



The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible

Jonathan Kirsch

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"The stories you are about to read are some of the most violent and sexually explicit in all of Western literature. They are tales of human passion in all of its infinite variety: adultery, seduction, incest, rape, mutilation, assassination, torture, sacrifice, and murder. . . ."

Sex. Violence. Scandal. These are words we rarely associate with the sacred text of the Bible. Yet in this brilliant book, Jonathan Kirsch recounts shocking tales that have been suppressed by religious authorities throughout history. Kirsch places each story within the political and social context of its time, delves into the latest biblical scholarship to explain why each one was originally censored, and shows how these ancient narratives hold valuable lessons for all of us.

The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible Details

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Author : Jonathan Kirsch

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Jonathan Kirsch**

From Reader Review The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible for online ebook

Michael Fishman says

This book was nothing breakthrough for me. But it most certainly was entertaining.

The book begins with the author discussing when he tried taking out the story of Noah and reading it to his children. He figured it was a nice Sunday school friendly story. But then he got to the end--the part where Noah got shitfaced and, eh, shamed by his middle son Ham. Whoa, he didn't see that coming.

I learned that story is second grade. Yes, my second grade teacher taught me about Noah getting drunk and paraded around naked by his son. But the author was like "wait, that's in the Bible?"

And so, the author (a journalist) has decided to make a book chronicling the dirtiest stories in the Bible. Some of them are pretty gruesome. I'm not a fan of his taking poetic licenses (to make it more readable), but then when he gets into interpretation, it gets interesting.

This is not a good book if you're looking for serious biblical scholarship. But it's a good FYI book if you are looking to change the way you previously saw the Bible.

Moka Chan says

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Marsha says

Here are stories ripped from the Bible: the naughty bits, including the scandalous stories about wayward women, desperate damsels and loose girls. Here are stories about the women who didn't get names because they were meant as what? Cautionary examples? Figures of shame? Secret objects of pride and joy?

I like reading the Bible for these hidden tales, the ones that show the Bible is a HUMAN story not merely one about an omnipotent, omniscient and kindly (?) God. By fleshing out the often missing female "voices", Kirsch gives us the Bible from other viewpoints, showing what it was like for the women who were subjected to the laws and whims of men. The ladies are brought to life, in all their wit, cunning, passion and beauty.

Jewel K says

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Ted says

Really brilliant book.

At first, I thought differently. Since I already know most of the stories, I found them to be fairly obvious, but that would not be true for someone not completely familiar with them. But what really got me were the commentaries in the subsequent chapters. So I skipped the retellings of the stories I know well and focused on the commentary. But the two stories from Judges that I wasn't as familiar with were expertly told and engaging.

At times, Kirsch strains credulity with some of his hypotheses, but not nearly as much as many of the rabbis and sages and scholars he quotes, some of whose generally accepted beliefs are astonishing in their wilful blindness to the plain facts evident in the text. And as Kirsch points out, midrash is an ancient and honorable practice, to which he is merely contributing.

The book is a fascinating read, and its message is very important in our age of dogmatic fundamentalism, which a clear-eyed reading of the Bible as a whole simply cannot support, as this book effectively proves. Bravo, Mr.Kirsch!

Skylar Burris says

Forbidden Tales is worth reading if you are familiar enough with the Bible to know when you are being mislead and discerning enough to take away from it what few diamonds you can; at the very least, it is entertaining, easy reading. Although Kirch makes some good points and tells some interesting stories, at times his scholarship appears somewhat sloppy and his thesis somewhat suspect.

Kirsch explores those tales of the Bible that do not generally make it into the sermon illustrations of the average pastor. He deals with the incest of Lot's daughters, the rape of Dinah, the prostitution of Tamar, Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter, and other such tales. The author's theme is that these stories have been "censored" and "suppressed" over the centuries. He suggests that the tales, as we have them, are but a shadow of the underlying forbidden story suppressed by the authors of the Bible, who (Kirsch believes) reformulated these much older tales into something less shocking. Kirsch's idea that the biblical authors somehow suppressed the true stories seems ill-conceived. As the author himself points out, these tales are shocking enough as is.

One example of Kirsch's idea of a "forbidden tale" is his speculation that the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter is a sterilization of a story "so shocking to the biblical authors that they dressed up her death in the trappings of sacrifice but dared not speak her name at all." This "so shocking" story, according to Kirsch, is that Jephthah's daughter was in reality part of a fertility cult that worshiped a goddess and that she was killed as punishment. The problem with this (rather wild) speculation is that nowhere else in the Bible is Jewish involvement with fertility cults or other gods "hushed up." The pages of the Old Testament elsewhere speaks of idolatrous cult worship and capital punishment for idolatry. Why would such a story, then, need to be "hushed up" in the Book of Judges? Indeed, the tale, as its stands, is a far greater shocker than Kirsch's supposedly "censored" version.

Kathleen Dixon says

I really like the way Kirsch has fleshed out the stories that he is looking at in this book. The Bible doesn't waste any time looking at the emotional impact of anything, nor on the reasons people do what they do. Kirsch has done an excellent job of making sense of certain completely nonsensical texts. He does a fine job, as well, of setting the context. And he shows how the "God" that is portrayed throughout the Bible is very clearly a construct of the authors. Mind you, we all know that we have created God in our own image - which is why there are so many versions of the supposed one-God in the Bible.

Nojood Alsudairi says

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Qahtan Aljazrawi says

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Steven Williams says

Review to follow.

Coleen Dailey says

I really enjoyed this book. It discusses many stories that are not emphasized in everyday church lessons - and provides some alternative reasons for why these stories may have been written as they were. A good read for anyone but particularly someone interested in Bible stories and their origins.

Nora says

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Khulood Almuflehi says

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Tricia Len says

I read this years ago...just found it again in my bookshelves... it was really good and sad

Fahima Jaffar says

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