



Walking the Bible

By Bruce Feiler
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Introduction *Walking the Bible* is Bruce Feiler's engrossing 10,000-mile journey and archaeological odyssey -- by foot, jeep, rowboat, and camel -- through the Holy Land. A fifth-generation Jew from Savannah, Georgia, Feiler was overcome with the urge to reconnect with the Bible, musing upon the original seeker, Abraham, as his inspiration:

"Abraham was not originally the man he became. He was not an Israelite, he was not a Jew. He was not even a believer in God -- at least initially. He was a traveler, called by some voice not entirely clear that said: Go head to this land, walk along this route, and trust what you will find."

Along with noted Israeli archaeologist Avner Goren, who acted as Feiler's trusted guide, partner, mentor, and sidekick, Feiler embarks on painstakingly retracing through the desert the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. Traveling through Turkey, Israel, the Palestinian territories, Egypt, and Jordan, three continents, and four war zones, Feiler converses freely with Bedouins and religious pilgrims alike. He visits actual places referenced in the Bible, including Mount Ararat, where it is believed that Noah's Ark landed after the flood, Saint Catherine's Monastery, the site of the burning bush where Moses first heard the words of God, and Mount Nebo, where Moses overlooked the Promised Land. In engaging and lucid prose, Feiler continually reflects on how the geography of the land affects the narrative of the Bible, and pointedly wonders whether the Bible is just an abstraction, or a living, breathing entity. Ultimately, Feiler concludes in *Walking the Bible* that the Bible "is forever applicable, it's always now...It lives because it never dies." The land that Feiler explores on his journey is timeless. *Walking the Bible* is not only a "good read," it's worth thinking about and savoring the people and places Feiler visits. This Study Guide is designed to help book groups explore and reflect on *Walking the Bible* through discussion. The Study Guide helps groups trace the large themes Feiler touches upon in his travels -- feelings about the land, its people, their history, the Bible -- and Feiler's own experiences on his journey. Whether you've journeyed to the Middle East or are content to remain an "armchair traveler," *Walking the Bible* is a fabulous adventure through a timeless world. And its accompanying Study Guide will deepen your experience and understanding of the region. **Discussion Questions**

1. Feiler traveled to many places as he journeyed through the sites found in the five books of Moses. Which one did you find the most interesting or inspiring? Why?
2. Of the many facts, stories, and history Feiler tells about the Bible and its geography, what did you find the most surprising? In other words, what did you learn about the Bible you didn't know before?
3. In the chapter, "Wall of Water," Feiler writes, "As much as [Avner] knew about the Bible, he seemed to know more about the nature of travel, about how to go to places, leave a bit of yourself behind, take a bit of the place with you, and in the process emerge with something bigger -- and experience, a connection, a story" (page 192). What do you think was Feiler's most significant "experience" or "connection" in his walk through the Bible? Why?
4. Describe Avner's connection to and feelings for Sinai.
5. What is Feiler's purpose in *Walking the Bible*? Does he accomplish that purpose? How?
6. Describe how the desert figured in Feiler's travels -- what he found there, its influence on the lives of those who live in the desert now and on those who lived in biblical times.
7. Who do you think was the most fascinating person Feiler met in his travels? Why?
8. In "Sunrise in the Palm of God," Feiler writes, "[The] more profound change the journey brought about in me...allowed me to turn off my mind occasionally and open myself up to feelings-spiritual, emotional, divine, even imaginary -- that might innately connect me to the world...after months of traveling around the Middle East, I felt newly aware of the emotional power of certain places, the essential meridians of history that exist just underneath the topsoil..." (page 420). Have you ever traveled to a place that connected you emotionally to place in the way Feiler describes? If so, describe your experience. If not, where do you imagine such a place might be for you?
9. Describe Avner and how Feiler relies on him.
10. Describe some of the contrasts Feiler experiences between the ancient biblical world and the modern world of the Middle.
11. In "Go Forth," Feiler writes, "Some journeys we choose to go on, I realized; some journeys choose us" (page 35). Talk about a time when you felt compelled to begin a journey -- a time when you felt the journey chose you.
12. In "In the Land of Canaan," Feiler writes about meeting Fern Dobuler, an Israeli who was originally from New York. Fern says, "When my kids used to go on field trips in America, they went to a museum, to the Empire State Building. Here when you go on a field trip they drop you off in the middle of the nowhere and you walk, for hours and hours and hours" (page 49). Discuss the difference between how Americans and Middle Easterners feel about or experience the land.
13. Contrast the differences Feiler experiences in Israel and with his experiences in Egypt.
14. Discuss the similarities and differences between St. Catherine's monastery in the chapter, "On Holy Ground," and Kibbutz Sdeh Borer in the chapter, "The Land of Milk and Honey."
15. How did Feiler's travels change your mind about the Middle East, the people who live there and their history? Or how did Feiler's travels support what you already think about the Middle East?

Contact the Author Bruce Feiler is the *New York Times* best-selling author of six books, an award-winning journalist and speaker. Over the last ten years he has traveled to over sixty countries, on five continents, immersing himself in different cultures and experiences. The result is six acclaimed books that take the reader along on his fascinating adventures and bring other worlds vividly to life. For Feiler's complete bio, as well as excerpts and reviews of all his books, and information about his speaking schedule around the country, please visit www.brucefeiler.com. Bruce Feiler also takes email comments directly from readers at his site and is pleased to answer questions from study groups. Bruce Feiler's newest book *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* (William Morrow, September 17, 2002) describes his personal quest to discover the man at the heart of the world's three monotheistic religions -- and of today's deadliest conflicts. The book, the first-ever interfaith portrait of Abraham, will be published this fall simultaneously in numerous countries around the world. In addition, William Morrow, Bruce Feiler, and other partner organizations are organizing a unique and unprecedented week of national interfaith dialogue -- from Friday, November 8th to Sunday, November 18th -- in which they hope to have at least 100 ABRAHAM SALONS running simultaneously across the country. For information on how to join this effort, please contact Bruce directly at www.brucefeiler.com. **For Further Reading** *The Art of Biblical Narrative* by Robert Alter; *God: A Biography* by Jack Miles; *The Bible as It Was* by James Kugel. **Reference** *The HarperCollins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, annotated by the Society of Biblical Literature; *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, edited by Paul J. Achtemeier with the Society of Biblical

Literature; *Harper's Bible Commentary*, edited by James L. Mays with the Society of Biblical Literature; *The Harper Atlas of the Bible*, edited by James Pritchard.