

**June 12--Bet Shan (Saul's body), Harad (Gideon's spring), Qumran, Dead Sea**

This morning **Sue Rogers** prayed for us—and sang. She said a part of us remains here.

Hebrew words: **Ya-lah!** Come on! Move!

People immigrating to Israel have to learn Hebrew—and it is a hard language to learn. I know—this Fall I had tried, but gave up.

Kibbutzim was the ultimate Zionism, farming the land that they now owned.

The Jordan Valley is going to be 90-95<sup>0</sup> today. Tomorrow there is to be rain in Jordan. But there is no humidity with the heat.

Initially we had planned to go to **Jericho**, but today Israelis cannot go to Jericho without showing passports and so forth—we will not go there on this trip.

We drove through **Tiberias**, the big city whose lights we saw across the Sea of Galilee in the evenings when we sat by the sea, watching the fish jump and the dusk deepening into night. It was a city built for the Romans, on an old graveyard. Dead human bones are a source of uncleanness for the Jews. But after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, Tiberias was considered somehow cleansed, and Jews started to live here. The Temple was gone, and with it the ability to offer acceptable sacrifice. The priests were suddenly without jobs. Rabbis (teachers) were very important, though, and they tended to live in Tiberias. The rabbis wrote Biblical commentaries called the Mishnah and Talmud. They also published calendars, based on complicated calculations of moons and seasons.

**Points for the vowels were also created in Tiberias.** There are no vowels in Hebrew—just consonants, and there was a real danger that people would forget how to pronounce Hebrew when they read Scripture—**the points and dots were a kind of code to tell what vowel sounds came where.**

On the calendars, Janus (two-faces) was the first month: it looked back to the old year and started the new year. February was for a family god; winter time was not good for farming.

The Inquisition in Spain (late 1400's) chased the Jews out of Spain. A few decades later, the Ottoman Turks offered the swampy, rural land of Galilee, including the town of Tiberias, to the Jews. The Jews failed to accept that offer in the 1500's, and were without a place to call their own until 1948.

Gilead is the home area of Elijah. The Balm of Gilead is made of plants indigenous to the area. **1 Samuel 31: 1-13 tells of King Saul's death, and how his body was hung up on the walls of Bet Shan.** The men of a nearby town, Jabesh Gilead, climbed the man-made mountain tel, up to the walls of Bet Shan, retrieved the bodies of Saul and his 2 sons, and buried them properly.

We looked over at Jordan: **today, Israel is at peace with Jordan, and has been since 1994.**

Then we arrived at **Beit She'an**. There is a Tell here: layers of civilizations, built one on top of the other. The **Philistines** got land from Egypt, and were the gate-keepers for Shan. **Shan** is an Egyptian goddess (god of wine and drunks). At the time of Christ the top had been leveled by fire. Later, in the **Greco-Roman era**, the area was called **Bet** (House) **Shan** (the Egyptian goddess). The Romans admired and embraced the Greeks. Romans built aqueducts, and these allowed for growth beyond the tel. The top of the hill was left for the building of an acropolis, dedicated to Dionysis (god of wine) and the rest of the city was now down below the tel. **Because this was a border town—close to Persia—it needed to be impressive—and it was.** Ronny told us again of when he first came to the US, and saw Washington, DC, and the Smithsonian museums, and so forth, he was simply awed. Powerful nations have always liked their first cities, their border cities, to inspire amazement in visitors, and Bet Shan was indeed a border city.

**When Christianity came to Bet Shan**, they wanted to impress the local people, but did it gradually, and with education. So how did they do it? Greeks taught no afterlife-- Christians offered eternity. Greek gods were to be admired, but they did not generally care for or love people. The sin of pride, of hubris (being equal to the gods) was one that would get you punished. People were not invited to come to the Greek temples; Christians invited people to come in, and built even nicer buildings than the Greek temples to the One God. Then the Christians used things the people enjoyed: “Did you use to enjoy going to the theater? Today, let us tell you the story of Adam and Eve.” “Did you use to celebrate the birth of the sun on December 25? Now we will celebrate the birth of the Son—on December 25!” “Who is invited into the old gods’ temples? No one!” (Remember hubris—pride, the greatest sin of all—so stay away from the gods). “Who is invited into Christian churches? Everybody! “

When Islam later came into the area the Muslims forced the local people to convert to Islam.

The tel at Bet Shan has seen many civilizations, but it has been excavated down to the level of Saul (10<sup>th</sup> century BC) Archeologists know there are still 25 towns left under that level. At the very first were the Egyptians, then the Hittites, and so forth. In the Old Testament times, the towns were on top of the hill. In New Testament times the towns were outside of the hilltops. We know Jesus went by here, because the roads went by here.

**Back in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, there were 3 bodies hanging on the walls on the hill of Bet Shan: Saul and his two sons.** Why would people do that? Not only to shame the bodies, but to let all people know that this king has been completely conquered. The story was in **I Samuel 31: 1-13**. Today we do much the same: when Bin Laden was killed, it made the front page of the *Omaha World Herald* .

In **Joshua 17**, we see that the descendants of the tribe of Manasseh either could not or did not drive out the Canaanites. The Canaanites had iron chariots. Disobedience often seems to make sense for the immediate, for the now. The Hebrews didn't drive out the peoples, but instead turned them into servants.

**But Partial Disobedience is still Disobedience.**

**Obedience is hard—like fighting against those iron chariots.**

As told in **1 Samuel 15**, Samuel had ordered Saul to clear all things out when he fought the Amalekites, because they had ambushed the Hebrews, including people and all animals.

Saul did fight the Amalekites, and beat them, but he saved back the best sheep “for sacrifice!” Samuel heard the bleating of sheep, and knew that Saul had not completely obeyed. **The Bible says obedience is better than sacrifice.**

Saul also kept the Amalekite king, Agag, and some of his children, maybe for ransom. Saul later killed Agag with his bare hands, but the children escaped. Some scholars think God may have ordered the annihilation of the Amalekites because He wanted to prevent trouble for the Hebrews later. It is hard to know.

**Incidentally, King Herod**, the one who built Masada, the one who built so many cities, the one who wanted to kill the baby Jesus and did kill all the babies in Bethlehem, was a descendant of the Amalekites—he was an Idumean, an Edomite.

Haman, the one who **wanted to kill Queen Esther** and all the Jews—was an Edomite.

The Bible says the Lord killed Saul, and he and his 2 sons hung at Bet Shan on the Wall of Shame. Be careful. **The little sins of partial obedience can result in a wall of shame**, like Saul and Bet She'an, and can cause trouble even centuries later.

**Perry Myers, Sr. said that all of our lives are on the wall, for all of us have sinned.**

**Prayer: Let us not shame You, and forgive us for our sins.**

As we walked around **Bet She'an today**, we saw an immense Roman town in front of the tel. Even mosaics are preserved. There was an immense theater, and the Romans had copper tanks for water about half way up the stone steps, that amplified voices. The theater was under some sort of roof, with ships' masts to hold up the roofing material. The back wall helped amplify voices too. Rome wanted to keep the people happy: there was a theater, a bath-house, and more. The theater, with white steps, black steps, and then white steps, was not only beautiful, but would accommodate about 9,000 people. Remember, this was a capital city, right up against the Persian border. Many words in theater today come from this time: *Orchestra*: section between the stage and the first

level. *Screed* : a back wall. This was a very large city back in Roman days. This theater is also where people heard the Gospel.

Romans always built with a certain standardization: each town had 4 quarters, 2 main roads, a bath house, etc.

**The way the Romans decided if the land was healthy enough to build a town** was by sending a colony of cattle to be tended there for a year. Then they slaughtered the cattle, and studied the livers. If the cow livers seemed healthy, then the Romans figured the land was healthy enough for humans, and settled there. Then they built their 2 roads. The Tetrapelon was the administrative area. The Basilica (biggest building) had the market place in its courtyard. When Basilicas later became churches, they had their entrance on the narrow end of the building. Another place was for the bath house. The bath house had a sauna, and was mainly a social place for meetings. The hot room was open to all. The Roman idea was to have one culture for the entire Roman world. Bath house, theater—their package deal included religion, which was the old Roman gods.

In old Middle East places, like Bet She'an, the center of the old city was the tel (actually, on top of the tel). However, in Roman times, the city was built down around the bottom of the tel. Roman cities had facades to cover up the tel from the general view.

We wandered around the Roman ruins. **Brad Roe, who majored in vocal music in college, found one of the “sweet spots” in the theater, and sang for us there**—it was amazing. We saw, close to the old bath house, **a Christian baptistry—it was “only” about 1500-1600 years old.** As we walked the Roman streets, we saw the huge hump they had in the middle, to have the rainwater go off into gutters so it could be saved and used. There were lots of columns—the ones designed for weight bearing were conical in design. We saw mosaics in the public areas, on the streets—again, for show—this was a very important city.

The Romans didn't use marble: they used well-polished limestone and frescoes.

Christians covered their streets with marble when they took over in 749 AD.

**If Bet She'an was so important down through the ages, why wasn't it rebuilt when Islam took over?** First, Islam had conquered most of the world, and no longer needed this as a buffer zone. Also, after the Crusades were over, Islam wanted this whole region to be one of total destruction and neglect.

**After we left Bet She'an, we drove past a huge dairy farm**—kibbutz-owned. Israel has a lot of field hands from China and from Thailand—and they also have trouble with these workers overstaying their temporary work visas.

**We saw fish farms, and we saw birds.**

In **Proverbs 29**, King Solomon noted the passage of birds. Large birds spread their wings and ride the hot air currents down the Jordan Valley. **The large birds are storks, pelicans, and geese. 500 million birds use this flyway each year.** Growing pelicans eat 20 lbs. of fish a day—fish farmers tried fireworks, scarecrows—all no good. **Finally they built one pond on each fish farm to hold nothing but sardines: cheap to the farmers, tasty to the pelicans, problem solved!**

**Gideon's Spring:** The spring of Harad flows out of Gideon's cave. The story is in **Judges 6 and 7** Mt. Gilboa was covered with Midianites; the Hebrews had 32,000 soldiers, but God told Gideon to send anybody home who was afraid of the coming battle: 22,000 soldiers went home. But God wanted to make it clear that He was going to deliver the Hebrews, so God said to bring the remaining soldiers down to the water, and test how they drank: only 300 men lapped out of their cupped hands: these were the soldiers Gideon was to lead to fight the huge army, that had terrified 22,000 soldiers. God won the day. **Today the water is unsafe to drink**, but we listened to the story and we pretended we were in that army, taking a drink of water. **In the days of the Judges, it was farmers vs. nomads.** Canaanite city/states were there, but those people hid in the cities. The nomads would swoop in at harvest time and steal the crops. **Gideon was hiding in the olive press, trying to protect his harvest.** After all this, Gideon was offered the job of King by the people: he was the only man ever offered the job by the people—and he said no. Gideon's spring flows out of a man-made cave. The angel of the Lord said to Gideon, **"The Lord is with you, Oh valiant warrior"**

After we came home from Israel, our 3 year old grandson stayed with us for several days with our daughter in law and baby granddaughter (our son Jon is in his summer guards). I was helping Evan brush his teeth, and he asked me where the cup was. I have always cupped water in my hand, and used it that way—the story of Gideon had fascinated me as a child. Evan was quite impressed with his grandma: he tried to cup it but his fingers were open—he finally drank it from my cupped hand. He thought it was fun!

**Israel is experimenting with organic farms**—not too many yet. You can tell them because at the four corners of their fields there are owl houses, to control the rodents. **One owl will eat 20-25 mice in one night.**

The **West Bank** is a political area. Israel has not been in the **Gaza Strip** since 2005. There never was a country named Palestine. **The border to the Gaza Strip is open at Egypt:** there is no need for flotillas of "relief ships". The last time a flotilla came they were photographed unloading bombs and other weapons, sending them into tunnels to be later hidden from aerial view. **Today, Monday, June 12, are Turkish elections.** Right now nobody will insure those flotilla ships, but the Turkish elections will still influence events.

We saw **date orchards** as we drove by. The date bunches, still on the palm trees, were wrapped in paper bags to help them ripen faster (the bags help raise the heat). On the

right are the **mountains of Samaria**. A date palm will use 1 cubic foot of water a day (a cubic foot is like a basketball), but they can use recycled sewage water for the first couple of years. **60% of the country is desert: Israel is reclaiming the desert.** They grow **roses in greenhouses** in the desert, supplying all of Europe. They use drip irrigation.

There has been a **checkpoint into Jordan since 1967.**

**In 1920, Britain got the mandate to take some Palestinian land to make a homeland for the Jews.** Arab peoples don't see themselves as a nation. Then *Lawrence of Arabia* changed the attitude in Britain to shift, and now Britain was against the Jews. In 1939, Britain hoped to win Arab support by denying Israel statehood. The Mufti joined the Germans because he hated the Jews. 1945 was the end of WWII. Britain said they were pulling out of the region, and gave **the United Nations the right, in 1947, to create two states, Palestine and Israel.** The British actually left the region in 1948. **There was full scale war between Arabs and Jews.** In the UN partition, the Jews said Yes; the Arabs said No. **The Palestinian country had been invaded by Jordanians and Egyptians. Jordan had the West Bank; Egypt had Gaza.**

What, exactly, is the **West Bank**? It had been given to Palestine (1947) but taken from Jordan. In 1988 the Palestinians had a dream of a homeland. **Gaza** has been in Palestinian hands since 2005. **Israel is still at war. 10,000 rockets had been sent in to Gaza with that last flotilla.**

**We saw a big fence, going across the desert.** It is an electronic security line as well as a physical fence, and **since Israel installed it the terror attacks have gone down by 90%.** People can still cross the fence to work in Israel, but the fence helps find and stop the suicide bombs.

We passed the check point, and are in the West Bank area. Israel still provides electricity and water and so forth to Gaza and to the West Bank. Nearly 100% of the people living in the West Bank and Gaza would characterize themselves as Palestinians.

We crossed the **River Jabbok**. This is the area where Jacob wrestled with God.

**As we drove by Arab towns, it was impossible to miss seeing all the trash around: plastic bags and whatnot.**

**25-30 years ago, the people living here would have called themselves Israeli-Arabs.** Today they call themselves Palestinians. The Jews **want** to be in the majority in their land (**the Druze, the Palestinians, the Muslims, the Christians—all have voting rights in Israel**). So Israel does give up land so the Jews can retain a voting majority. **If Jordan falls, like Egypt and Syria did, then there is a problem.** Jordan currently holds many Palestinian refugees.

Ronny Simon said the problem is not making agreements between nations and peoples; the problem is keeping those agreements. So the Israelis will want to keep some military/intelligence outposts in the West Bank.

**Fresh herbs** are also grown in greenhouses here in the desert. They are picked and packed, in nearly sterile conditions, and shipped to Europe.

The **Dead Sea is shrinking**, but will rise when Israel lets the Jordan empty more water into the Dead Sea. Right now it is back to about the area it was when Jesus was on earth.

**Jericho** is in the **desert**. But the desert can have flash floods. **Elijah outran a chariot to avoid a flood. 1 Kings 18: 45-46.** There was also the Jordan river miracle (**crossing of the Hebrews on dry ground, with the waters parting** as the soles of the priests carrying the ark entered the water) with the 12 stones to mark the event (**Joshua 3 &4**). **Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, most likely near here**, as it is close to Jerusalem, as well as being in the desert where John the Baptist was. **Jericho is an oasis. It is Palestinian**, who have NO inclination to excavate anything that might possibly elevate Jews. **Each time Jesus traveled to Jerusalem from the south, they had to take the Jericho road.**

The only pomegranates in Israel grow by the Dead Sea.

We only saw Jericho from a distance because of the politics, but we did go to **Qumran**. The scrolls themselves are in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, and we saw them when we went there. There are steep cliffs beside the only road in the desert—the Jericho road. Back in the time when the Dead Sea Scrolls were written, people willingly chose to live in this Qumran community. Today there are no scrolls here, but there are inkstands, jewelry, and a long, narrow stone table. People are still not sure what group, precisely, wrote the scrolls. In the years between the Old Testament and the New Testament, there was a Jewish dynasty called the Hasmoneans, who were Maccabean. They conquered the Greeks, and proclaimed both a king and a high priest. Recognizing that the Temple politics were corrupt (it was being led by men not of the priestly line), these people left, but chose a place by the Jericho Road, so they could interact with their Jewish brothers and sisters. They also chose it because of the nearby River Jordan (which was bigger then). We saw a retaining wall to catch rainwater. People lived in caves around there. **They called themselves the Yachad, or Essenes.** Josephus tried to live with them, but he was shocked that they had no women. Their theology was a little odd: there was no way they could occupy and multiply in the land. The Essenes set a high bar for themselves.

In 1947, there were scrolls found in the cliffs. One story tells that a young Arab shepherd was searching for lost sheep. He threw rocks into the caves, hoping to hear a “baa”. Instead he heard a “clink”. There were jars. He opened the jars and saw they were stuffed with parchment. Another story has it that the father of the boy was a shoemaker. A Greek Orthodox bishop recognized the parchments for what they were, but then war broke out. In the negotiations, there was money offered for old scrolls found in Bedoin

tents. During the war, the Bedouins looted the caves to sell the pieces of scrolls. When these pieces were bought up, and then assembled, most were authentic. One chapter that was complete was **Isaiah 53—the suffering Messiah**. Before the Qumran scrolls were found, some Biblical critics had suggested that Isaiah 53 was not really in the original text—but now the Qumran scrolls showed that in the scroll of Isaiah, Chapter 53 was there with all the rest of the chapters. Many of the scrolls were copies of the Deuteronomy laws. All these Qumran scrolls were written before the canonization of the Jewish Bible. **Also in these Essene scriptures they found a statement telling people to go into the villages, taking no reserve food, but to shake off the dust of the sandals if the people rejected them.** This is New Testament stuff (Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:11; Acts 13:51).

**The Dead Sea Scrolls were written on parchment, which is made of animal skin.** DNA analysis says the scroll parchment fits the **Judean ibex** but also could fit a different animal. Oooh, what could that animal be?!?! **Now here the story gets strange, and I would say non-Biblical:** the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was in 1947, the year Israel became a state; the week after the UN said that Israel was a state. **Some Jews have much speculation about a particular animal called the Red Heifer.** In **Genesis 19** there is a description of a Red Heifer (almost like a Holy Cow). Moses killed the first one, and then later priests used its ashes for cleansing themselves for sacrifice. They then mixed the ashes with the ashes of the previous Red Heifer so you keep the mixture going. The Mishnah (**Jewish commentaries**) spoke a lot of this, saying that true sacrifice involves this Red Heifer, but that the 10<sup>th</sup> one will be done by the Messiah. There have been 9 ones so far, but nobody can find the original ash mixture, to carry on the chain. Many people have been killed in this region trying to find the Ark of the Covenant and the Ashes of the Red Heifer. There is much speculation and rumor about all this in Israel, and among Jews. **Ronny said terrorist groups scam money out of people by suggesting they are going to look for these things like the Ark and the Red Heifer.**

We are going to stay in a kibbutz next to the Dead Sea, so Ronny told us some things about the Dead Sea, which is sometimes called the Salt Sea.

Stay in only 10-15 minutes. It is over 30% salt, so it sucks the moisture out of your body. It averages 1000 feet deep, though some parts go below 1200 feet. It is saltier today than 100 years ago. **The Bible says (Ezekiel 47: 10; Zechariah 14:8) that fishermen will fish on the Dead Sea.** How can this be? Note the greenery: **fresh water flows into the Sea, and floats on top of the salt water.** Today, it is sometimes called the Sea of Salt, but in **Genesis 14**, it was called the Sea of Tar. Chunks of tar were harvested from it to mummify people; the Jesus Boat (up in Galilee) was coated in tar. The Crusaders called the Sea the Gate of Hell. A map of today shows the Salt Sea is ½ Israel, ½ Jordan. People are killed by flash floods every years in the hills by the Salt Sea and the water drains into the Sea. 100 years ago, when the Salt Sea was much bigger, there was no knowledge of these fresh water places.

This is Ibex country. The sulfur smells stronger in the afternoon.

We stayed night in Ein Gedi Kibbutz. This had a botany garden that was amazing. The walks from the lobby to the rooms to the dining hall, and so forth, were through lawns that were surrounded by huge trees, cacti and blossoming shrubs. The baobab tree (many trunks) was a place for pictures. There was another tree with 2 or 3 huge trunks. There was a tree with little pointed shields. The trunk of this tree was otherwise fairly smooth, but those shields bubbled up all over. The bougainvillea and other flowers were great.

Steve and I were tired, and crashed for a while before supper in our room, but many others from our group took the shuttle to the Salt Sea. You can only stay in for 10-15 minutes, but Chuck Larsen III (Chuckles) said it was amazing. You waded out in shallow water for a bit—and suddenly the bottom dropped way down—but you didn't care because you were floating. You could, with great attention and balance, stand in the water, as if you were dog paddling, but the easiest was just to lean back and float. Steve and I look forward to doing this tomorrow.