



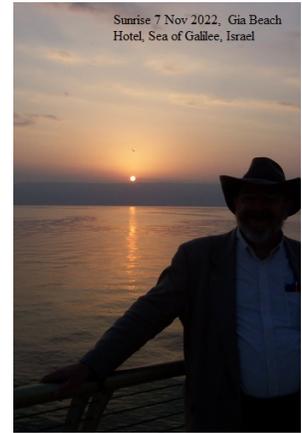
The Half Shekel Journals of 2022 by Pastor Ed Rice

#19 Sun 7 Nov Mount Arbel Caves

We had already learned some things about the caves of Mount Arbel. They were strong holds for persecuted Jews



for generations. Yesterday evening our guide Joe took us back to 161 BC to meet General Bacchides, who brutally slew the Jews, which the Seleucid Empire¹ wanted annihilated. We also recalled that the Maccabean revolt that was generated eventually



overthrew the vile Seleucid Antiochus IV who desecrated the temple, and controlled all Judea. That Maccabean revolt reestablished Judaism in Judea, just in time for the Saviour to step into the world; no coincidence there.

This early morning, Joe described the Roman soldiers who were lowered down in baskets on



ropes to shoot their arrows into cave dwelling



Jews when the Romans wanted to annihilate them just 200 years later. Somehow, Pastor Charlie and Joe had conspired together to arrange time in our schedule for our group to

climb down a portion of Mount Arbel, and peer right into some of those caves. No kidding. And voila we started down the Israeli National Trail² in the Arbel Nature Reserve, starting about where we were last night. (Start: 11/7/22 0918, 32°49'28.27"N 35°30'05.51"E, Altitude 130.3816; Middle:0955 32°49'26.75"N 35°29'48.87"E, Altitude 46.8206; End: 1018 32°49'33.22"N 35°29'24.65"E, Altitude 137.5430. Looks like they hiked down 109 feet from the peak, then back up 91 feet to the pickup point, God bless them.)

Leaving Eiad, the bus driver, smiling waving, and leaning against our 46' Irazar16S Tour bus we made our way past the gift shop and up the trail toward the peak of Mout Arbel. The hike up was beautiful. It was on a well groomed path serpentine up the valley with relaxing photo-ops of



- 1 Oxford Dictionary, s.v. "Selucid", a dynasty ruling over Syria and a great part of western Asia from 312 to 64 BC. Its capital was at Antioch.
- 2 We would use the Mount Arbel National Park portion of the The Israel National Trail, a hiking trail that crosses the entire length of the country of Israel, with its northern end at Kibbutz Kfar Giladi, near the Lebanese border and extending to Eilat at the southernmost tip of Israel on the Red Sea. Its total length is over 646 miles, we were to use one of them.

beautiful landscapes, plants, and flowers.

It may have been 1/4 mile up when Pastor Charlie started warning that the trail down, next to the caves, was categorized as “difficult.” As we kept going up the trail, smiling and laughing, the categorization changed a little to, “very difficult.” As we approach the end of the well groomed trail, Pastor paused the whole group and gathered us around a large rock, and began an explanation of the “very difficult” category.



“Listen, unless you are in very good physical shape, have good hiking shoes, and proper hiking apparel, you should not endeavor to take the next portion of this hike. You can turn back at this point, stroll back down this nicely groomed, trail and wait for us in the air-conditioned tour bus.”

I got the impression, as did evidently Pastor Charlie, that some people were not paying

particular attention to this escalating warnings. Like they often do in song at Solid Rock BC, Pastor Charlie raised it to a higher key and repeated the last verse and chorus.

When we humans are told that something might be more physically demanding than we are ready for, we have a tendency to overestimate



our physical stamina, and recall all the previous voices that said, “Don’t worry, you can do it, it’s not as hard as they make it out to be...”

Beverly and I, in our 70s, heard none of those voices; we knuckled under and backed out

with alternate plans as soon as we heard the “difficult” categorization. I am not proud of my obesity, but neither am I ignorant of it. We clicked no pictures all the way up the trail, knowing there would be plenty of time to do so, as we casually strolled back down to the air-conditioned gift shop and waiting tour bus.



Pastor Charlie had raised his warning key almost half an octave before we casually waved goodbye to all the stout hearted hikers who are attracted by challenge, and the opportunity to be spelunkers, i.e. “one who makes a hobby of exploring, and studying caves.” Shane and Micah Rice had promised to bring back photos so other Rices could do their spelunking remotely.



I did not take particular note of who went on the spelunking hike and who thought better of it and made the casual relaxing stroll back down the well groomed trail to the gift shop. The foyer of the gift shop was lined with exceptional framed photos of Mount Arbel, and it's caves. In lieu of the “very difficult” hike, I started clicking pictures of



my favorite pictures. Bev and Kathy were back in the gift shop, admiring things and talking; at least I saw no purses open.



I inadvertently blocked some photo shoot of a young couple and apologized. Turns out they were Christians from North Carolina on a 10 day tour with their Church of Christ congregation. Everyone visiting Israel is excited and friendly. Some of their group

stuck their head out and called from the gift shop door, their group was leaving. I clicked a few more pictures of pictures.

It probably wasn't an hour before we gathered at the bus and Eiad headed us down to the pick up point where we would recover the trail wearied spelunkers. The bus was comfortable, the lush seats more so. When I awoke from a relaxing nap, there was some concern about some hikers that were still quite a ways back up the mountain trail.



Micah and Harrison had gone back to lend aid to the fallen, and we prayed that “the fallen” were merely fallen behind. It was a great relief to see them come around the last corner, and although they were well out of earshot, the group recited together, “Praise the Lord” and a round of applause rang out.

I’ll not record here the detail of the ordeal of some of the hikers, hikers that, perhaps unadvisedly, made the spelunking journey down the steep cliffs, except to say that, at least two claim that they owe their very lives to Micah and Harrison. “If it had not been for them, I would still be up there on that cliff overhang!”

There will be some from the spelunking contingent who read this journal and remember so well the 7



November morning that they might be compelled to write out their own first person detailed account with, or without, pictures. If such a person would send me their account, I may or may not (depending on how much humor/edification it contains) publish it as an addendum to this half shackle journal. If I publish this work in paper back through Lulu however, I’ll not give you a dime of my royalty (in the last three years of publishing 13 volumes of 3000 pages, I netted

\$7.95 of royalty³, ... and used on a cup of coffee at Starbucks!).

After a lunch stop, where we regrouped from the spelunking adventure, we were prepped with anticipation to visit Tel-Dan, the northern most point in the nation of Israel. Our guide Joe gave it more flavor on the bus as Eiad turned right on route 90 and headed the bus north.

I am not sure who is still working on their journal covering this 10 day Israel Pilgrimage; I wish them well. I flip through 1,500 pictures for each Half Shekel of work; I feel bad for those who have over 40 hours of video instead of 1,500 pictures. Take a note, pictures are preferred over videos. Anyway, the challenge of assembling a journal brought to mind Mark Twain's journal entry about journalers. I will again recommend his

3 I published 12 volumes of Systematic Theology for the 21st Century, but the need is so great that I keep giving them away for free. See all books at <https://www.lulu.com/spotlight/GSBaptistChurch>

whole Journal “Innocents Abroad”, it is public domain and available for free for your electronic devices. In any event, for those still journaling, I’ll close this Half Shekel with Mark Twain’s Journal entry on journaling.

Below is an excerpt of Mark Twain’s “*Innocents Abroad*” Chapter IV, that has his humorous insights about journaling. I thought it worth the read, as is his whole freely obtained book

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3176/3176-h/3176-h.htm>

Mark Twain writes:

After prayers the Synagogue shortly took the semblance of a writing school. The like of that picture was never seen in a ship before. Behind the long dining tables on either side of the saloon, and scattered from one end to the other of the latter, some twenty or thirty gentlemen and ladies sat them down under the swaying lamps and for two or three hours wrote diligently in their journals. Alas! that journals so voluminously begun should come to so lame and impotent a conclusion as most of them did! I doubt if there is a single pilgrim of all that host but can show a hundred fair pages of journal concerning the first twenty days’ voyaging in the Quaker City,



and I am morally

certain that not ten of the party can show twenty pages of journal for the succeeding twenty thousand miles of voyaging! At certain periods it becomes the dearest ambition of a man to keep a faithful record of his performances in a book; and he dashes at this work with an enthusiasm that imposes on him the notion that keeping a journal is the veriest pastime in the world, and the pleasantest. But if he only lives twenty-one days, he will find out that only those rare natures that are made up of pluck, endurance, devotion to duty for duty’s sake, and invincible determination may hope to venture upon so tremendous an enterprise as the keeping of a journal and not sustain a shameful defeat.

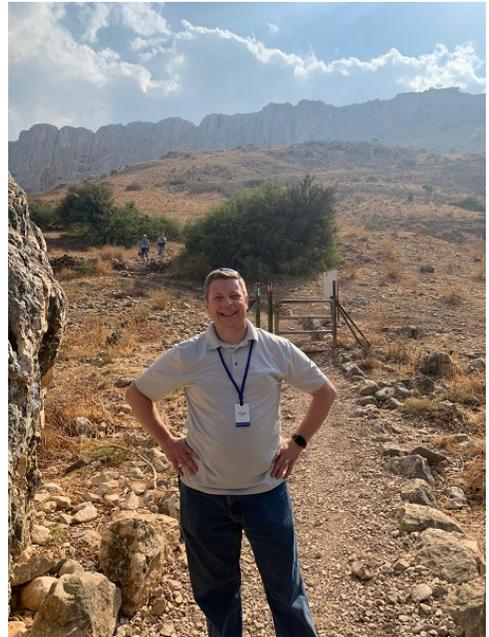
One of our favorite youths, Jack, a splendid young fellow with a head full of good sense, and a pair of legs that were a wonder to look upon in the way of length and straightness and slimness, used to report progress every

morning in the most glowing and spirited way, and say:

“Oh, I’m coming along bully!” (he was a little given to slang in his happier moods.) “I wrote ten pages in my journal last night—and you know I wrote nine the night before and twelve the night before that. Why, it’s only fun!”

“What do you find to put in it, Jack?”

“Oh, everything. Latitude and longitude, noon every day; and how many miles we made last twenty-four hours; and all the domino games I beat and horse billiards; and whales and sharks and porpoises; and the text of the sermon Sundays (because that’ll tell at home, you know); and the ships we saluted and what nation they were; and which way the wind was, and whether there was a heavy sea, and what sail we carried, though we don’t ever carry any, principally, going against a head wind always—wonder what is the reason of that?—and how many lies Moulton has told—Oh, every thing! I’ve got everything down. My father told me to keep that journal. Father wouldn’t take a



thousand dollars for it when I get it done.”

“No, Jack; it will be worth more than a thousand dollars—when you get it done.”

“Do you?—no, but do you think it will, though?”

“Yes, it will be worth at least as much as a thousand dollars—when you get it done.

May be more.”

“Well, I about half think so, myself. It ain’t no slouch of a journal.”

But it shortly became a most lamentable “slouch of a journal.” One night in Paris, after a hard day’s toil in sightseeing, I said:

“Now I’ll go and stroll around the cafes awhile, Jack, and give you a chance to write up your journal, old fellow.”

His countenance lost its fire. He said:

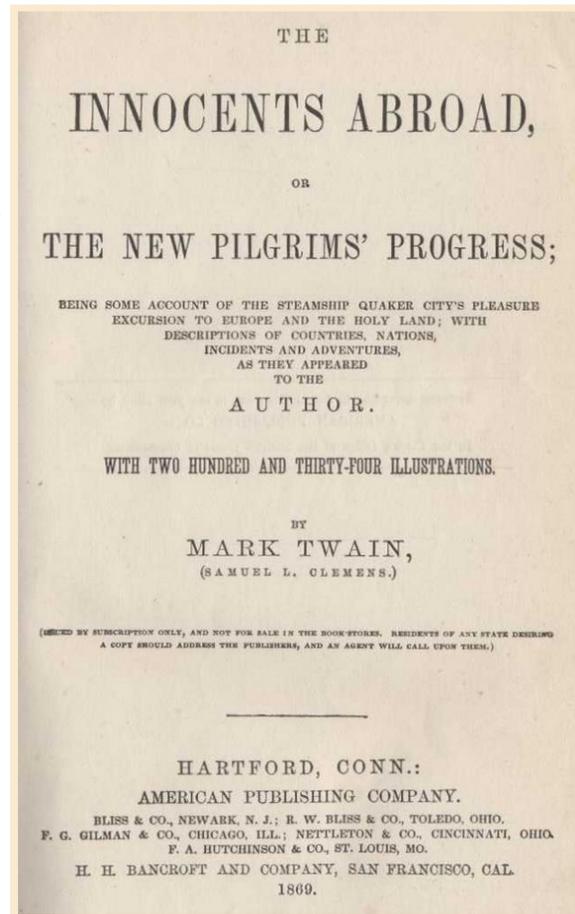
“Well, no, you needn’t mind. I think I won’t run that journal anymore. It is awful tedious. Do you know—I reckon I’m as much as four thousand pages behind hand. I haven’t got any France in it at all. First I thought I’d leave France out and start fresh. But that wouldn’t do, would it? The governor would say, ‘Hello, here—didn’t see anything in France? That cat wouldn’t fight, you know. First I thought I’d copy France out of the guide-book, like old Badger in the for’ard cabin, who’s writing a book, but there’s more than three hundred pages of it. Oh, I don’t think a journal’s any use—do you? They’re only a bother, ain’t they?”

“Yes, a journal that is incomplete isn’t of much use, but a journal properly kept is worth a thousand dollars—when you’ve got it done.”

“A thousand!—well, I should think so. I wouldn’t finish it for a million.”

His experience was only the experience of the majority of that industrious night school in the cabin. If you wish to inflict a heartless and malignant punishment upon a young person, pledge him to keep a journal a year.

A good many expedients were resorted to keep the excursionists amused and satisfied. A club was formed, of all the passengers, which met in the writing school after prayers and read aloud about the countries we were approaching and discussed the information so obtained.⁴



4 Mark Twain's "*The Innocents Abroad*" is available in full (Public Domain) at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3176/3176-h/3176-h.htm> or in multiple formats at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3176> [From an 1869—1st Edition] Accessed 4/4/2023 egr