



Speizman Jewish Library



Recommended Reading

A Walking Tour of the Holy Texts

Walking the Bible, by Bruce Feiler, William Morrow, New York, 2001

Review by Rabbi Jessica Spitalnic, Temple Beth El

If you have ever traveled to Israel with a tour group, you know that your tour guide will make quite a dramatic introduction to the group's very first visit to the Kotel, the Western Wall. My husband, who for several summers guided Reform Jewish teenagers for NFTY (North American Federation of Temple Youth) in Israel, would lead the group on a particularly dramatic build-up to their first visit to the Western Wall. His shtick would include a dramatic retelling of Jewish history that had led to this exciting moment, inspirational selections about the Western Wall, the sharing by the teenagers, most visiting Israel for the first time in their lives, of the significance of this moment and the writing of notes to place in the cracks of the Wall. At the height of suspense before one such visit to the Wall, a loud voice yelled from the back of his group, "Could you cut the chit-chat and get me to the Kotel?"

It is that tone of anxiousness that pervades Bruce Feiler's new book, *Walking the Bible*. Feiler, a

writer on secular topics like clowning and country music, by trade, felt that since he had left his Savannah home and childhood synagogue he had grown up at, he was more and more removed from his religious identity. After doing much research and networking, Feiler realized what he wanted to attempt to do. Feiler wanted to literally, as the book's title suggest, walk the Bible. Connecting with the Israeli archeologist Avner Goren, the two of them set out to explore both the physical and spiritual journey laid out in the Five Books of Moses, the Torah.

Torah is about cycles. We read through the words of Torah over the course of the Jewish year and come to contemplate these works from different perspectives throughout our lives. As a young child, Torah is drama with exciting stories of adventure. As a bar or bat mitzvah, Torah becomes the focus of a ceremony that will prepare the thirteen year old for his or her role as an adult in the Jewish community. For adults, words of Torah can be an affirmation of faith, a guideline for living and a continued inspiration for our belief in God. But what Feiler does with Torah in *Walking the Bible* is special. He takes Torah

and slows it down. He forces himself and the reader to enter the minds of the biblical characters, to walk in the steps that they walked in and to be truly present in that relationship between God and humankind that Torah shows us. And boy, does he do this in an engaging way.

Feiler rushes breathlessly from one biblical location to another, all the time updating us on where the site connects us to the Torah text. A visit to the Dead Sea becomes at the same time a geology lesson on the salt formations that have come to be known as "Lot's wife" and a review of the destruction of Sodom. A visit to the monastery at St. Catherine's in the Sinai, the considered site of the burning bush, becomes a quirky image as Feiler remarks on the bush and the fire extinguisher only a few feet away.

Feiler and Goren also come across as a traveling United Nations. Goren, who was chief archeologist of the Sinai when Israel controlled that region, had made many lasting friendships and as the two men trace the biblical path they are warmly hosted by Israelis, Arabs and Christians alike, often in remote areas of the Middle East. Feiler spends much

of the books trying to get a glimpse of the souls of those he encounters along the journey, but ultimately, it is his own spiritual life that he finds nurtured. As he puts it, he comes to feel that, "It's as if the godliness of the land and the godliness of my being had

fused." *Walking the Bible* serves as a wonderful review of the biblical stories, an interesting resource on the field of bible studies and ultimately, when the book is finished, a great reason to once again read the original. ☆

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From the Librarian's Desk

By Amalia Warshenbrot, Librarian, Speizman Jewish Library

A Note From Amalia and Cynthia

The Speizman Jewish Library has a number of books which can enhance your knowledge of the Bible and Biblical history and archaeology. One of our newest titles is *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of the Sacred Texts* by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silberman.

Rabbi Spitalnic discussed this year *King David: the Real Life of the Man Who Ruled Israel* by Jonathan Kirsch.

The following is a small sample of books on the Bible and Biblical history:

The Zealots of Masada, Story of a Dig by Moshe Pearlman

Archeology of the Bible by Magnus Magnusson

Oxford Bible Atlas by Herbert May

Student's Atlas of the Bible published in Israel

Atlas of Bible Lands by Harry Frank

Bible Lands by Jonathan Tubbs

The Bible as History: Confirmation of the Book of Books by Werner Keller

Noah's Flood: the New Scientific Discoveries About the Event that Changed History by William Ryan and Walter Pitman

These are just a few of the titles

we have in our library. During the last of these hot summer days, come by the library, pick out a book, and take it home. Stretch out in your favorite chair, have a tall cold glass of tea by your side, and expand your horizons. ☆

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