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Leonard Cohen's creative and personal life has been endlessly studied, yet Freedman (*The Talmud: A Biography*) takes a fresh approach by focusing on Biblical and Torahic references in Cohen's lyrics. Freedman writes that Cohen was a spiritual man who combined Jewish and Buddhist practice and felt a great affinity for the stories and messages of the Bible. He writes that Cohen also understood the Bible to be "a collection of stories that everybody knew," which allowed him to communicate through and add to the cultural consciousness. Freedman covers only 21 songs, though at least 150 others also have religious references; this lessens the impact of his thesis. Freedman's background as a scholar of Judaism is apparent; his discussion of Cohen's "Story of Isaac" goes into great detail about the tale of Abraham. His interpretations are certainly fascinating, but he's clearly drawing many less-supported conclusions (as he admits in the foreword).

VERDICT An intriguing and specific look at the traditions and stories that influenced a brilliant songwriter.