



The Half Shekel Journals of 2022 by Pastor Ed Rice
#06 Wed 2 Nov am Judean Wilderness; Jericho Road

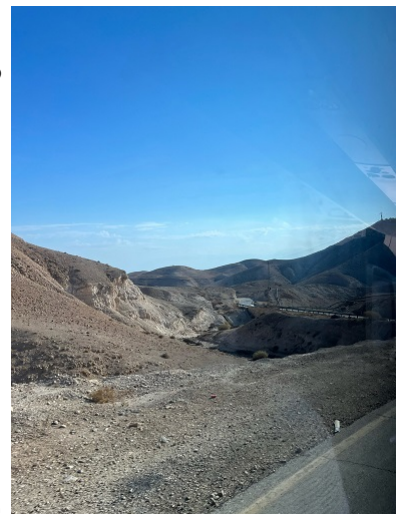
I am always up before dawn, Beverly, not so much. It was dark, and my dumb phone disagreed with my smart phone as to what time it was. The bathroom light showed my Casio watch agreeing with my Visi smart phone. I knew my watch was wrong; so it was 4:00 am in Jerusalem. I thought it ironic that my dumb phone knew to change time zones, and my smart phone did not. I turned off the Kyocera flip phone and put it in my suitcase. I would just add seven hours to my Casio and Visi phone for my time here in Israel.



When at home in upstate New York I would load my wood stove, load my pellet stove, and then hit my study at 4 am and work till dawn. Beverly would sleep till dawn, steam a serving of green leafy vegetables for me, and we would meet at 9 AM over a cup of coffee for Bible reading and prayer. I was amazed that at the Dan Hotel, here in Jerusalem, I had adapted to the seven hour time change so well, and hit my study, in the corner desk of our room, at 4 AM Israeli time. (Our 9 am



Bible and prayer time had neatly switched to 9 pm last night. We met in the hotel's luxurious foyer and read our Bibles aloud with a pianist playing classical Bach in the background. We are systematically reading our Bibles aloud, Genesis to Maps, via a chronological schedule I made and posted on our website. I think every Christian should; and know every family is commanded to. (cf Deut.6:6-9))



“Be on the bus at 7:30,... Not making your way towards



the bus,... ON the bus.” Pastor was quite emphatic. Breakfast was amazing, completely Kosher, and available in the fourth floor dining room at 0600. We eloquently dined with Shane, Kathy, Micah, Harrison, Elaine and Phyllis. I love the Kosher breakfasts in Israel. It meant that meat and dairy were not prepared together, consequently vegetables were served with everything. There was no steak n eggs, sausage or bacon. I had a cheese omelet, cinnamon roll, toast and coffee. The salad bar was loaded with vegetables and olives and hummus, cold fish parts, and hummus, fruit and hummus, and did I mention hummus? It was everywhere. We were on the bus at 0730. We all were; Praise the Lord.



Joe was excited and passionate about our day. That's what tour guides are. It was contagious and we were all in a very susceptible state, that's what tour guides do! Eiad, bus driver extraordinaire, backed the 40 foot Irizar out of the hotel lot, down the circular entryway and up a short alley before he hit first gear, and launched us into streaming traffic. Someone needs to tip this guy. Joe stood in the front gripping a microphone in one hand and a bus guide rail

in the other. "We are about to enter a tunnel that takes us out of Jerusalem and plunges us into the Judean Desert,... Be sure and watch the contrast on both sides of this tunnel." Sure enough busy streets opened into a green suburbia until the bus approached the Mount Scopus tunnel on Highway One (31°47'23"N 35°14'48"E thank you iPhone iPhotos). That tunnel plunged us into the stark Judean Wilderness which would be our topic for the whole day, day three of the adventure.



Joe was right to call out the "into-the-tunnel" versus the "out-of-the-tunnel" experience. The barren wilderness spread in every direction that one looked, and continued for the ten miles that we traveled down Highway One, until we came to the Museum of the Good Samaritan. We went another two miles on the nice highway through the barren wilderness and then turned on a winding curving narrow Road called Wadi Alquait. We had turned at

Mitzpe Yeriho (literally Jericho lookout) and entered the Al-Kelt Nature Preserve on the Prat River. We were on the Jericho Road, it was only a five mile walk to Jericho and a twelve mile drive back to Jerusalem. Our drive down the Wadi Alquait taught us what the wilderness and the Jericho Road really looked like in Jesus's day.

Pictures and topographical maps can't really capture "desert wilderness" as found on this five mile stretch of Jericho Road. Ongoing glimpses out windows on either



side of the tour bus were effective, but getting out, and making our way up a narrow craggy rock path that topped at the edge of a gorge overlooking Mar Jaris nailed it. The map showed Mar Jaris to be Saint George, and it was described by Joe as a monastery.

We stepped off the luxury bus into this hostile environment only to be accosted by an aggressive swarm of Bedouin peddlers throwing prayer shawls around our women folk. I grabbed my wife's arm, pulled her out from under two prayer shawls, and as we ran



past them and their tiny burrow we found a little path heading up the craggy mount. We only held this leadership position for a short time as folks glided past us on the narrow trail. We finally brought up the rear and joined them in an outcropping alcove at the top.

When the Bible says that Jesus left Galilee and went up to Jerusalem I never envisioned this five mile stretch of mountainous path leaving Jericho nor the twelve mile trek across this wilderness to get to Bethany. Few have. If Jesus made this trek for two or three feast days per year for his three year ministry¹, that puts him on this very road up to twelve or eighteen times in his public ministry.

Further, remember when David, fleeing from his son Absalom, was warned, “*Lodge not this night in the planes of the wilderness, but speedily pass over*” (2Sam.17:16), he went through this five mile rocky crag before passing over Jordan (verse 22).

Our guide Joe reminded us of the several usages of this Jericho Road in the Bible, and in its history. He actually, but kindly, addressed our ignorance of what such a wilderness trek entailed and challenged us to never forget the barrenness of this land when we read Bible accounts involving this



1 As a good harmony of the life of Christ analysis shows cf-my Systematic Theology Vol 04 page 147

Judean Wilderness. He transferred his Whisper to Pastor Chalie who began an impassioned explanation with the most unusual request.

“In order to fully capture this wilderness experience, and learn what it is like to listen



to God, I want us to sit in perfect silence for a full five minutes.” Some of us were challenged to realize he was sincere, but the crowd, sitting here in an outdoor arena of stone, overlooking a great canyon wilderness that stretched towards Jericho, fell into a total silence. Some of us watched the silence fall, and tried to capture it on camera until the shutters waxed too loud. Silence is an amazing thing. Deer hunters know it, but only rarely experience it in a

public settings.

The little burrow cooperated fully. Birds sang softly, and rocks whispered. Five minutes in total silence is longer than anybody knows. It was real. It was wilderness. It invoked meditation.

Pastor broke the silence with a loud yet very hushed prayer. It was that because, for a moment, even for five moments, this group of fifty, all together, were consumed with silence. Consider, if you would, what it means to be “consumed with silence.” On this mountain side, in the Judean Wilderness, overlooking a monastery, built on the Jericho Road, we were... consumed with silence.

By definition “consumed” is, “wasted; burned up; destroyed; dissipated; squandered; expended.”²

With nine preachers in attendance those five moments on a mountain side did not need to be squandered and burned up. Any one of us, indeed anyone there present, could have filled a moment with a profound observation. I'll suppose that each one of



us pondered, in the first shocking moment, what could have been said. If we but dared to break the silence. Thus the first moment was consumed in silence.

As humans, 90% of our time is consumed in pondering what we will say next. That occupation is one thing that makes us bad listeners. Silence is the enemy of ongoing

² Noah Webster 1828, sv “consumed”.

conversation, and it must be destroyed or dissipated. Consuming silence is different than being consumed with silence.

Job's three friends came to encourage him and the Bible reports, “so they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him” (Job 2:13).

Doubtless they spent the first day pondering what they should say, if they dared break the silence.

I spent the second moment on the mountain side of the Judean Wilderness observing what others were doing with this silence. I was critical of some who were obviously not



consuming it right. “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, ...” I have often started that prayer, but Jesus's story of the Pharisee who prayed it “within himself” (Luke 18), keeps me from finishing it out loud. I'd suppose that all of us



have started it, sure enough.

Through the pages of his book I once went with a young preacher into the study of an old and wise evangelist. The two came together so that the younger could observe the private effectual prayer time of the seasoned preacher. When he arrived on

schedule, the evangelist was prostrate on the study floor, forehead resting on the hardwood. The younger joined him in that position, not a word yet spoken. The young man listened to the elder's breathing for ten minutes. He glimpsed at his watch, adjusted his position slightly, and listened for another ten minutes. After the third moment of silence the old preacher stirred slightly and said with a pleading power, “Oh God...”,

there was a long pause before the elder twice repeated his utterance...

I need not rehearse more of that account for us to reflect here on what it is to be consumed with silence. In the third moment of our time on that mountain I began to pray, and my prayer began "Oh God. ...". I then listened carefully for his response.

To muse is to ponder in deep thought. To be amused is to be so taken in trivial thinking as to be without any deep thought. We humans consume a lot of time in amusements. The rest, I suppose, is consumed in pondering what we will say next. We don't spend much time being consumed in silence.



Luke 9:18 says, "*And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him ...*". Pastor Charlie took a moment on the side of the mountain, overlooking a monastery, and the old Jericho Road, to teach what it is to be consumed with

silence. It was time well spent, it was alone time for prayer, but more so for listening for God. It is no coincidence that he reassembled the group by beginning a prayer. His prayer began, "Oh God ..."

Sent from my iPhone



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#07 Wed 2 Nov Good Samaritan, En Gedi

Pastor Chalie, on the summit overlooking the rugged terrain of the Jericho Road took us to the very scene of Jesus' Good Samaritan Parable.



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#08 Wed 2 Nov

Masada, and the Dead Sea.
Masada, in Hebrew Mits Ada?

