



The Half Shekel Journal by Ed Rice
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The Muslim Turks occupying Israel's once promised land perceived the economic advantage of immigrating the Spanish displaced Jews into Israel and opened their doors to them. They then gave them “eternal access” to the Western Wall of their temple area and a flood of Jews immigrated back to their homeland.

Ronnie's explanations continued. “This then is not the Jewish Western Wall, it is 'the' Western Wall.” All faiths have access to this area as a place of prayer. The Jews reverence this wall as the portion of wall that remains of their temple mount, the very closest thing to their temple's holiest place. In respect of that reverence we should respect their custom of wearing a head covering in their holy areas and not disrespectfully turning our back on their holiest area. But access to this wall is freely given to all who would pray here, and the following of these Jewish customs is likened to following the Christian custom of removing head coverings when we enter a Church. You do not have to conform, but someone may speak to you about it when you don't.

Since we visited the wall last night and were now armed with much more information we were less timid on this approach I had my Stetson and no need of the paper kippah. As the ladies headed toward their entry point Pastor Carpenter, Pickett and I headed for the men's entry of the Western Wall. One of us should have said something profound as we walked into the large open area filled with people, orthodox Jews of many sects, children and visitors. I was at loss for words. My limited knowledge of the wall coupled with my anxious aged longing to see it drove words far from me. Every thing going on around me caught my interest. Children were being gathered for lessons, Jews were bobbing back and forth in a public prayer show, chairs were being moved to accommodate a group praying at the wall, elders were engaging conversation with juniors of their sect, tourists were milling around in the mix and cameras were clicking. The three of us swiftly dispersed as we followed camera lenses in different directions.

I made my way through the mallei of activity and found an open area at one of the gargantuan two thousand and nine year old foundation stones. A Christian can pray anytime and anyplace. We have an advocate with the Father, His only Begotten Son, dwelling within us and thus we can “pray without ceasing.” I do have places of prayer as I have places of study. Being in those places prompt me there to pray or to study. This place, dedicated and reserved for a prayer place, did nothing towards prompting a prayer from me. I was instead struck with an awe. The stone before me was positioned here as part of a retaining wall to top Mount Moriah with a great 45 acre plateau for Herod's temple construction project. To my right hand and to my left were Jews praying from the Jewish prayer book:

“Because of our sins we were exiled from our country and banished from our land. We cannot go up as pilgrims to worship Thee, to perform our duties in Thy chosen house, the great and Holy Temple which was called by Thy name, on account of the hand that was let loose on Thy sanctuary. May it be Thy will, Lord our God and God of our fathers, merciful King, in Thy abundant love again to have mercy on us and on Thy sanctuary; rebuild it speedily and magnify its glory.”

Since this was being prayed all around me I thought it appropriate to start my prayer praying for the peace of Jerusalem. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee.” (Psalm 122:6) “Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.” (Zec 8:22) I also prayed for the reconstruction of the temple here. When Baptists read their Bible correctly and literally¹, there is a 7 year tribulation period coming upon this earth at hand right after the catching away, or 'rapture', of the Church to meet the Lord in the clouds. (1Thes 4) In the midst of that 7 year period of world tribulation the anti-Christ, “the abomination of desolation, spoke of by Daniel the prophet” (Matt 24:15) “Shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.” (Dan 9:27) The “sacrifice and the oblation” cannot

1 Only a minority of Christianity consistently read their Bible literally, most take their eschatology figuratively and thereby muck up any parts they will. Baptists, more consistently than any, hold to inerrant, infallible, literal interpretation for their eschatology.

cease until it is restarted, and it cannot reconvene until there is a temple to house it. The temple will be reconstructed and it is exciting to learn of the preparation already made for that reconstruction and reconvening of the sacrifice and oblation. It was also exciting to be here at the temple wall and ask God to do what He said He would, rebuild this temple.

It was custom to write your prayer requests on a paper and tuck it into a crack in the stones. And it was reported that these slips of paper were periodically removed and kept forever in a vault within the Western Wall. I had previously written the names of all twenty three members of Good Samaritan Baptist Church on a small slip of paper as well as the names of all twelve missionaries that our church supports, their wives names and their callings on the opposite side. I promised my self that I would pray for each name at the wall. It also included our three sons, their wives and 11 of our grandchildren. As I prayed, I tucked the slip of paper into one of our Ford Porter "God's Simple Plan of Salvation" gospel tracts and rolled it up into a tight cylinder that tucked neatly into one of the few open areas above the rock before me. This was not steeped in superstition that such a written message would get to God better than my prayer, but was a token of my never ceasing to pray for those names. I should not say here that I prayed hastily but all the activity around me was intriguing.

I moved along the wall to the north of the open area, careful not to turn my back to the wall as I did. Jews of all sects were praying all along the path. At the edge of this open wall area there was an opening that allowed entry underneath some buildings above. Here another 100 feet of wall was exposed to several groups and many prayers. Two Catholic confessionals were up against the wall just inside the alcove. I checked them carefully because they were not here last night when we were here. Sure enough, they had wheels, and were rolled into a back closet evenings. I found it strange that Catholics would want to confess their sins next to a Jewish temple wall, but I find many things strange about Catholicism. My mom, Doris Romiano Rice, was converted to Christ when I was 6, and what I knew most about Catholicism was her joy for being free of its bondage and its confessionals. We have an advocate with the Father who was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God, Jesus Christ the Righteous.

There was a group of younger Jews in a rich discussion further in, and a whole class of children being taught by an animated elder teacher near the end. I watched the children enjoying their lesson from the Torah and tried to figure out some of the gist of the lesson by the antics of the teacher. I did not feel out of place watching the children's lesson because there were about 20 adults standing around the back enjoying the lesson. Their advantage was that they understood the Hebrew tongue which went with the antics.

As I came back out of the alcove a young Jewish man came to me and asked my name. He then asked where I was from, about my family and after I thoughtlessly rapid fired answers to his rapid fire questions he took my arm, led me to the wall, and began praying out loud. He prayed for me, by name, my wife, by name, for my three boys and my home and theirs. He prayed for our peace and happiness and health. This was happening faster than I could catch my thoughts or squeeze in a word, and I am from New York! When he finished I looked up to see a jubilant smile, a clothe purse of coins in his left hand, his right hand extended and open. Just before I comprehended that he was looking for a shekel or two tip for his prayer, I grasped his open extended hand and placed my left hand on his shoulder and began to pray that this young man and many others here would receive the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. His reaction was quick, his withdrawal immediate and when I finished my audible prayer and looked up I saw him nowhere in the crowd. There was a crowd. I continued my prayer less audibly but more earnestly. I knew followers of 1879s Mrs. Mary Baker Glover Eddy would sell their prayer time, but this is the first Jew I'd seen try it. I could have spent another hour observing all the activity. If I spoke Hebrew there were several lively discussions ongoing that I am certain I could have joined.

Although Christians had often called this the wailing wall it was interesting to see jovial Jews laughing and dancing with joy here. I made my way back to the entry point to join several of our group already gathering and taking group photos. I could hardly believe it, I was standing at the wailing wall I had heard about since I was eight. How many times I had seen slides of this, now I was armed with a camera and viewing it through its lens.