

Local author has been writing his way 'through the wilderness'

By JUNE STRANER
TODAY Writer

Brevard author Jamie Buckingham has tackled a bold venture in his new book, "A Way Through the Wilderness." It is a personal account of his amazing, soul-searching sojourns in the desert of the Sinai Peninsula, a triangle of arid land between Israel and Egypt and rimmed by the Suez and the crystal waters of the Gulf of Aqaba.

"I've put more of myself in this book," said Buckingham from his Palm Bay home. "I have spent so much of my life struggling. A couple of times I didn't see how I would get out."

He "cranked out" 35 other books, he said, beginning with "Run Baby, Run," in 1967, which remains a bestseller. Past achievements, however, only whetted Buckingham's literary appetite.

"This time I wanted to write something that would be around for 50 or 100 years," he said. "I have a good feeling about it, although Christians are not buying books like they were 10 years ago.

"They are more selective today because prices have increased and they can effortlessly switch on television testimonies about God's work in these times."

Buckingham's challenge,

then, was to produce a message that would plunge into the deepest regions of the reader's spirit, minister biblical answers to timeless questions and allow him to emerge with hope and insight into who God really is.

"'Wilderness' doesn't have the immediacy of a bestseller, but we forecast a long run for the book," said Paul Del Giudice, general manager of Chosen Books in Lincoln, Virginia, a division of Zondervan Corp., publishers of the \$10.95 hardback.

"We sold 4,034 copies from its September introduction to December 1," he said, "and, we project 10,000-copy sales for next year."

If the opinions of Buckingham's fellow Sinai trekkers are any indication of the book's success, "A Way Through the Wilderness" will be on every Christian's nightstand as a ministry tool.

"I was a college senior when I went to Israel with Dad in 1976," said Bruce Buckingham, now a legislative assistant for Rep. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) in Washington, D. C. "Those 10 days in the desert were a catalyst for all the Sunday School teachings I'd grown up with.

"Following the footsteps of Moses tied the Bible together, deepened my dedication to God and strengthened my beliefs," he said.

The cultural impact of soundless Sinai surroundings, where even the wind is noiseless, brought inward contentment and the small still voice of God, who corrected "a lot of little personal problems" for a Melbourne pastor who accompanied Bruce and Buckingham on the first of the author's five wilderness journeys. Buckingham planned that first trip to provide background for a historical novel he considered writing about the fall of Jericho.

That same awesome desert silence that lets peace settle on one person may create anxiety in others, causing flight, or swift escape back to the noise of the world, Buckingham explained in his book.

To the "pilgrim believer," who wanders through vast personal dry seasons, however, he wrote, the wilderness presents a time to look at oneself in God's perspective.

"I felt so insignificant there," wrote Melbourne traveler Jim Bauman. "Yet, God works out His purpose for each of us."

In 1980 he and 12 others in Buckingham's party hiked beneath jagged granite wilderness rocks and climbed to the top of Mount Sinai, "the mountain of God," where, perhaps 3,500 years ago, Moses faced his Creator and received the Ten Commandments.

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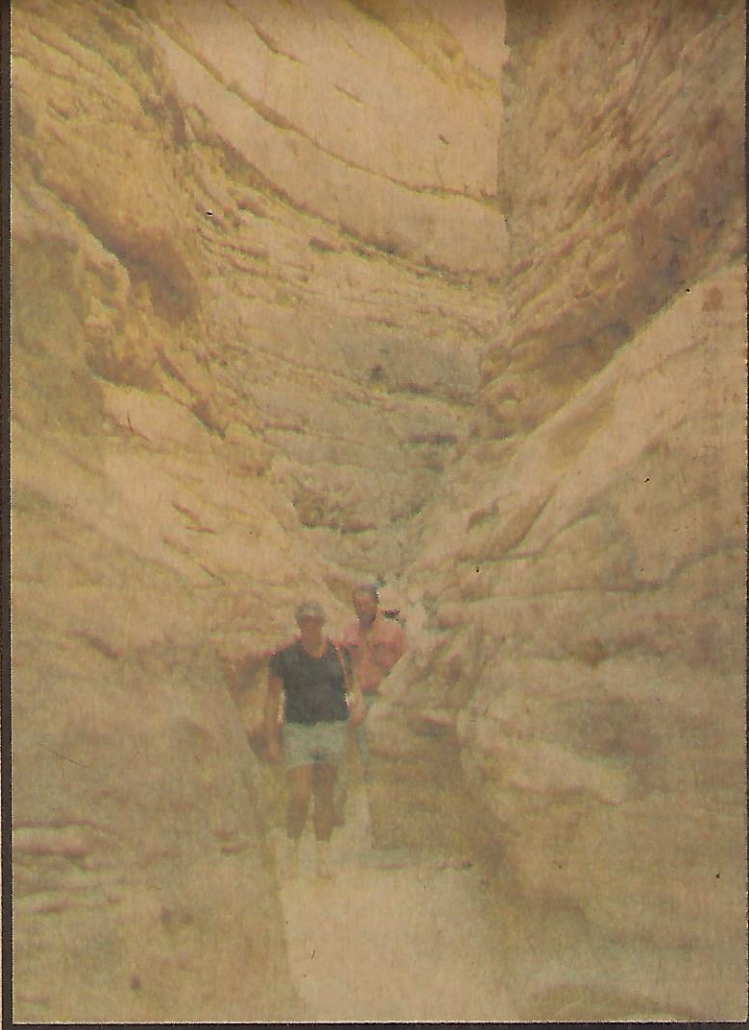
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Making camp in a narrow wadi (dried river bed), left, the men begin unloading the desert vehicle to prepare supper on the sand. Jamie Buckingham leads a small band of men through a narrow wadi in southern Sinai. Note the high water marks on the walls which indicate flooding during winter rains.

Bauman, now a church administrator for Buckingham's Tabernacle Church, captured the value of simplicity from his Mount Sinai experience, he said. "Suddenly, you are willing to leave material things behind. You know, that you know, that you know." God is real. God is big. God is powerful, and God still speaks to people, Bauman said.

"His voice is almost audible. It overwhelms you, coming from your spirit," explained sojourner Gene Berrey, a South Brevard Florida Power and Light Company executive.

He was struck by the awesomeness of the Lord during Buckingham's fourth desert journey, he said, and found his horizontal relationships with other travelers were enhanced as well.

The camaraderie of the team offered members "intense and lasting friendships," Berrey said, "giving credence to God-given covenant relationships between like-believers.

"In the desert, you are dependent on one another for life itself," he explained. "It's one place you don't want to face alone."

Buckingham agreed, adding, "Nor can you bring your own culture into the desert. It will kill you.

"I had to learn to leave my earthly surroundings behind so I could flow with the rhythm and melody of the desert. Then, life became enjoyable out there."