

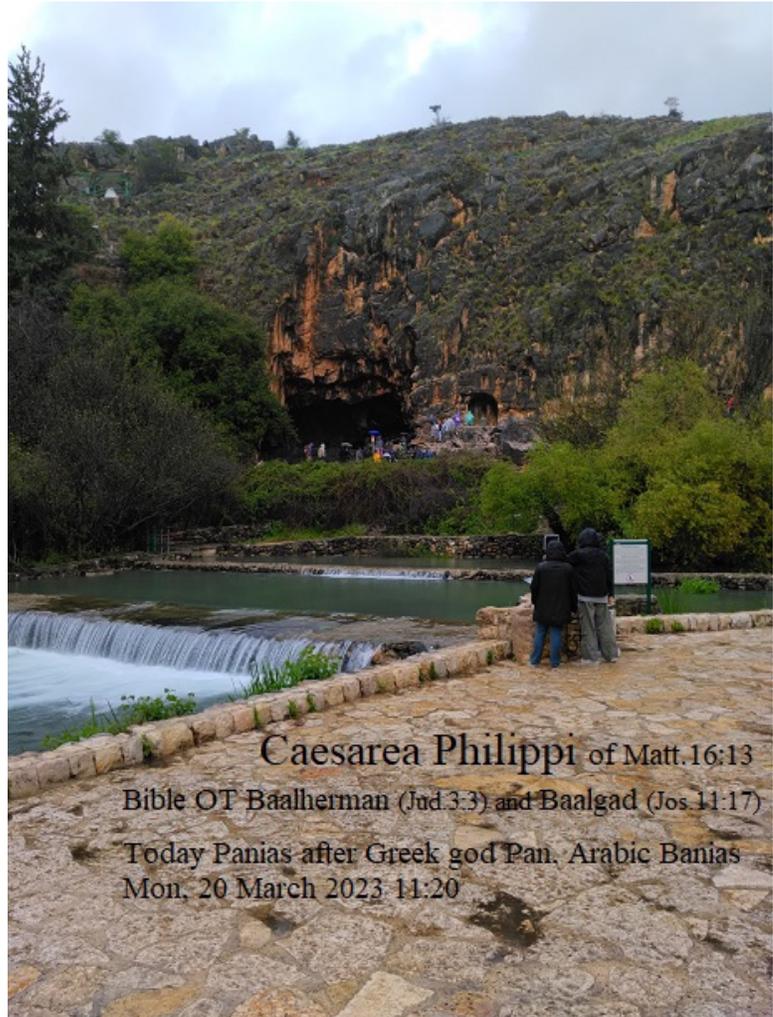


## The Half Shekel Journals of 2023 by Pastor Ed Rice

#2308 Mon 20 Mar Caesarea Philippi, Golan Mt Bental, Olive Factory

One thing about visiting Israel just before their Passover is you learn what the Bible means about the “latter rains” (One might logically think former rains are spring rains, latter rains are autumn rains, but they would be exactly backward in that logic). I suppose Eli our guide was the only one that remained appreciative of the ongoing latter rains we were seeing; Eli lived here and would see the next six months of Israel's semi-arid<sup>1</sup> climate pass without a drop of rain. God regularly used these two rainy seasons to communicate to his people. Jeremiah the prophet gave them one of God's clarifying rainy forecasts:

*Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? <sup>23</sup> But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. <sup>24</sup> Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest. <sup>25</sup> Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you (Jer.5:22-25).*



And also:*Hos.6:3 Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD:*

<sup>1</sup> The northern part of Israel is characterized by a Mediterranean climate, while the southern part is arid, with a narrow, semi-arid strip in between. Israel's climate is characterized by hot summers and mild winters. Rainfall varies significantly across the country and from year to year. This insight was carefully gleaned from the lying deceiving climatechangeology portal called "Climatology - Climate Change Knowledge Portal World Bank" <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org>. From a more reliable source: Israel has a wide variety of climatic conditions, caused mainly by the country's diverse topography. There are two distinct seasons: a cool, rainy winter (October–April) and a dry, hot summer (May–September). From Climate of Israel - Britannica <https://www.britannica.com>

*his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the **latter** and **former** rain unto the earth.*

And again: *Joel.2:23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the **former** rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the **former** rain, and the **latter** rain in the first month.*

For our present circumstance God's latter rains were hindering our tour of Caesarea Philippi, even as they dampened our visit to Tel-Dan. “*In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you*” of 1Th.5:18 came to mind, but I did not have the wherewithal to say it out loud just now. We stood under umbrellas staring at the huge cliff face and cave entrance located in the Herman Stream Nature Reserve and called “Ein-Panias” meaning the city of Pan, the god of the wild and companion of the nymphs. In Bible times it was called Caesarea Philippi and Jesus came into the “coasts” of Caesarea Philippi, indicating he came to the “edge” of the city and did not necessarily enter into the Roman city.

As we stared through the rain at the sight, our guide Eli clarified that Jews were not allowed to enter the Roman city dedicated to the false god Pan. He talked of the Pan-Flute legend wherein a beautiful nymph spurned the devil god Pan's advances and prayed to the river gods who transformed her into “Syrinx” meaning reeds.

Folklore supposed the devil god played reed flutes the rest of his life. But that is innocent folklore compared to what went on here at the mouth of this spring at the base of Mount Herman, only 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. This cave was thought to be a gateway to the underworld; the spring from its mouth was thought to be bottomless, and here



every kind of pagan, devilish sacrifice imaginable was made as a propitiation to appease the gods that controlled the Greek and Roman mind. Children, and goats were thrown into this bottomless spring to sink to their death and appease the devil's gods. The cliffs all around the cave's mouth were riddled with “sacred niches” cut into the stone to hold every kind of graven image, teraphim, and idol that pagan, heathen, unregenerate minds could conceive. Here the pagans burnt incense. Here they filled this cave with the blood of innocents.

As God sent Judah into the Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah the prophet, in 605 BC, was sent to report that Israel was not guiltless of this type of paganism:

*Hear ye the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. 4*

*Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; 5 They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind:(Jer.19:3-5).*

We were at the base of Mount Hermon and looking into a cave mouth that was the largest spring feeding the Jordan River. The cold waters of this spring, flowing out of the cave, has been a hot-bed for pagan worship of false gods. In the Old Testament of the Bible it was called Baalherman (Judges 3:3, 1Chron.5:23) and Baalgad (Joshua 11:17, 12:7, 13:5), but it was later named Pania after the Greek god Pan. That's Pan with a "P". An open air sanctuary was built for Pan next to the cave.

Augustus Caesar gave this city to Herod the Great, who built a marble temple to Augustus. When Herod the Great died, in 4 BC, the city passed to his son Philip the Tetrarch, who rebuilt the city and changed the name to Caesarea Philippi. Philip made it his capital, and ruled the area until 33 AD. He depicted the Shrine of Pan on his coins, some of which have survived to this day.



Caesarea Philippi is called by several names today: Baniyas and Pania are the most common, and it turns out that Baniyas is just an Arab's pronunciation of Pania, Arabs have no "P" sound in their alphabet. Eli was fluent in giving a wealth of background about what we saw as we came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi. He alluded to every aspect of the paganism found at this bubbling spring and headwaters to the Jordan River. As the rains subsided Pastor Lee Pickett took the whisper microphone and highlighted how important this stop, in the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, was to understanding what Jesus said to his disciples at this very place.

*Mat.16:13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*

*Mrk.8:27 And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?*

If we open our Bible to Matthew 16, we can see the Biblical significance of why we were here today. Jesus came to the “coast of Caesarea Philippi”, he did not enter the city, ... probably stood right here where we were meeting. With the backdrop of this massive rock, pouring out its water, and all the pagan idolatry and false god worship present in the background, Jesus asked his disciples, “*Whom do men say that I the son of man am?*” Then he asked “*But whom say ye that I am?*” It was Simon Peter that answered and said,



“*Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God.*”

As non-Roman Bible believers, as non-catholic Bible believers, it is important to rightly divide the word of Truth in Jesus' paramount statement in verse 18. “*And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter (<4074> Petros, stone) and upon this rock (<4073> petra, rock, cliff or ledge) I will build my church ...*”. A good paraphrase is, “Peter, you're just a little stone, but on this rock, i.e. the truth that I am the Christ, the son of the living God, ... I will build my *ecclesia*, i.e. a called-out gathered together body of believers.”

But wait there's more: I can well picture the most pragmatic teacher to ever walk on earth as he gave a full 3 second pause, then swung his arm across all the pagan worship going on behind him and said slowly and emphatically, “*and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*”<sup>2</sup>

Standing in this spot, viewing that huge rock and hearing these Bible truths expounded has an impact on the mind that will not soon go away. It was good to be here in the coast of Caesarea Philippi. We had to forego the paths up to the caves mouth, and those around the pagan god's “sacred niches” because they were glistening with fresh rain and very slippery. The bus was loading, and we were presently right on time for our Druze lunch stop. Who the Druze were, and what all they believed was covered succinctly in half shekel 2303. This lunch was a timely pleasant stop and a good deal, I think, ... \$16.

Mount Bental is one of Israel's favorite peaks to visit because of its panoramic views of the Golan, even seeing all the way to Syria. Pastor Lee's booklet “Bible Berean Israel Tour” says, “Our next stop is Mt Bental to view into Syria and also the modern history of this great nation Israel. Here, at the Valley of Tears, God wrought a miracle in October, 1973 as just twelve Israeli tanks stopped hundreds, and saved the life of the nation. (Jer.31:6-12, Isa.43:4-7)”

*For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God. 7 For thus saith the LORD; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the*

2 Some have speculated that this water springing cave was called “The Gates of Hell”, previous to Jesus's arrival here, but there is no such evidence. It would seem much more likely, to this Baptist preacher, that God labeled it such in his son's declaration, and that the label stuck around after that.

*nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. 8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. 9 They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. 10 Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. 11 For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. 12 Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all (Jer.31:6-12).*

*Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. 5 Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; 6 I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; 7 Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him (Isa.43:4-7).*



During the Yom Kippur War in 1973, one of Israel's largest tank battles took place at the foot of Mt. Bental. The fierce battle earned the area below Mount Bental the name Valley of Tears. In 1974 a demilitarized zone was established between Syria and Israel and monitored by the UN.

This Golan region has a long and important history previous to the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

*Jos 21:27 And unto the children of Gershon, of the families of the Levites, out of the other half tribe of Manasseh they gave **Golan** in Bashan with her suburbs, to be a city of refuge for the slayer; ... .*

Golan of Bashan was a bordertown and subjected to “captivity,” as the name means in Hebrew. Ben Haddad of Damascus was defeated by King Ahab here, and it has been a war-torn area ever since. Eli was passionate as he described for us how from 1948 - 1967 Syria controled the Golan Heights, and used it as a military stronghold to randomly snipe at Israeli civilians in the Hula Valley below, forcing children to sleep in bomb shelters. In late 1966 a youth was killed by a landmine while playing football near the Lebanon border. Syria allowed Yasser Arafat's Fatah to carry out such attacks.



During the 1967 Six Day War, on June 9<sup>th</sup> Israel moved against Syrian forces on the Golan. By late afternoon on June 10<sup>th</sup>, Israel was in complete control of the Golan plateau. In the wide margin of my Bible, I have written:



In 1948 Israel was founded as a nation. The armistice gave them the wailing wall, now they were recognized as a nation. In 1956 after continual Arab attacks on its border, Israel overruns the Gaza strip and would advance all the way to Egypt, if not stopped by the action of the major powers. In 1967 Egyptian Nasser, armed to the teeth by Russia, and urged ahead by them, declares total Arab war against Israel. Israel's June 6th preemptive strike totally eliminates the Egyptian Air Force. Israel takes Jerusalem, their Holy of Holies, vowing never to retreat again (1948 only gave access to the Wailing Wall, now they had all of Jerusalem). They swept to the Jordan River valley, Jordan armies were

cut to bits. They advanced against Syria and Egypt, taking the Golan heights, Syria's strong post. In six short days Jordan demanded a ceasefire (against Russian advice). Thus in six days Israel increased her territory from 8,000 to 34,000 square miles, with 1,000 Israeli fatalities, and 35,000 Arab fatalities!

Six years later, in a surprise attack on Yom Kippur, the Syrians over ran the Golan Heights, before being driven back by the Israelis. Syria signed an agreement that left the Golan in Israel's hands. Peace processes faltered, and Syria renewed threats and made troop movements, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016, that Israel will never give up the Golan Heights. “It's time that the international community finally recognized that the Golan will remain forever under Israel's sovereignty.”

Eli filled in more details of the Yom Kippur war. The six day war had made Israel a little arrogant, and in 1973, on Yom Kippur, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 14,000 Syrian, Egyptian and some Iraqi forces overran the IDF with 1,260 Syrian T-62/64 tanks (vs 170 antiquated

WWII Israeli tanks). Avigdor Kahalani, commander of the Israeli tank battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, and war hero of the Six Day War where he was burned over 80% of his body, advanced the slogan, “Never Surrender!” Defense Minister Moshe Dayan (with his black eye patch) said to Golda Meir, “Golda, we have only a few tanks, should we use nukes?” Golda responded, “No, we will fight to the last bullet.” After four days, 1,260 T-62/64 tanks retreated before 170 Israeli tanks. “The lessons learned in the Yom Kippur War of 1973 are, 1) Never be arrogant, 2) Have faith, and 3) Practice, practice, practice.”



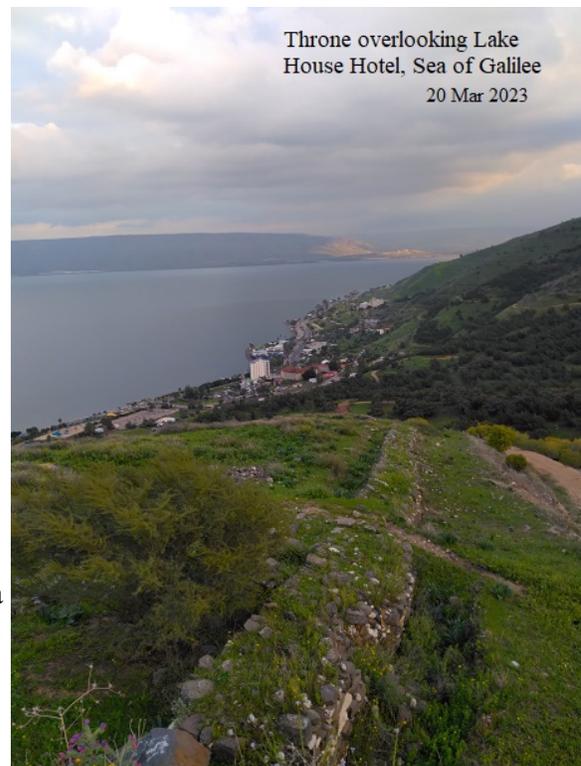
Trail to Throne  
Overlooking Tiberias, Israel  
20 Mar 2023 17:16

Today Israel has built thriving communities for Arabs, Druzes, Alawites<sup>3</sup>, and Jews in the Golan, but Syria has never signed a peace agreement with Israel. Visiting Mount Bental is a moving experience for any Israeli x-military, and any Israeli citizen is an Israeli x-military. In that Eli talked about it to visitors a couple times a month, he was especially impassioned during this visit. It rubbed off on all of us.

We never got to Kursi National Park ...Kursi is an archaeological site in the Golan Heights containing the ruins of a Byzantine monastery and identified by tradition as the site of Jesus' "Miracle of the Swine". Part of the archaeological site is now an Israeli national park. Instead we went to the Olive Factory.

What an interesting place; the tree in the entryway was 800 years old? and the wheel press 2000 years old? A short movie explained the uses and byproducts of the olive oil, as well as some very interesting things to learn about olive oil. The Talmon family moved from Tel Aviv in 1997 and began growing olive trees on their farm. They developed some “carved in stone” values of family, respect, honor, innovation, reliability, responsibility, and sustainability. And voila, here we are today.

There are some interesting things to be learned about olives. The difference between a green olive, and a black olive is a couple weeks on the olive tree. Black olives are ripened. Also, there is no such thing as “extra” virgin olive oil, even as there is no such thing as an “extra” virgin maiden.



Throne overlooking Lake  
House Hotel, Sea of Galilee  
20 Mar 2023

3 Oxford Dictionary, s.v. “alawites” a member of a Shiite Muslim group living mainly in Syria.

When olives are crushed it is critical that the pits are not crushed. They contain toxins that leach into the olive oil when pits are crushed. The first crushing, with no crushed pits, produces virgin olive oil. The second crushing, with some pits possibly crushed, produces just olive oil, and the third and fourth crushing, with substantial pit crushing, produces oil lamp grade olive oil, fit for burning. That brings us to the toxins in the pits, and the aged question, “What does one do with the tons of pits produced?” Turns out, the pits, that naturally fall under the olive tree, prevent other plants from growing there; and can, consequentially, be marketed as a kind of “all natural” weed killer. But wait there is more, the olive pit toxins are also kind of an “all natural” hand cleaner, found later to be a superb, and healthy skin cleaner, and later still, an effective beauty cream. Turns out, all these olive pit uses are as lucrative as the virgin olive oil produced to begin with.

We were walked through the family run factory and then sampled olive oils, spices and beauty products. The face and body scrub soaps made skin feel remarkably soft, and I don't think anybody made it through the outlet store with their wallet remained in their pocket / purse. What a marvelous experience. Learn even more via

<https://oleaessence.com/our-story/>.

Before supper Dave and Joe took a challenging hike to “Throne” at the top of the hill overlooking the hotel. They found the ruins of a byzantine era church and fort at the top of the mountain. They also got some spectacular photos.



Supper Lake House  
Hotel, Sea of  
Galilee, Israel  
20 Mar 2023 1800

What a superb day in Israel. What a superb supper at the Lake House Hotel on the Sea of Galilee, with two dozen friends.

Tomorrow, 21 March 2023 we visit Cana (Sepphoris), Nazareth Village, Nazareth Precipice, Gideon's Spring, and Beit Shean on our way to the Prima Kings Hotel, Jerusalem. Pack your bags n load m in the bus, it leaves at 0730.