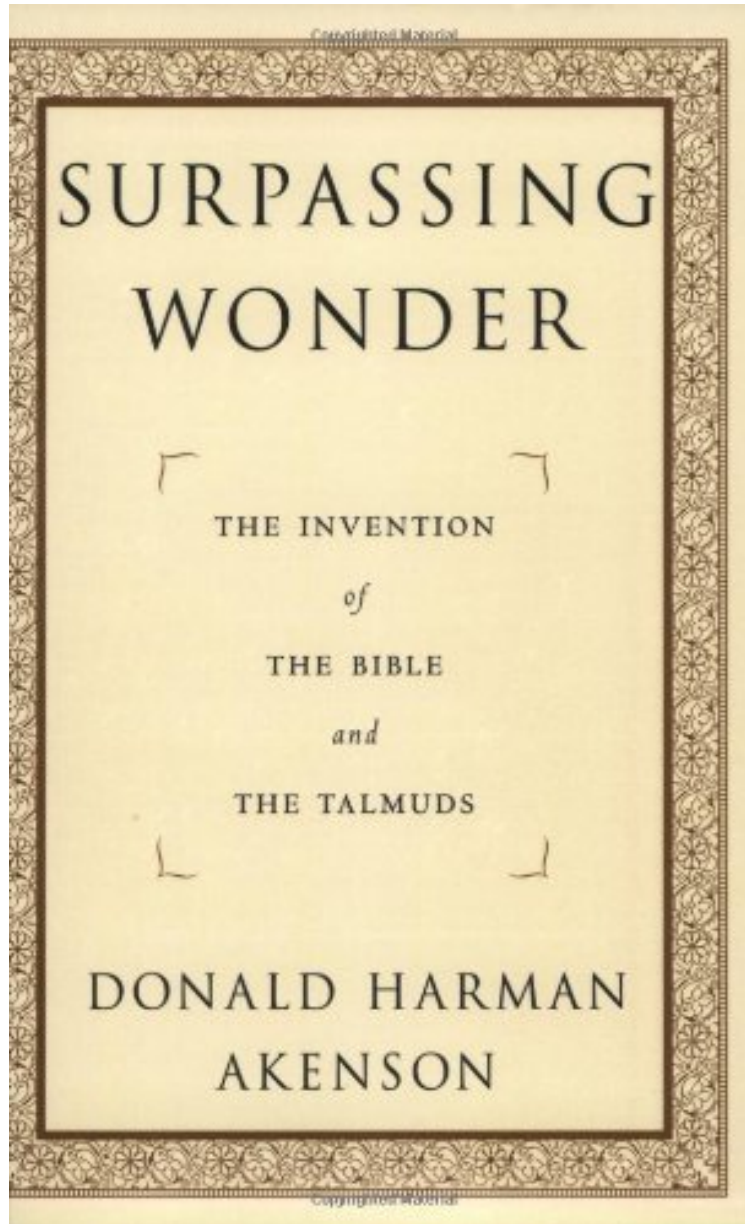


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Surpassing Wonder: The Invention of the Bible and the Talmuds

Donald Harman Akenson

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Donald Harman Akenson : Surpassing Wonder: The Invention of the Bible and the Talmuds before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Surpassing Wonder: The Invention of the Bible and the Talmuds:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. LONG WINDEDBy Roger C ChapmantHE title is somewhat misleading because relatively little of the text is focused on the new testament . The section on the Jesus Seminar is a bit biased. The book will require a second reading. In fairness I did obtain a wider perspective on thr Talmud, given that my initial knowledge was minimal.In summary although the book was not what I hoped it would be it increased my knowledge.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy JewelReceived in a timely fashion. Live the book. Thanks!23 of 25 people found the following review helpful. A brilliant, original, and highly entertaining book.By A CustomerThe author is quite upfront in warning off readers who will not profit from this book: i.e. those devoted to the concept of Bible inerrancy or otherwise unwilling or unable to broaden their perspectives. Those readers are missing out on a wonderful ride. In a manner reminiscent of Stephen Jay Gould (another author I wouldn't recommend to the blinkered reader), Akenson combines humor, imagination and scholarship to explore the incredible richness of Biblical texts. I was very impressed with his main thesis, which is audacious yet plausible and cogently argued. The book is more than a satisfying intellectual read. It is an invitation to share in the author's unquenchable joy as he attempt to answer questions central to our understanding of ourselves.

Elegant and inventive, *Surpassing Wonder* uncovers how the ancient Hebrew scriptures, the Christian New Testament, and the Talmuds of the Rabbis are related and how, collectively, they make up the core of Western consciousness. Donald Harman Akenson provides an incisive critique of how religious scholars have distorted the holy books and argues that it was actually the inventor of the Hebrew scriptures who shaped our concept of narrative historythereby founding Western culture.

From Publishers WeeklyAkenson describes his book as a long love letter to the Tanakh, the "New Testament" and the Talmuds. Akenson focuses his study on the formation of four sets of texts that lie behind rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. He argues that the first nine books of Hebrew scripture (Genesis through Kings) are a unified invention in the form of historical writing, the product of a single great mind, gifted at once as an editor and a writer, working between the beginning of the Babylonian exile (598 B.C.) and the return to the Holy Land (550 B.C.). The books of the Bible from Genesis through Kings, Akenson contends, are the foundation upon which both Christianity and modern Judaism are built. He proceeds to examine the creative ferment out of which the "New Testament" and the Talmuds developed in the early decades of the first century A.D. The "New Testament," he contends, is a reinvention of Tanakh in which the books from Matthew to Acts are to Christian scripture what Genesis-Kings is to Hebrew scripture. In Akenson's view, modern Judaism abandons the historical narrative characteristic of Tanakh in favor of a legal document, the Mishnah, which is gradually tempered by narrative in the Babylonian Talmud. Akenson's passion for the texts translates into an eloquent plea to appreciate them as organic wholes rather than to dissect them with progressively sharper scholarly scalpels. Along with the study of texts, Akenson offers a running critical commentary on modern biblical scholarship, as well as an extended discussion of the transformation of anti-Judaism into anti-Semitism. Patient readers will be rewarded with a deeper understanding of the common textual roots of Christianity and modern Judaism. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Library JournalThis is a historian's refreshing account of the "invention" of three scriptures and the subsequent flowering of the religions that emerged from them. Differing from creation de novo, "invention," in Akenson's sense, collates and edits pre-existing materials and unifies them under a new, overarching scheme. Thus, the Judahite ("Old Testament") scripture was invented during the Babylonian Captivity (597-538 B.C.E.) by Judean exiles who hoped to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple as God's dwelling among men. Judeans followed their Temple-oriented faith until the Romans destroyed both temple and faith in 70 C.E. Two new faiths deriving from Judahism, namely Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, perforce posited a new and immaterial temple where God dweltAthe human heart. In spite of its difficult subject matter, this book is a pleasure to read. Akenson (history, Queen's Univ.; research, Univ. of Liverpool) enjoys his study and shows it in lively prose. Recommended for both academic and public libraries with special interest in religion and history.AJames F. DeRoche, Alexandria, VACopyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. "How can a brilliant, learned, and original work of biblical scholarship also be delightfully funny, generous in spirit, and so gentle in its instruction that we barely know that we've been improved? *Surpassing Wonder* changes forever how one reads the Bible, and therefore how one reads most of Western culture. Thanks, Mr Akenson, to say the very least." Roger Rosenblatt "One cannot help but be struck by [Akenson's] wide-ranging and often highly original insights, which he transmits with literary vigour, wit, and ambling ease. Here, for instance, is a non-Jewish historian who considers the Babylonian Talmud - so often contemned and even banned - as a shining creation that the world should recognize as the masterpiece it is." Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, Senior Scholar, Holy Blossom Temple "Professor Akenson possesses the special gift of blending scholarly precision with sparkling imagination. He carefully analyses and interprets ancient texts while preserving and often illuminating their significance for thoughtful people at the end of the twentieth century." The Right Reverend Peter R. Mason, Bishop of Ontario "This outstanding book is a love letter to the Bible, written in awe of the Jewish and Christian texts, but sparkling with light and joy - a scholarly light, in which two faiths can listen to each other's histories, and a sense of humour which reflects the Bible itself, and the events jointly caused by God and man." Bishop

Stephen Verney "Although I may not agree entirely with Dr Akenson's analysis, this book is an intriguing exploration of the creation of the scriptures and opens new avenues of discussion in Christian Jewish Dialogue. It is a fascinating contribution to the widening debate about the Bible, its origins, and its relevance for the world today. I welcome this contribution to opening our hearts and stimulating our minds." Bill Phipps, Moderator, United Church of Canada "It is a tour de force combining critical, balanced analysis with charming wit, and certainly both, but especially the latter are sorely needed in the fields of both theological and scriptural scholarship which far too often self immolate in a sea of jargon and tedium. As a church historian, I am indeed delighted to see a universally respected colleague produce such a marvelously engaging and refreshing exploration of the basic scriptural underpinnings of the Jewish and Christian traditions. The work demonstrates that for far too long the shame of anti-Semitism has undermined objective analysis of what Jews and Christian members of a common root, and as such both need to be knowledgeable about this shared reality. Further, it shows the power of good history, which is often ignored in schools and departments of theology, to inspire the imagination that in turn promotes unity, hope and especially compassion towards the other. It is such challenging studies as this that are particularly vital for all people as we enter the twenty-first century where, as never before, they are needed if the human species and life on this planet are to survive into the following century." Vince McNally, Associate Professor of Church History and Patristics, Sacred Heart School of Theology.