This volume was produced as a Festschrift for Jon D. Levenson on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday. Two particular features go toward making this a Festschrift of more than usual note. The first is the decision of the editors to invite contributors to explore a single theme: the theological meaning of the election of Israel. The second is, of course, the stature of the volume’s honoree, Jon D. Levenson, whose own contribution in the area of the biblical theology of election, as well as biblical theology and hermeneutics more generally, has been seminal.

The reference to Abraham in the title of the collection resonates with Levenson’s own interest in the character of Abraham, as reflected in his writing. A large proportion of the contributors note their particular appreciation of Levenson’s *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Much of Levenson’s recent “Abraham” work has been focused in the area of Jewish-Christian relations, and one of the great gifts of Levenson’s scholarly endeavor to date has been his insightful and generous introduction of Jews and Christians to the biblical theology of the other, as well as to their own. This interfaith element to Levenson’s work is fittingly marked in the volume’s bringing
together of Jewish and Christian scholars, many of whom refer to the special regard in which they hold Levenson.

The editors write in their introduction that they made two requests of the fifteen contributors to the volume. First, each was asked to write an essay as closely connected with the volume’s theme as possible, but from the perspective of his or her own discipline. Some of the contributors work in the area of Hebrew Bible, some in apocryphal and pseudepigraphic literature, and others in the fields of New Testament, rabbinics, history of Christian exegesis, and modern theology. The result is a collection of essays that approach the central theme from a satisfyingly wide range of perspectives. The second request of contributors was that they “emulate the clear and concise style characteristic of both Levenson’s scholarly and his more popular writing, in the hope of making this book accessible to lay readers and useful in the classroom setting.” In line with this aim to make the collection accessible to readers both within and outside the academy, the essays are free of footnotes, although most include relatively extensive endnotes. In other respects it does not appear that the essays lose depth or scholarly value as a result of the decision to seek to make them accessible. Indeed, a number of these essays will prove quite challenging to nonexperts.

The editors are to be applauded for their approach to its compilation. In particular, the decision to give it a focus on a single issue that reflects both contemporary interest and Levenson’s own work has paid dividends in making the volume a valuable contribution to scholarship as well as a fitting memorial to the first sixty-five years of work of one of the foremost scholars working in biblical studies today. The editors are also well-qualified for their roles. Kaminsky in particular has made a significant contribution to current scholarly discussions of the biblical theology of election. Anderson’s focus on the reception of the Hebrew Bible in early Judaism and Christianity qualify him to oversee what is in large part a reception history of a prominent theological theme of the Hebrew Bible. Both, in addition, have contributed strong essays to the collection.

The essays are presented in groups according to the particular focus of their contributors. The first group of five essays explores aspects of election theology within the Hebrew Bible. The opening essay, by Richard J Clifford, S.J., presents an argument that Gen 1 contains, “locked” within it, allusions to Israel’s election. Clifford bases his argument on aspects of Gen 1’s cosmogony and its treatments of Sabbath, temple, dietary laws, and “and taking.” Unfortunately, the argument is not strong, and Clifford does not explore the tension between his proposals, for example, that Gen 1 includes a coded allusion to Israel’s later taking of the land of Canaan and what is generally understood to be the relatively universalistic outlook of this first creation narrative. If Clifford’s argument were persuasive, and he had engaged in such a discussion, this might have been a fascinating
essay with which to open the collection, but, disappointingly, this essay is one of the weaker in the volume.

W. Randall Garr’s contribution, “Abraham’s Election in Faith,” opens with a “verbal morphology” and discussion of semantic context of he’ëmin in Gen 15:6 and concludes by considering Garr’s findings in the context of a brief reading of Gen 15. Garr argues that Gen 15:6 presents Abraham as persuaded of the truth of God’s promises by “the intervening evidence of God’s creative activity on the sky” but also inspired to invest in and rely on the promises. He concludes, very briefly, that Abraham’s faith is sufficiently exemplary to “earn” him elected status but does no explore what it might mean for elect status to be “earned.”

Joel S. Kaminsky, one of the volume’s two editors, contributes one of the most valuable essays to the collection. Here he builds upon his own previous work and that of others, most recently Joel Lohr, by exploring the question whether elect status, once obtained, can be forfeited. In fact, the essay traverses wider territory and touches on questions of the place of election theology in both Judaism and Christianity and dialogue between the two, thereby reflecting Levenson’s interest in this area.

The next contribution, by R. W. L. Moberly, begins by presenting Levenson’s argument that child sacrifice in Israel “was not so much abolished as transformed” so that the idea of the sacrifice of the firstborn remained “potent and productive” and the motif of the “favoured, yet imperilled” status of the firstborn son became part of Israel’s self-understanding of the meaning of election. Moberly’s fascinating paper goes on to argue that a similar process of transformation can be seen in relation to “another highly offensive feature within Israel’s scriptures,” the hērem directive.

Kathryn Schifferdecker’s essay explores the theme of election as it is reflected in Job. Schifferdecker suggests that the movement through near-death experience toward life that plays itself out again and again in the Hebrew Bible, and as articulated especially clearly in the “story of the death and resurrection of the beloved son, of Israel itself,” can be seen in the story of Job. Although Job is not identified clearly in the text as being either Israelite or non-Israelite, Schifferdecker argues that the shape of the Job story suggests that he is one of the elect. In doing so, she identifies compelling narrative parallels between the depictions of Job and Abraham and Job and Israel.

The essays in the volume’s second group focus on reception of the Hebrew Bible and its presentation of the theme of election. The first is that of Gary A. Anderson. Ironically, despite the placement of this essay in the next group, it can profitably be seen as a companion piece to Shifferdecker’s Job essay. Here, too, is an argument that a character,
this time Tobit, can be seen as a type of Israel. Anderson agrees with George Nickelsburg that “the figure of Tobit functions as a cipher for the elected nation as a whole” and so sees it as fitting that the paradigm of the Akedah would be a feature of Tobit’s life. Anderson argues that the presence of this paradigm means that an understanding of Tobit as a “Deuteronomistic novella” fundamentally shortchanges it.

Greg Schmidt Goering explores questions of election in the Wisdom of Ben Sira. In particular, Goering challenges current perceptions of Ben Sira’s dualism. He argues that Ben Sira’s Jew/non-Jew dualism should not be conflated with the older wisdom dichotomies of wise/foolish and righteous/wicked so as to suggest that Ben Sira identified wisdom or righteousness with the Jew and foolishness and wickedness with the non-Jew in any straightforward manner.

Matthias Henze writes that he intends his essay to supplement Levenson’s discussion of the idea of “choseness.” Whereas Levenson explores this discussion through biblical and rabbinic literature, Henze’s focus is the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Henze discusses the presentation of the theme of election in the Apocalypse of Weeks (1 Enoch), the Psalms of Solomon, the Testament of Moses, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch to argue for a complex understanding of “election” during the period that goes far beyond a simple conception of Israelite superiority over neighboring peoples.

In a relatively brief essay, Marc Hirshman explores the reception in rabbinic literature of Isa 56:7’s notion of “a house of prayer for all peoples” and 1 Kgs 8’s analogous conception of a house to which the foreigner travels in order to pray. Hirshman notes a move within Second Temple Judaism from recognizing the locus of divine presence in the temple to finding it within the Torah and asks how this movement impacted upon the more universalistic Judaism reflected in these biblical texts. He argues that the rabbinic texts he consults witness to a range of differing views.

James Kugel chooses to write on an alternative topic, although also one close to Jon Levenson’s heart—“the persistence of evil”—offering a study in the reception of Gen 6:1–4. He argues that these verses are additional to their context and that their current placement dates to a time of considerable malleability of scriptural text. Originally inserted as a continuation of Gen 5’s genealogy, Kugel argues, a movement from an “Age of Text Alteration” to an “Age of Text Interpretation” saw an appeal to these verses for an explanation of God’s purpose in bringing the flood. A text that had originally functioned genealogically thereby came to function etiologically, so that the placement of Gen 6:1–4 led to the growth of an issue about congress between humans and divine creatures that had not been part of its original concern. Kugel maps the later exegetical maneuvers
needed to negotiate this development and discusses a development of attitudes toward the malleability of scripture that appears to emerge from this history.

Kevin Madigan’s contribution, like several others, engages with Levenson’s interest in the narrative of the Akedah. Madigan’s particular take is to explore early postcanonical engagement with the Akedah, which he argues “profoundly shaped early Christian self-understanding, theology and practice.” Madigan surveys use of the Akedah in 1 Clement, the Epistle to Barnabas, Melito of Sardis’s Peri Pascha, and Origen’s exegesis of Genesis, as well as in early art and monasticism.

Mark Reasoner explores Paul’s treatment of the salvation of Israel in Rom 9–11, revisiting what he describes as the “centuries of Christian exegesis that reads ‘Israel’ in Scripture as a figure of the church.” He argues that Christians interpreting Rom 9–11 ought to consider, first, the possibility that Paul intended by his use of “Israel” the ethnic or corporeal Israel and, second, the aligned possibility that Israel’s salvation “must include the idea of a political salvation on earth.” Reasoner maintains that this latter idea is predicated upon a conception of salvation that includes restoration in the land.

In the final essay of part 2, Brooks Schramm focuses on reception of the theme of biblical election in Luther’s theology. Noting the tension between Luther’s emphasis on the doctrine of election, on the one hand, and his strong opposition to the claim of Judaism to the status of God’s chosen, on the other, Schramm explores Luther’s interpretation of God’s choice of Jacob over Esau in Gen 25.

The Festschrift concludes with a short third section containing two theological essays. In the first Leora Batnitzky considers what might be “a Jewish view of the implications of election for affecting God,” using Calvin’s views as a “jumping-off point.” She concludes that “there need not be a contradiction between a sovereign God who chooses (both to create the world and to have a special relationship with a particular people) and the possibility of human beings affecting God.”

In the second theological essay Bruce D. Marshall considers the relationship between Jews and the Roman Catholic Church, beginning by identifying “mixed messages” sent in 2010, a year in which Pope Benedict XVI made a celebrated visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome but also declared Pius XII, whose silence in the face of Jewish persecution remains a sore point, to be a “person of heroic virtue.” Against this background, Marshall explores the tensions between two essential Catholic teachings: the universal scope of the saving mission of Christ and the irrevocable covenant with Israel.
The volume concludes with lists of publications by Levenson, the doctoral dissertations that Levenson has supervised, and the contributors to the volume. There are indexes of sources and modern authors.

This is a fine volume that will make an important contribution to scholarship on the topic of divine election. It will be clear from the foregoing discussion that, as is inevitably the case with a compiled volume of this sort, not all of the contributions are of equal strength. Nevertheless, the overall standard of the essays is high, and the editorial approach that has favored the treatment of a single topic (mostly) from a variety of perspectives has been a successful one. I found the use of endnotes, and corresponding absence of footnotes, frustrating in essays that, despite the goal of accessibility, are often quite academic and technical in nature. But that is a small quibble and does not detract from what should prove to be a valuable collection of essays and a fitting tribute to the scholarship of Jon D. Levenson’s first sixty five years. We look forward to the remaining fifty-five.