THE SOURCE BY JAMES A. MICHEMER

Description

An archaeological excavation of Tell Makor launches a journey into the history and culture of the Jews that includes the early Hebrews, the impact of Christianity, the Spanish Inquisition, and the modern Middle East conflict. First published in 1965.

Review

This endless diorama of gods, graves and a scholar begins at the archaeological site of an American, Cullinan, at Makor (in old Hebrew - The Source). Michener, whose globe-trotting (Hawaii, Afghanistan, etc.) makes him a sort of Lowell Thomas of the novel, extends his reach and his grasp this time to include not only the country of Israel, but 11,800 years of its history and religion in sequences relating to some artifact at the site (a flint, a phial, a Menorah, a coin, etc.). These intervals are also opened up by prefatory scenes in the present called "The Tell" which deal with Cullinan, who is at Makor on a five year dig, and Vered Bar-El, a Israeli expert in dating pottery, "a dark haired lovely Jewess from Bible times." (He falls in love with her; she will not go against her faith to marry a non-Jew.) However 95% of the book turns from the excavation to a reconstruction affording a synoptic view of Judaism, its religion, history and culture. The various periods are subdivided into "Levels" which proceed from cave to kibbutz; from Ur, the hunter, down through the centuries; from the earliest gods-- the trinity of El Shaddai, Baal and Astarte-- to one god, Yahweh, and all the ritual and the laws coincident with what was to prove as indestructible a faith as a people; from prehistory through the Old and New Testaments, into medieval Europe, past the Inquisition and finally down to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Jews' moral rights to Israel, that "meeting place of dynamisms." (…) (Kirkus Reviews, May 1, 1965)

Biography

Universally revered novelist James A. Michener (1907-1997) was forty before he decided on writing as a career. Prior to that, he had been an outstanding academic, an editor, and a U.S. Navy lieutenant commander in the Pacific Theater during World War II. His first book, Tales of the South Pacific, won a Pulitzer Prize and became the basis of the award-winning Rodgers and Hammerstein musical South Pacific. In the course of the next forty years Mr. Michener wrote such monumental bestsellers as Sayonara, The Bridges at Toko-Ri, Hawaii, The Source, Chesapeake, Centennial, Texas, Alaska, Caribbean, and Mexico. Decorated with America's highest civilian award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Mr. Michener served on the Advisory Council to NASA, held honorary doctorates in five fields from thirty leading universities, and received an award from the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities for his continuing commitment to art in America. James A. Michener died on October 16, 1997.
1. How do you interpret the title of the book?
2. Describe the writing style and structure of the book.
3. Describe the setting of the book and why is it important.
4. If you have any religious background – Jewish, Christian, Muslim – did you learn anything new about your own religion?
5. Describe the relationship between three monotheistic religions throughout the centuries.
6. How do you perceive these relationships in modern times?
7. Describe the link between historical and contemporary chapters.
8. If you were to write an additional chapter to this book, what would it include?
9. What genre is this book? How different is it from other books you've read?
10. Can you compare this book with other books by this author?
11. Try to summarize the subject of this book as if you would recommend it to a friend.
12. Some readers say that this book is an eye-opener. How did it open your eyes?
13. Did you learn anything new about archeological methods from this book?
14. If you were to travel in time, which chapter of this book would you choose to visit and why?
15. How did this book affect you?

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