexts. Essays pertaining to Tobit and the Wisdom of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), canonical in Catholic and Orthodox canons, are the first two essays in this part. Also found in Part II are essays concerning Israel’s election in Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical texts, rabbinic thought, early Christian thought, Romans 9–11 (NT), and even an essay on Luther’s understanding of Israel’s election. One can clearly see the diversity of scholarship in Part II.

Part III: “Theological Essays” contains only two essays by Leora Batnitzky, a professor of modern Jewish thought, and Bruce D. Marshall, a professor of Christian doctrinal theology. These two essays speak to the contemporary application of the theology of Israel’s election.

Anderson and Kaminsky did a fantastic job arranging this volume. The reader gets an in-depth, multi-disciplinary glimpse at a controversial topic profoundly important for both Judaism and Christianity. The caliber of scholarship in these pages is astounding. Rather than a loosely compiled volume of essays on an array of topics, one finds an intricate, yet diverse look at a single topic, which draws the reader into the ongoing conversation on the theology of Israel’s election. The reader’s eyes are opened to the enormity of the topic at hand when reading this compilation of essays.

Because this volume takes a variety of scholarly approaches on the same topic, I would highly recommend this book for anyone interested in the topic of Israel’s election, and the possible methodological approaches to the topic. I also recommend this book to anyone interested in the fields of historical theology and Biblical and rabbinic studies, as well as those interested in serious theological dialogue between Jewish and Christian traditions. This book speaks to a question of both ancient and contemporary importance. All of the essays in this book are of an excellent quality and depth and are interesting and accessible to readers both inside and outside the academy. This book is well worth the money.