



The Half Shekel Journals of 2023 by Pastor Ed Rice
#2301 Thur-Fri 16-17 Mar Flight to Israel, Tel Aviv, Joppa

Now Joshua was old and stricken in years: and the LORD said, unto him, thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed (Joshua 13:1).

After three score and ten years on God's green earth, he has allowed me to visit the land that he loves on two holy pilgrimages to Israel in my 71st year of life. I am old and stricken in years, and there remains yet very much that needs to be written down. I have bought 24 pencils containing the star of David. My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have seen touching his land, his city, and his people: these pencils are to be the pen of a ready writer (cf Ps.45:1).



Rachel Rice our Driver to Newark Airport



LORD, Father, touch, my pen, Lord, touch my health and my mind, Lord, touch my proof-reader, touch her health and mind I pray. LORD God, we have walked where your only begotten Son has walked; we have prayed where your only begotten Son prayed; read now my plea, hear now my prayer, let me write of all thy wonderful works, which I have seen, and my ears have heard.

“Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works, which thou has done, and thy thoughts which are to usward: they cannot be reckoned up in order onto thee: if I would declare and speak of

them, they are more than can be numbered“ (Ps.40:5).

I expect my Lord Jesus Christ will return before I finish this documentation, even before I wear out this pencil. I trust that you know about his eminent return. I pray that your soul is ready to meet him as Saviour and not as Judge.



John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ... 36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but

is passed from death unto life.



Rom.3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

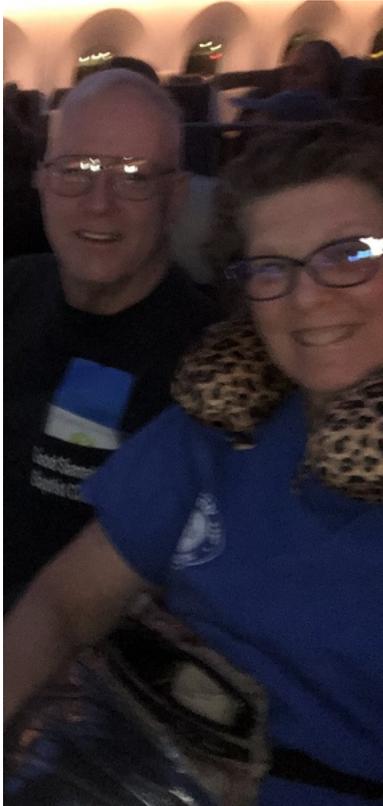
Rom 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth

confession is made unto salvation. ... 13 For whosoever shall call

upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.¹ (Jn.3:16-18, 36, 5:24, Rom.3:23, 5:8, 6:23, 10:9-10, 13).



Israel is different in March than in November. March closes the latter rain² just before Passover, and November closes the first, or former rain.³ So both can get one wet, and both might drop into the 50s (deg F).⁴



At our home on Waneta Lake NY, per recommendation of Eli, and Lee, we packed an umbrella and rain coat and drove our, just off the show room, 2011 Dodge Grand Caravan 300 miles to Solid Rock Baptist Church, Berlin NJ. The FL wheel bearing growled for the last 100 miles, and trembled for the last 20, but we made it to Bliss' home where our granddaughter Rachel Rice lives. We attended two days of Vision Baptist College classes with our graduating senior Micah Rice, (graduation April 27th) and then, voila, Rachel had us at the Newark International Airport for our 2100 – 1320⁵, El Al, Israel flight #26, seat 41B & C, 10 ½ hour flight, with a 6 hour time zone change.

The flight was excellent, two kosher meals, lots of walking room, in the back there was even an open exercise area (well stretching area anyway), and ready access to

1 The Holy Bible.

2 “latter rain” is “spring rain” <04456> from “Strong's Exhaustive Concordance”.

3 Strong's <03138> יורה yowreh ,AV-first rain 1, former 1; 2x, Deut.11:14, Jer.5:24, early rain, autumn shower; 04175 מורה mowreh AV-former rain 2, rain 1; 3x, Ps.84:6, Joel.2:23, (early) rain.

4 Details about the former and latter rain were eloquently given by Johanna, the Bible Gardens guide encountered on a subsequent adventure in this trip.

5 If you don't know military time, just subtract 12 from numbers bigger than 12.

restrooms. Even my friend, Dave Johnson, with his areophobia, relaxed and enjoyed the flight.

What they called Day 2 actually began at the Newark New Jersey, 6 PM check in which was midnight Israel time; the day count is generally lost in some kind of jet-lag and so I will not use it in this journal; watch the dates instead. Israel tours do not count in jet-lag, so they often advertise their tours to be one or two days longer than they really are. We arrived at the David Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv as promised, and we were escorted through all the security stations with the excellent provisions arranged by International Heritage Tours (info@ihtours.com).

At the airport exit we met up with eleven Canadians who had flown in from Toronto, and our total count of twenty five pilgrims was complete. Bev and I knew four of these pilgrims previously, the other nineteen were fast found Christian friends.

Pastor Lee Pickett was as giddy as a schoolboy as he introduced everyone in the group. He was seeing a long, awaited vision, and years of dedicated planning, culminate into reality in an airport parking lot. Pastor Lee choked back tears and gave an impassioned charge about what he expected for us all in the next thirteen days. He led in a prayer and praise, and then introduced Eli Talmi our guide.

Eli gave a hearty Hebrew greeting and a warm welcome, asked us to please follow

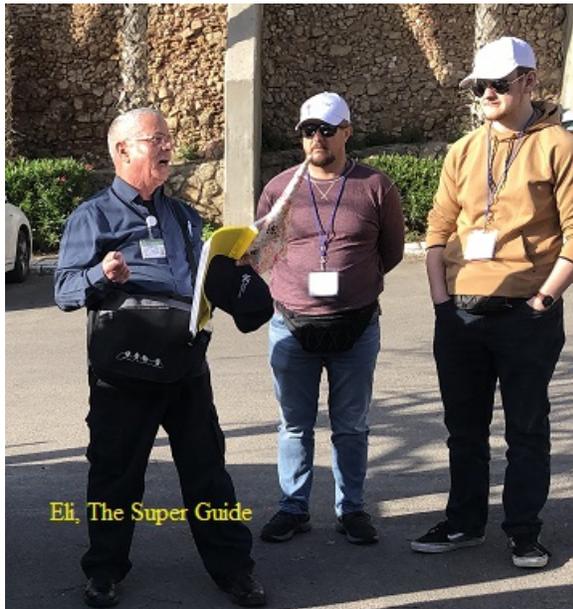


him quickly, and charged off across the tour bus laden parking lot. At the awaiting King Long 12M Coach, 49 seat, made in China, tour bus, Eli Talmi introduced our exceptional bus driver, Costia (no English, and from Russia). We drag our luggage to the belly of the bus, climbed aboard the luxurious coach, and thus it began.

“Prov.3:5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

Eli Talmi, our guide, and Costia our bus driver, sprang into full gear simultaneously. Costia was negotiating through crowded

airport parking lots and then narrow streets of Tel Aviv with a 40 foot tour bus, Eli was detailing what this land would have looked like in 1861 when Mark Twain visited, and wrote his book *“Innocents Abroad.”* Eli quoted a portion of the book illustrating the barrenness of this land back then.



Mark Twain's whole book *“Innocents Abroad”* is available for your reading at Gutenberg⁶ but an article which gives the information referenced and quoted by our Guide Eli, is found in *“Mark Twain’s unwittingly prophetic vision for the State of Israel”* by Tuly Weisz (founder of Israel365, which connects Evangelical Christian Zionists with Israel); it is quoted below.

“Mark Twain’s unwittingly prophetic vision for the State of Israel” By Tulu Weisz Published: Sep. 23, 2017⁷

At his peak, Mark Twain was probably the most popular American celebrity of his time. What few realize is that it was an unlikely trip to the Holy Land that established his fame as an author.

A

century and a half ago, Twain traveled on an excursion with his American church group to Europe and the Middle East. The material he gathered, first published in a San Francisco newspaper, formed the basis of the humorous book that made him hugely popular: *The Innocents Abroad*.

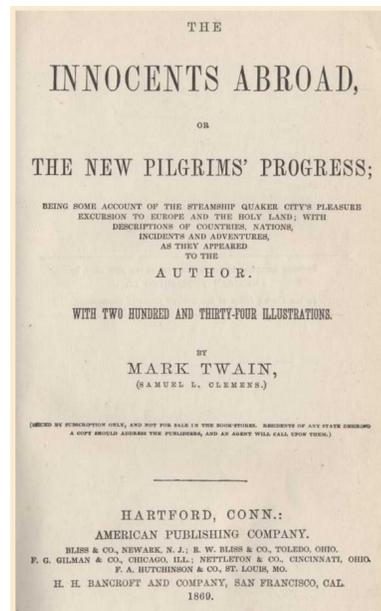
But while in the Middle East, Twain, whose real name was Samuel Clemens, was not focused on the book he would eventually write, but another, holier work: the Bible.

While in Palestine, Twain took a piece of stationery with *“Mediterranean Hotel”* printed on the top just above the date, September 24, 1867, and wrote to a Mr. Elias, a local book-binder in the Old City, the following instructions: “Elias, fix up the little Bible I selected (I don’t want any other) – the one that has backs made of balsa-wood from the Jordan, oak from Abraham’s tree at Hebron, olivewood from the Mount of Olives, and whatever the other stuff was – ebony, I think. Put on it this inscription: ‘Mrs.

Jane Clemens – from her son – Mount Calvary, Sept 24, 1867.’ Put ‘Jerusalem’ around on it loose, somewhere, in Hebrew, just for a flyer. Send it to our camp, near head of the valley of Hinnom – the third tent you come to if you leave the city by the Jaffa Gate – the first if you go out by the Damascus Gate. Yours, Sam L. Clemens.”

The King James Bible published by the British and Foreign Bible Society was an ironic choice of gift for the man who famously quipped, “Faith is believing what you know ain’t so.”

A natural skeptic, Twain was not taken by the splendor of the Holy Land. He wrote irreverently about the country’s legendary sites. The Sea of Galilee was, “a solemn, sailless, tintless lake, as unpoetical as any bath-tub on earth.” The Church of the Nativity



- 6 Mark Twain's *“THE INNOCENTS ABROAD”* is available in full 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
- 7 <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/unto-the-nations-505760> accessed 3/28/23

was “tricked out in the usual tasteless style observable in all the holy places of Palestine.”

Throughout *Innocents Abroad*, Twain explicitly states that the area was desolate and devoid of inhabitants. His group entered Palestine from the north, passing through such sites as the Sea of Galilee, the Banias, Nazareth, Jenin and Nablus.

Riding on horseback through the Jezreel Valley, Twain observed, “There is not a solitary village throughout its whole extent – not for 30 miles in either direction. There are two or three small clusters of Bedouin tents, but not a single permanent habitation. One may ride 10 miles, hereabouts, and not see 10 human beings.”

He continues, “Of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the prince... Can the curse of the Deity beautify a land? “Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies.”

Twain was not alone in his poor impression of the land of milk and honey. Historians and travelers alike made similarly dreary observations over the centuries.

Six hundred years before Twain’s visit, another famous visitor with a nom de plume was struck by Jerusalem’s desolation. Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, known as Nachmanides (1194-1270), fled Christian Spain for the Land of Israel. After a long and perilous journey, Nachmanides arrived at the Port of Acre before traveling to Jerusalem in 1267, where he couldn’t even find nine other Jews to pray with. He wrote to his son, “Many are Israel’s forsaken places, and great is the desecration. The more sacred the place, the greater the devastation it has suffered. Jerusalem is the most desolate place of all.”

Nevertheless, the sage, whose Torah commentary is still studied, had an altogether surprising interpretation of the desolation he encountered. He saw it as a blessing in disguise.



Commenting on a verse in Leviticus that describes the curses that will befall the land of Israel, Nachmanides wrote that the devastation “constitutes a good tiding, proclaiming that

during all our exiles, our land will not accept our enemies... Since the time that we left it, [the land] has not accepted any nation or people, and they all try to settle it... This is a great proof and assurance to us.”

The 13th-century scholar wrote that Israel will remain desolate until the Jewish People assume control. But when the people of Israel finally return to the land of Israel, the region will once again flourish thanks to Divine providence.

As the most famous eyewitness to the 19th-century desolation of Palestine, Twain was an unwitting collaborator of Nachmanides. Innocents Abroad brought global attention to the



sorry state of Palestine, and proved that Palestine was a land without a people for a people without a land, just 15 years before the First Aliya and subsequent waves of Jewish immigration.

Half a century after Twain’s visit, the Balfour Declaration was issued in 1917. Fifty years later the Six Day War was won. And today, in 2017 – 50 years after that – Israel continues to flourish, moving in leaps and bounds away from Twain’s “sackcloth and ashes.”

At various points throughout his journey, Twain criticized his fellow “American vandals abroad” for the petty buying and selling of holy land trinkets and religious artifacts. So what compelled this skeptical father of American literature to buy an olive wood-covered Bible for his

mother? Twain might not have known it at the time, but by reporting on the “curses” of Palestine during his visit, he was lending credence to the biblical passages he famously mocked in his book, prophecies which were fulfilled less than a few decades later.

Likewise, Twain’s decision to purchase a Bible over any other trinket is evidence that he was moved by the religious holiness and spirit of the land.

The author, TULY WEISZ, is founder of Israel365, which connects Evangelical Christian Zionists with Israel and strives to be a light unto the nations.

The bus pitched to the right swerved around some horn honking offenders, pitched to the left and broke hard as a car stopped for no apparent reason. Eli gripped the rail in the front of his seat with one hand, and the mic in his other, and didn’t react or break his stride. “In 1948 there was a major change in Israel, in fact, May 14, 2023, will mark a celebration of our 75th anniversary of that change. David Ben-Gurion (in Hbrw בני-גוריון (דיד) (1886 to 1973) , the first Prime Minister of Israel, informed us then that Israel’s

future lies in the *Negeb* (in Hebrew נֶגֶב⁸), (this saying would be rehearsed on several occasions, especially when we were in Southern Judah, the wilderness called the parched south...*negeb* נֶגֶב).

Costia slid the 38 foot tour bus into a 40 foot parking slot and the doors opened only inches from the curb. Both Eli and Pastor Lee were beaming with excitement, “Okay, this is our first stop, we are now going to walk on the streets of Joppa, just as we promised.”

In 1950 Tel Aviv, (a tel, being a tel, and Aviv, being the spring season, the name meant to capture the old springing into new life) merged with Joppa⁹. Joppa was the strategic Biblical port city where Cedar trees were ported in from Lebanon on their way to Jerusalem (2Chron.2:16, Ezra 3:7); consequently Joppa has been continuously inhabited for well over 3000 years! Jonah found it useful in his unsuccessful flight from God’s call in 860 BC. Today we were only going back two thousand years to visit a house by the seaside, very possibly the house of one Simon the Tanner.



An angel of God said to a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, “*Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do*” (Acts.10:4b-6).

8 Strong's Exhaustive Concordance “*Negeb*” <05045> AV 112x “south country” Gen.13:1,3 from an unused Hebrew root meaning to be parched.

9 Strong's Exhaustive Concordance <03305> יָפוֹ Yapho or יָפוֹהַ' Yaphow' {Ezr 3:7 } AV-Joppa 3, Japho 1; 4x Joppa or Japho= "beautiful".

At Simon the Tanner's house, Peter, on the housetop praying, fell into a trance, and saw a great sheet and a great vision. One can read that whole account in Acts 10. We thought of where we stood, here at the door of one Simon a tanner, but more so at the threshold of the gospel reaching into the souls of Gentiles. This was after Peter preached to, and saw the conversion of, thousands of Jews,(Acts 2–3), after the persecution began (ch.4), after Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, and were slain (ch.5), after the need for deacons arose (ch.6–7), after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (ch 9), and now in Acts chapter 10, God is keeping his promise that even the Gentiles will be given entry into the kingdom. We let all that sink in while standing at the door of a Joppa house by the sea.

The Tal by the Beach Hotel was exquisite; room 306 at 5:45 PM Israel time was a haven; the kosher buffet for supper at 6:15 PM was... Manna... Exodus 16:15 says *“when they saw it, they said one to another, it is Manna: for they wist not what it was.”*

Dusk set in Tel Aviv six hours before it got to Dundee New York, but an hour long hot soak in a tub, took away some of the backache and leg cramps from sitting on an airplane for 12 hours. We were in Israel! Five hours of solid sleep was not wasted on this pilgrim. Saturday, March 18 early, we would head north along the Mediterranean Sea. There would be much to see there.

