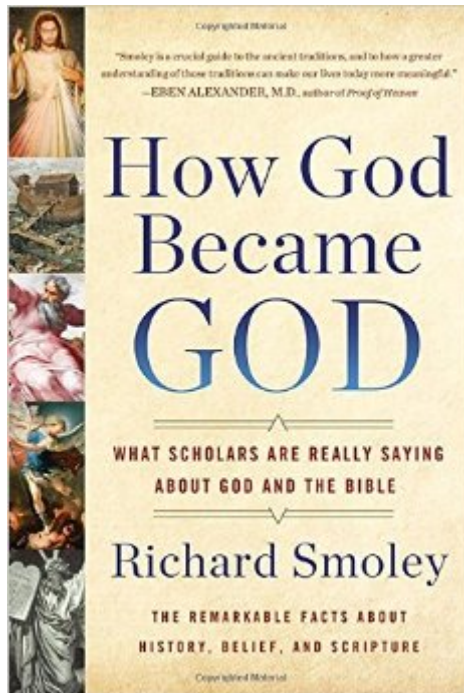


The book was found

How God Became God: What Scholars Are Really Saying About God And The Bible



Synopsis

This epic, thrilling journey through Bible scholarship and ancient religion shows how much of Scripture is historically false--yet the ancient writings also resound with theologies that crisscrossed the primeval world and that direct us today toward a deep, inner, authentic experience of the truly sacred. From a historical perspective, the Bible is shockingly, provably wrong--a point supported by today's best archaeological and historical scholarship but not well understood by (or communicated to) the public. Yet this emphatically does not mean that the Bible isn't, in some very real measure, true, argues scholar of mysticism Richard Smoley. Smoley reviews the most authoritative historical evidence to demonstrate that figures such as Moses, Abraham, and Jesus are not only unlikely to have existed, but bear strong composite resemblances to other Near Eastern religious icons. Likewise, the geopolitical and military events of Scripture fail to mesh with the largely settled historical time line and social structures. Smoley meticulously shows how our concepts of the Hebrew and Christian God, including Christ himself, are an assemblage of ideas that were altered, argued over, and edited--until their canonization. This process, to a large degree, gave Western civilization its consensus view of God. But these conclusions are not cause for nihilism or disbelief. Rather, beneath the metaphorical figures and mythical historicism of Scripture appears an extraordinary, truly transcendent theology born from the most sacred and fully realized spiritual and human insights of the antique Eastern world. Far from being "untrue," the Bible is remarkably, extraordinarily true as it connects us to the sublime insights of our ancient ancestors and points to a unifying ethic behind many of the world's faiths.

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Customer Reviews

I place this book between Karen Armstrong's History of God and Reza Aslan's Zealot. I've read all three of these books and Richard's book easily wins the race. If there is any justice in publishing, this book should be a breakthrough book for Richard Smoley. The scholarship is evident but you are never bogged down in his learning as you are swept up in his common sense observations and his folksy delivery. He never answers the dilemma that many thinking Christians find themselves in of how we reconcile our own intimate revelation of Christ with what we know historically and ethically to be true. Of course, I doubt anyone can answer that question. Nevertheless, if you want a fascinating survey of what the best archeologists and historians are saying about Yahweh, Jesus, and the Bible then you should start here. Also, you will find some very shrewd guesses about what we only partly know. Thoughtful and thought provoking, Richard writes with sensitivity towards those who believe and those who know too much to surrender to belief.

• How God Became God • addresses Biblical inconsistencies and exposes assumptions of doubtful authenticity. Richard Smoley weaves cultural history with current academic scholarship. He respectfully provides a range of responsible opinion on his subject matter, along with supporting evidence. Smoley's writing style is anything but academic. The book reads as if you were having a relaxed and leisurely conversation with an old friend, who just happened to be a Harvard/Oxford-educated scholar and a longtime student of early Christianity and mystical traditions. It's a fascinating and easily absorbed book, although readers with fixed worldviews may find its contents disquieting, especially persons of traditional faith and atheists. For everyone else, it will be a great read.

For those thinking Christians who have read the introductory blurb above and worry that "How God Became God" may torpedo their faith entirely, take heart: The intro is rather misleading. Although Abraham was likely a fictional character and the jury's still out on Moses, Smoley never claims that Jesus was "unlikely to have existed." Quite the opposite, he makes it clear that most scholars believe Jesus DID exist, despite a paucity of hard evidence outside the Gospels. Not only does Smoley himself believe that Jesus was a real person, he suggests that Jesus may have been much, much more than that - a figure of cosmic importance, if not actually the literal son of God. More I will not say, because Smoley's take on the meaning of Jesus' life is a highlight of the book, and I don't

want to spoil it. Altogether, this is quite an insightful and fascinating read. Smoley has an accessible, almost conversational style that pulls you in and keeps you flipping through the pages, marking particularly thought-provoking passages for later study and contemplation. And if you like this book, I also recommend two other Smoley books, "Hidden Wisdom" and "Inner Christianity."

Since my investigation into Biblical archeology and accompanying history of the Old Testament when in my 30s, I came to the conclusion that it wasn't God who created Man but rather Man who created God. The first few chapters of Richard Smoley's book confirmed my thoughts and resonated with my spiritual evolution. Reading those first chapters on the Old Testament reminded me of the minister who presided over our mainline Protestant congregation when I was a teenager and introduced me to the Old Testament, implanting in my mind the importance of religious mythology to believers. It's too bad that so many believers down through the ages have taken this beautiful mythology from the various ancient traditions and put a literal stamp on it. Smoley's conversational style is so pleasant to read and easy to understand. At the same time it reminded me of the more academic "History of God" by Karen Armstrong -- a book that I have long loved. Smoley's chapters on Jesus reminded me that scholars are still searching for the "historical" Jesus that those members of the Jesus Seminar attempted to pry out of the four Gospels. And how could we forget the Apostle Paul? I've always loved Paul even though he is denigrated by feminists and others. Paul was my early inspiration to study for the ministry -- even though I was called out of that and into Buddhism. I love Smoley's work and while this is a wonderful book, my favorites remain "Forbidden Faith" (an amazing study of Gnosticism; and "The Dice Game of Shiva" and consciousness creates the Universe.

Smoley first disposes of that which is not essential, simply and effectively. Those who follow his trail clearing to the end will find themselves surprised and in an entirely unexpected place (unless they have read his other work). Far from challenging faith, he strips away the no-longer-useful husk and presents the reader, by the end, with evidence of the living seed.

I just finished this and really enjoyed it. It is written for the layman and being one, I appreciated that. Basically it has two components. First he dishes what is true and what in all likelihood is not factually true in the Bible. But then he goes on to speculate on just what the spiritual truth/message of the Bible might be. I'm still mulling part 2 over in my mind, but it definitely made me want to read more of Richard Smoley's books. I like his conversational writing style.

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