

And the Walls Come A-Tumblin' Down

Albi Gom

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It is a smart and talented author who can take a well-known Bible legend and turn it into a work of historical fiction that is not only entertaining and engaging but also enlightening and amusing. Albi Gom is just such a writer, and, in his take on Joshua at the walls of Jericho, he manages to make events and characters both human and believable without denigrating the biblical story.

And the Walls Come A-Tumblin' Down is an absolute joy. Gom puts his readers into the minds of Moses and Joshua, offering his own unique take on how they may have heard the voice of God. He shows the difficulties they faced while leading the children of Israel—a people Moses describes in the book as being “not physically lost” but “spiritually lost.” This could have easily become a grim, fire-and-brimstone-themed novel, but Gom manages to infuse a great deal of humanity and humor into his characters and into his writing. His is a story of peoples at war, and what they do to understand and cope with situations they have been thrust into by their kings, priests, and warlords.

Joshua and Moses each have a story line, as does Rahab, the whore who helped Israelite spies sneak into Jericho. Her son, his friends and girlfriend, and other citizens of the doomed city have also been brought to life by Gom, and through them the reader is taken inside the walls to experience life in a city under siege.

There is a bittersweet love story between two teenagers, some soap opera-like family dramas, and a wonderfully funny subplot involving two soldiers who are a cross between Abbot and Costello and Bill Mauldin's World War II GIs, Willy and Joe. These two characters, Amud and Gamiel, provide more than just comic relief; they represent the true everyman, the common soldier who has to do all of the work, take all of the risks, and follow all of the orders, no matter how senseless those orders are.

Amud in particular has the best lines. “Do you think darkness makes distances longer?” he asks an exasperated Gamiel as they crawl out of the city. When Gamiel explains that rather than accept capture they are supposed to commit suicide, Amud responds with the kind of incredulity that is familiar to soldiers of all ages: “I’m supposed to kill myself to prevent the enemy from finding out from me stuff they already know?”

That Gom writes in such a modern vernacular may be off-putting to those who prefer their sword-and-sandal epics to be told in thees and thous. While it is doubtful that ancient Israelites or their Canaanite adversaries used words such as stuff, kinky, and macho, or called each other “you guys,” they probably did use phrases that meant much the same thing. At the very least, Gom has made his characters speak realistically, even if they are the sort of people one might encounter on a street in Jersey rather than Jericho.

And the Walls Come A-Tumblin' Down is a refreshing and fun novel that is highly recommended for readers who like their Bible stories told with humor, humanity, and history.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (November 21, 2012)

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