



The Half Shekel Journals of 2023 by Pastor Ed Rice
#2302 Sat 18 Mar Caesarea by the Sea

Our first full day in Israel began, as was promised, with a wonderful Mediterranean breakfast buffet at the Tal by the Beach Hotel. Bev and I, knowing how fast these 14 days would fly by, knew it was important to connect faces with each name on our two week old prayer list. I was notoriously bad at this art form. I once tried word association tricks, and our friend Brother Herculean, had spent years being called Brother Sampson, because I couldn't even do that right. We set out to meet new friends at breakfast (sometime when I have more time to write I will explain why break – fast is called that, and how God designed us, and our 12 hours of daily darkness, to give our digestive track half a day off, ... every day). At breakfast we tried to associate faces with names and get a little background information on our new friends. Turns out I would still spend the next 10 days



whispering into Bev's ear, "What was their name again?..." "Notoriously bad" is an apt

description of my skill in this art form.

We had crammed all our worldly possessions back into our "suit" cases and they were crammed into the belly of the King-Long tour bus. Costia flawlessly guided the beast through the narrow streets of Tel Aviv and out to Route 2 toward Caesarea, 45 minutes up the road. Our guide Eli was determined to fill the ride with



information about his homeland, and its rich Biblical history, so as soon as Pastor Bill Thiessen said “Amen”, he gave us a hearty “Bokatov” (in English “good – a.m.”, I think).

Brother Bill had started our Saturday with some profound thoughts from Psalm 121.

«A Song of degrees.» I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. 2 My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. 3 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. 4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. 6 The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. 7 The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. 8 The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore (Ps.121:1–8).



It is hard to be anything less than profound when you read this Psalm while standing in God's promised land, Israel, right after our first sunrise day here, and it being a Sabbath day (as was Adam's very first day in God's universe). Pastor Thiessen circled this Psalm around our wonder, and crowned our morning with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. It was Saturday, it was Sabbath day, and we were in the land that

Jehovah God loved, and, by promise, always occupied! His favorite place here on God's green earth. Profound might not fully capture what this was.

Costia had us cruising smoothly up Route 2 and Eli was just as smoothly detailing the amazing history and construction we would find when we got to Caesarea. He inserted a wealth of insight about the Turkish deforestation of the region, and Mark Twain's aforementioned description of the barren land. He included the 1920s when Zionist settlements started filling the land and he put us in wonder of Isaiah's prophecy that the land would be made fertile again. Eli could not conceal his exuberance over the miracles that unfolded here in 1948, nor did he try. It resonated again when we passed an orange

grove and he described how Israel's *Negeb*¹ bloomed into life, and Israel became a leading exporter of oranges into Europe. He only had time to touch on Israel's power plants as we passed one, and Israel's desalination plants that now produced 90% of Israel's freshwater. ... More needed to be said, but we were getting off the bus at Caesarea National Park.

Herod is called "The Great" for two reasons, as near as I can figure. First, he was greatly psychotic, as can be seen in any brief study of his life. Second, he was a great contractor, who built great things, even impossible things. Caesarea, a leading example of his latter greatness, but it also depicted some of his former psychotic greatness.

Eli was excited to have this group of 25 standing awestruck in front of the



entryway of the massive amphitheater in Caesarea National Park. He gathered us there and paused for a moment, some of his zeal was shining in his face. Herod, the Roman Jewish client-king of Judea, born 72 BC, and reigning from 37 BC till his death in 4 BC, who called himself "The Great", thought himself Jewish when he wanted to, and thought it might be helpful, and thought himself Roman, when he thought that might be helpful. He was neither, he fooled no one, he did neither well, and failed in both rolls. He played the role of the persecuted persecutor, but, ... he was a great builder.

Here, at Caesarea by the sea, he built two artificial breakwaters that held 200 ships with his massive palace that overlooked the sea. When Herod the Great, built the city Caesarea, he wanted to be thoroughly Roman, and he built with Roman philosophy of bread plus entertainment, comfort plus entertainment, amusement plus entertainment. On that note, Eli smirked a little, turned a little, waved his little flag a little, said, "Follow me", and walked through the entryway into the massive, acoustically fine-tuned, amphitheater. It worked well. Twenty-five awestruck tourist sat in the upper left corner

1 *Hegeb* in Hebrew נֶגֶב from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, <05045> AV 112x "south country" Gen.13:1,3 from an unused Hebrew root meaning to be parched. (this word would be rehearsed on several occasions, especially when we were in Southern Judah, the wilderness called the parched south...*negeb* נֶגֶב).

of the 4,000 seat theater which is a center of entertainment to this day.

Pastor Bill Theissen came to the center of our little group and opened his Bible to Acts 10. With passion and zeal Pastor Theissen taught how Peter left Jappa and came to Caesarea to preach to the house of Cornelius, salvation through grace. And here we stand in the same town where that door was thrown open to Gentiles. We stand here as Gentiles, saved by grace. “It’s hard for me to imagine that God would do that to save the likes of me... Thank you, Father that you opened that door. Thank you, that you saved such a wretch as me.”



That truth gripped our hearts. Tears wet our eyes and a silent, holy rejoicing lifted from this group of believers. Pastor Lee took a moment to polish and crystallize the praise and worship. But eventually schedule, and our guide Eli, directed us down through the amphitheater seats. As we went, Bev and I took a moment to pull aside and thank the Lord who brought us back to Israel, back here where we could sit and savor precious moments like these, where we could rejoice, and see what it does to the first time visiting believer,... No, I guess, what it does to every believer that steps onto this holy ground.

We gathered out on Herod's artificial breakwater, at least on the parts that remained above water after 2,023 years. God raised up a psychotic narcissist, and gave him a propensity to build unbelievable and impossible things. God is not above

using people like that, and Satan is not below using people like that. As an engineer, I have supposed that God didn't want his only begotten Son to come and manifest himself in a paltry, half asped² rebuilt temple that had been desecrated by Satan and a villainous psychotic narcissist named Anticus of Syria (241 BC – 187 BC). And so God raised up his own psychotic narcissist named Herod. And Herod, calling himself “The Great”, made the Jerusalem temple one of the wonders of the world. That’s what I suppose. Here

2 There is actually a wood handled wood working plane called an A.S.P. And when a wood worker did not use this tool well, or he only did one side of a board, it was called “half-asped”. The phrase quickly got misspelled universally. See picture of wood handled A.S.P below.

at Caesarea, Herod was in training for building great and impossible things³, and so he did.

And so it was that Eli pointed out to us the ancient harbor ruins with two amazing artificial sea walls that Herod built, plus the foundations of his stupendous palace that stood in the harbor, and the unbelievable freshwater 8' deep swimming pool, built in the sea, and filled via 10 miles of aqueduct, an engineering marvel to this day, bringing in water from the springs north east of the city.



But wait, there's more.

Found at the entry of Herod's Palace was a damaged block of carved limestone now called the Pilate Stone. Its inscription says that Pontius Pilate had built a "Tiberium". Evidently it was some structure honoring the Roman emperor Tiberius, who ruled from AD 14 to AD 37. Such an archaeological mention of Pontius Pilate was quite momentous to the half-infidels, trying to keep the full infidels at bay. A Bible believer might-ought-to get a little more excited about it than we do, but it is the Holy Spirit of



God that confirms the authenticity and superb accuracy of God's Holy Word, not so much the archaeologist's shovel.

But wait, there's more. As we came back to shore, as it were, out of Herod's Palace foundations, Eli showed us a recently

3 An approximate timeline for Herod The Great's construction projects is: Herod, born 77 BC, reigned as the Roman Jewish client king of Judea 37–4 BC, and built 15 palaces; he built a Masada Palace, 37 through 10 BC; the Jericho Wadi Qelt Palace, 35 through 4 BC; Caesarea, 22 through 10 BC; and the Rebuilt Temple, with the extended Temple Mount we see today, 20 through 10 BC, just in time for Christ, the King of Glory.

excavated room that was very likely a prison cell. Since that was very likely, Acts 23:35 very likely put the Apostle Paul in this very spot, ... yeah, in this very room!

Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. 34 And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; 35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall⁴ (Acts.23:33-35).

As we left Herod's Palace, and headed towards Herod's hippodrome, we stopped for a photo op at the Roman Head⁵. Who



could resist the opportunity to sit on such a royal throne and get a picture when it was 2,023 years old? Evidently not very many. ...

En vogue with Roman philosophy, bread plus entertainment, plus entertainment, plus entertainment, Herod built a hippodrome; the gambling and Sin City equivalent of the horse track of our day. This hippodrome, at Caesarea, is the best preserved of its kind, could seat up to 20,000 spectators, and was predominantly used for chariot racing. Our guide Eli summarized all that went on

4 See the extended Strong's Concordance study below, "A note about the Greek word Praetorium."

5 "The Head" is a 15th century nautical term referring to the bow or fore part of a ship. The ship's toilet was typically placed at the head of the ship near the base of the bowsprit, where splashing water served to naturally clean the toilet area. It thus became a common practice to call the toilet, the head. There is a portable toilet outlet in Upstate NY called "Ed's Head". You cannot imagine how much I hate their name.

here physically, and then our guide Pastor Lee Pickett summarized all that went on here spiritually. Society, today, does not differ greatly from this Roman city's sin filled, entertainment centered, situation. The wickedness of man is still great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually (cf Gen6:5). People need the Lord. Pastor Lee lead the group in prayer, and with a strong challenge that we need to be witnesses (Matt.28:19-10, Mrk.16:15, Luk.24:46-48, Jn.20:21, Acts.1:8, Great Commission referenced 5 times), and we need to be soul winners (Ps.126:6, Prv.11:30, Dan.12:3). People need the Lord.



We wandered back towards the bus, which would carry us to Mount Carmel.

A note about the Greek word Praetorium, in Acts.23:35 “Herod's judgment hall.”

Acts.23:35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in **Herod's judgment hall <4232>**.

From Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: 4232 πραιτώριον praitorion AV-judgment hall 4, hall of judgment 1, common hall 1, praetorium 1, palace 1; 8 times total. Def. "head-quarters" in a Roman camp, the tent of the commander-in-chief OR the palace in which the governor or procurator of a province resided. Its eight uses in Scripture:

*Mt 27:27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into **the common hall <4232>**, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.*

*Mr 15:16 And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called **Praetorium <4232>**; and they call together the whole band.*

*Joh 18:28 Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto **the hall of judgment <4232>**: and it was early; and they themselves went not into **the judgment hall <4232>**, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.*

*Joh 18:33 Then Pilate entered into **the judgment hall <4232>** again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?*

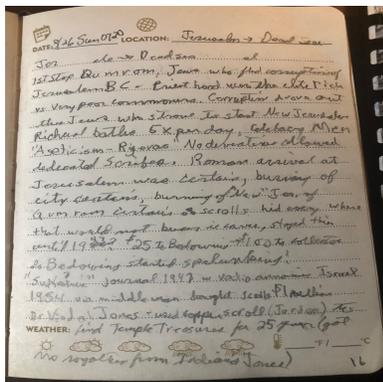
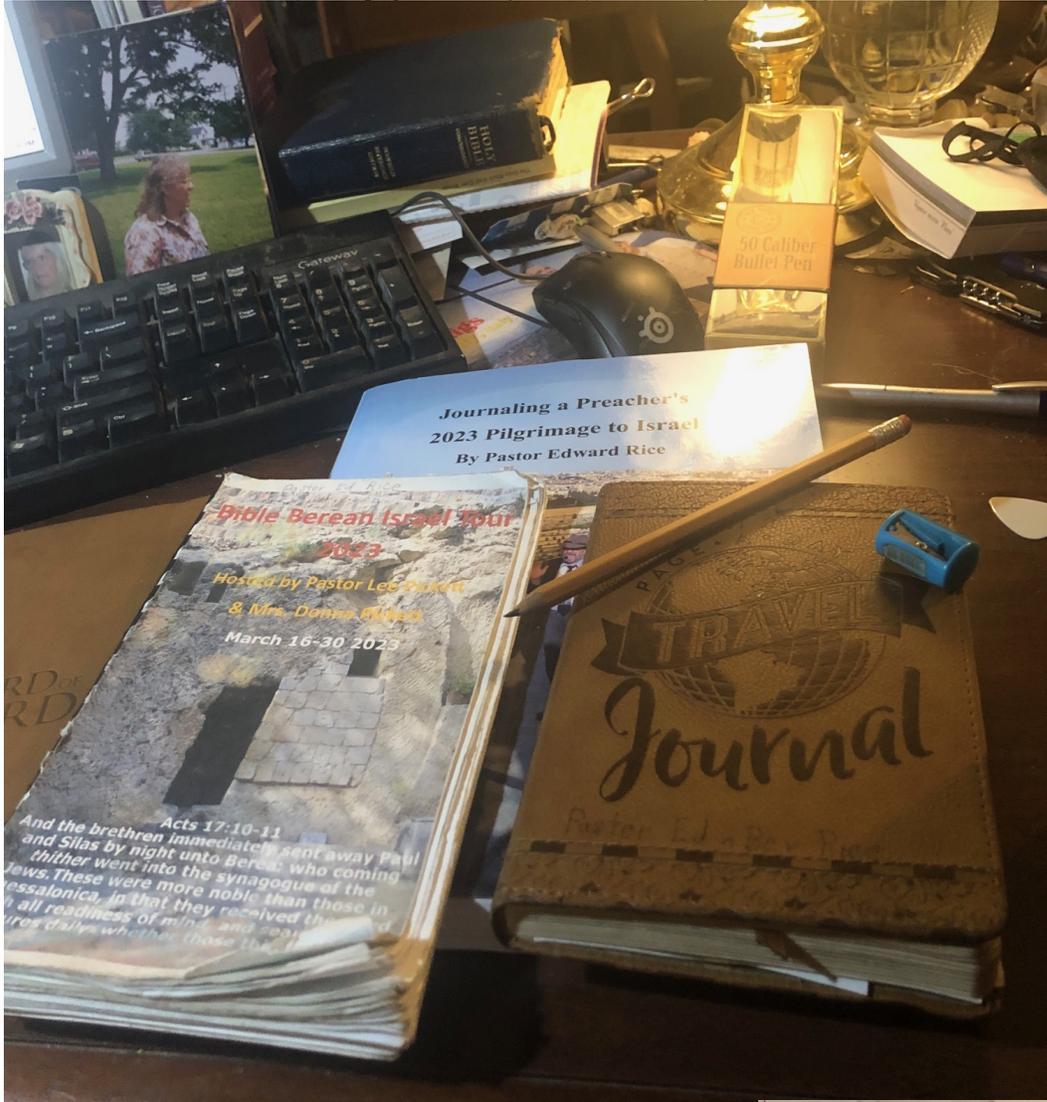
*Joh 19:9 And went again into **the judgment hall <4232>**, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer.*

*Ac 23:35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in **Herod's judgment hall <4232>**.*

*Php 1:13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in **all the palace <4232>**, and in all other places;*

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance is a very effective tool for rightly dividing the Word of Truth.





It has been a journey, a journaling journey. From 21 pages of scribbled notes in a “Page a Day Travel Journal”, I hand wrote 150 pages of narrative, dictated them into an iPhone weekly, made corrections, formatted them into Half Shekel Journals, added photos, made corrections, distributed them, proof-read with Bev and made corrections, formatted them into a book, proof-read with Bev and made corrections, published them in a first print, proof-read with Bev and made corrections, and voila out comes “Journaling a Preacher's 2023 Pilgrimage to Israel” by Pastor Edward Rice, ISBN 978-1-304-60900-7, List Price: \$33.00 + S/H \$6 + Tax \$2 = approx \$41 ea., Book Size: US Letter (8.5 x 11 in / 216 x 279 mm), Page Count: 272 Pages Interior Color: Color Standard Paper Type: 60# White, Book Binding: Paperback Cover Finish: Glossy. Awesome.

