



The Half Shekel Journal by Ed Rice
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The shoreline of the Dead Sea was a surprisingly lush and productive strip of agriculture. When an Israeli puts his hand to the plow their promised land yields its bounty, even near the Dead Sea. The rows of fig trees and truck farms opened periodically to make room for some tourist attractions. Where the Jordan valley connected to the sea was especially rich in each. There was even one attraction that allowed visitors to tour a swampy reserve full of alligators. Our guide, who was as much enthralled with linguistics as with archeology, relayed the time they hastily hung out an English translation of their sign which read “Come feed yourself to the alligators.” Turns out word order is important for some languages and they meant “Come to feed the alligators yourself.” Thirty years as a multi lingual tour guide provided Ronnie with enough wit and wisdom to relate such linguistic snafus one after another, and his accent so duplicated the Pink Panther's inspector Cluso, that Jeff Carpenter and I could likely have kept him going for hours. The account of getting a 'vrroom' in France had us in stitches, and some intimate phone conversations with 'ken' and the question about being kutchy-kutchy should not even be mentioned in this journal. Inspector Cluso, if you don't know, is the heroic source of wisdom for all modern spiritual giants and Israeli guides, credited for authoring the lines “It is just another dark stone in the rich tapestry of life” and “It is just another piece of fabric in the rich mosaic of life.” and ... enough. The bus turns off the valley road and heads up into the hills toward Engedi.

While First Samuel is a book about the rise and fall of king Saul, and 2nd Samuel about the rise and perpetuity of David, Ein Gedi, and Saul's hunt for David, is the overlap between the two. We stared at the rugged terrain around us. The trickling stream before us did not seem to be a significant water source for David and his 600 men, (1Sam 23:13) as they camped and hid in these surrounding hills. From our leveled hill of the Israeli National Park we overlooked the stream, several ibex, and fleeting conies on the opposite bank. The excitement of seeing the sure footed mountain creature overtook the fact that we were at Engedi, where David was justified and Saul vilified. In a cave near our position David and some of his men were hidden when Saul came in to take a nap. Scholars like to discover hidden meanings in the Bible and then show off a superior intellect by teaching these, often invented, 'hidden meanings' to their followers. Many are taught in our seminaries that Saul “covering his feet” in a cave is one of those profoundly discovered secret meanings whereby Saul went into the cave to defecate. Such a hairbrain interpretation of Scripture is popular around Bible colleges and seminaries but just a little practical understanding of camping and cave dwelling portrays these show-off scholars as the prideful fools engrossed with bathroom talk that they are. Saul was in the coolness of the cave to take a nap and man had covered his feet for such a task for 2,942 years previous and for 3,070 years since. Don't let 'scholars,' so called, twist you up when it comes to logic, clarity, and literalness of the Holy Bible.

David could have slain Saul in the cave. David's 600 against Saul's 3,000 could have prevailed at Ein Gedi. Instead his speech turned Saul back to sane and responsible behavior for two years. If God does not turn the heart, the best arguments of man can only turn it temporarily. Saul would soon be seeking to destroy God's anointed again. The natural heart of man is desperately wicked and pitted against a Holy God. The supernatural that the secular educators are vehemently denying before our children, is the

only one that can change the heart of man.

In the park area at Engedi, after suitable pictures of the ibex and connee, our group gathered to worship on this Lord's day. After our Sea of Galilee service, Matt Dowdy was the majorities choice for a song director and he lead in several old hymns of the faith.

When a group of leaders, who are peers, meet without an assignment of leadership, the dynamics of the group is always an interesting study in personalities, humilities, and presumptions. I had been asked by the Christian Journeys coordinator, Brian Watts, to preach to this group of preachers on this Lord's day. There were a dozen more qualified and all were stimulated by our presence in God's promised land. In my mind I backed together three outlines I had preached this year about conquering and dwelling in God's promised land for Christians. It will take being strong and of



good courage, a continual presence in God's Word, and an absence of compromise and perpetual presence of faith as depicted in Joshua 1-10. God expects that we will conquer vices and put them out of our life as much as he expected Joshua to put out the Hittite, Amorite, Canaanite, Perizzite, Hivite, and Jebusite. Preaching to preachers allows skipping many ancillary explanations and illustrations because most have already preached my text. Although it was a rushed worship time it was precious to gather with other believers and praise God for His Son, our Lord, our Saviour, and our Deliverer. The bus headed down the slopes and pointed to the Moriah Classic Motel at the southern tip of the Dead Sea. It was also super bowl Sunday back in the states, and some in our number were expecting to see the game tonight.



The Dead Sea was deader than usual. Not because of its 36% salt content (the Great Salt Lake of Utah has only 6%) but because it had receded over 100 feet in depths from the 1920s. Israelis were now using most of the water from the Jordan River in agricultural ventures and cyclic climate changes, that the world fears and labels 'global warming' as their scare tactic, and blame tactic, has decreased rainfall in the area. The result was, large spans of sink-hole-riddled, high-salt-laden

soil which was being made productive with Israeli ingenuity. It was interesting that they had to dredge a channel to the southern end of the sea to keep a 'healthy' content 'salt' water at the foot of the Moriah Classic Motel. There they offered a variety of spa, mud, and beauty treatments at very reasonable prices. Had we not had very reasonable exhaustion after the longest day our journey, I might have noted some of those prices. We enjoyed an excellent buffet meal at an excellent 5 star motel. Bev and I would likely sleep well tonight. It sure was nice to find our comfortable bed. I can't believe I'm in Israel. I can't believe we planned an early dawn swim in the Dead Sea.