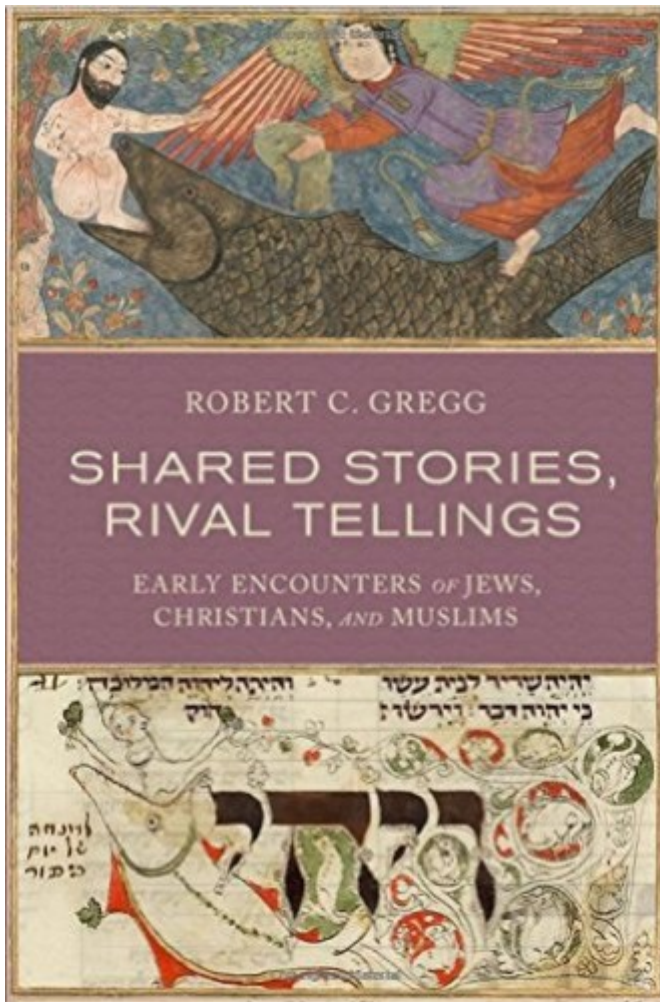


Unsettled in the beginning

by [Debbie Blue](#) in the [May 11, 2016](#) issue

In Review



Shared Stories, Rival Tellings

By Robert C. Gregg
Oxford University Press

The Century invited people to comment on their favorite book of the Bible and a book that has helped them appreciate or understand the biblical text. All of the responses are linked [here](#).

I love Genesis for some of the same reasons the church fathers were wary of it. It's full of embodied human beings who mate, reproduce, and behave erratically. In Genesis the rules have not yet been laid down. Religion has not been settled. It's a bit rough around the edges—just uncertain people lurching toward God. I can relate to this back and forth better than I can relate to the disciples in Acts who are so confident in “The Way.” I like the layers in these old stories and how the different strands are often at odds with each other.

There is movement and there are setbacks, and most of the time no one really seems to understand comprehensively.

Perhaps it's the unsettled nature of these narratives that allows the three Abrahamic faiths to interpret them so richly and variously. In *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*, Robert Gregg offers detailed analysis of the art and commentary surrounding the Genesis stories of Cain and Abel, Hagar and Sarah, and Joseph with Potiphar's wife. It's fascinating. Did you know that according to some Islamic commentary, the ram offered to God by Abel (Habil in the Qur'an) is kept in God's custody until God lets it go to be sacrificed by Abraham in Isaac's place? I'm not sure what, if anything, I'll do with that, but it's a fruitful imagining.