

Beauties of the Truth

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Psalm 47, Celebrating Victory in the Face of Enemies

"O Clap your hands, all ye peoples, shout unto God with the voice of triumph" (Psalm 47:1).¹

So beloved and important is Psalm 47 that to this day it plays a special part in the annual Jewish liturgy. In traditional synagogues, Psalm 47 is recited before the sounding of the Shofar (ram's horn) at the start of each New Year. Although the custom of reciting Psalm 47 seven times before the sounding of the Shofar may only be a relatively new one dating from the 18th century, the custom is widespread, at least in Ashkenazi communities.

The lessons of this Psalm are simple. Someday, not only the Lord's people, but all peoples shall clap and shout unto the Lord with the voice of triumph. Some commentaries have suggested that the occasion for composing this Psalm was the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (10th century BC). Surely Psalm 47 would be an appropriate tribute of praise for any event of such magnitude. But here we will consider the special lessons of this Psalm if, as maintained by Jewish commentaries, it was first sung much later when Jerusalem was besieged by the armies of Assyria under Sennacherib (7th century BC).

To bolster the morale of the populace during the siege, the sons of Korah (Psalm 47 superscription) were directed to compose three Psalms — Psalm 46, 47, and 48. These were not to be sung in the temple, but as "Songs upon Alamoth," that is, songs for the adolescent girls in the city to sing in the streets after the fashion in which triumphal songs would normally be sung (see "Psalm 46, A Song upon Alamoth," *Beauties of the Truth*, November 2009). The reference to public participation in the singing with shouting and clapping clearly alludes to the use of the Psalm in public outside the temple compound. This singing was to take place even as the threat of destruction from the siege lay just out of bowshot beyond the city walls. The young women of Israel typically played a prominent role in leading the singing for the songs of triumph and these three Psalms

celebrated the unwavering faith of the Lord's people in the face of overwhelming odds. Up to this point Assyria had proven victorious in every siege and had overrun the 10-tribe kingdom of Israel.

Sennacherib's Prism, which details the events of Sennacherib's campaign against Judah, was discovered in the ruins of Nineveh in 1830, and is now stored at the Oriental Institute in Chicago, Illinois. The account is a self-serving boast from the Assyrian king. Sennacherib claims to have destroyed forty-six of Judah's cities and trapped Hezekiah in Jerusalem "like a caged bird." The text goes on to describe how the "terrifying splendor" of the Assyrian army caused the Arabs and mercenaries reinforcing the city to desert.

The overwhelming magnitude of the threat to Judah and Jerusalem may be estimated from the report that after the destruction of 185,000 from the Assyrian host in one night by the Angel of the Lord, the army could still sustain an orderly retreat (Isaiah 37:36). The singing and clapping that were part of this Psalm were an exhibition of trust, knowing that the Lord would indeed triumph.

"For Jehovah Most High, is awesome; He is a great king over all the earth" (verse 2).

The clapping and shouting are a joyful acknowledgement that the Lord Jehovah is God and holds universal

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sovereignty. Typically the heathen gods were not believed to have power beyond a limited geographical area. How different was Jehovah, the God of Israel. Though the Assyrians would boast and reproach the God of Israel, presuming to speak in His name (Isaiah 36:7, 10, 15), the blasphemy and emptiness of this attempt at psychological warfare and its attempts to undermine the confidence of the defenders would soon yield to the “awesome” nature of Jehovah’s rulership. His true power would become evident to all once His mighty angel passed through the camp of the Assyrians.

“He subdueth peoples under us, and nations under our feet” (verse 3).

Since the opening of the gospel call to the Gentiles, the invitation to the kings of the earth is to “kiss,” that is, receive instruction from, the Son (Psalm 2:12).

We wish all peoples and nations would submit themselves willingly to God as sovereign, and Jesus as the “arm” of Jehovah (Isaiah 51:5, 9, 52:10, 53:1). We know they would be blessed by recognizing the privileges and leadership of Israel in a peaceable manner. However, Psalm 2:12 tells us that their submission, under God’s elect, will be a forcible one (B101).

“He chooseth our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved” (verse 4).

Why the phrase, “the excellency of Jacob?” The land of Canaan was promised to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But though the promises of God came first to Abraham (Genesis 12:1; 22:17), then to Isaac (Genesis 26:3-4), and finally to Jacob (Genesis 28:14-15), neither **all** the seed of Abraham, nor **all** the seed of Isaac were to specially share the inheritance of the land. However, the “excellency” (Strong’s 1347) of the Holy Land would be for **all** the natural seed of Jacob, whom God loved (Malachi 1:2, Romans 9:13).

“Selah” (verse 4).

Advocates of excited forms of church worship find support for their excesses by pointing to expressions in the Psalms, including Psalm 47, which speaks to joyous and even loud worship — clapping, using drums and other percussive instruments, and dance. But they fail to observe that rather than abandoning worshippers to the natural human passions that can seize and control our judgment, by one word all the celebration is interrupted before it devolves into ecstatic worship. This one word brings us back to rationality — *selah*, or “pause and consider.” With this command all clapping and shouting would cease.

“God is gone up with a shout, Jehovah with the sound of a trumpet” (verse 5).

At first this expression might be puzzling. It is the mirror image of the expression in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 where Christ descends from heaven in a shout (Greek, *en kelusmati*) and the sound of a trumpet.² The implication for this Psalm is that the nature of this military action against



Temple of Solomon, where Psalms were sung on other occasions.

Jehovah’s enemies is one that employed stealth, indeed one that took place in the dead of night. Faith was needed to recognize that the heavenly host was quietly round about Jerusalem at all times, even as in an earlier day the heavenly host had defended Elisha (2 Kings 6:17). When the due time came for the angel to destroy the Assyrian host this amazing deliverance was accomplished in a single night without the men of Judah lifting their swords. This verse celebrates Jehovah’s triumphal victory which was yet to be a reality.

The account by the Greek historian Herodotus (*Histories* II.141) suggests that the agency employed by the Lord’s angel was bubonic plague. (See RVIC on 2 Kings 19:35, footnote 155).

Like the defenders of Jerusalem, the church shares in this triumph as well, for there surely is a Messianic theme here. The great doctrine of the ascension is taught in the words: “God is gone up with a shout.” The Lord while ascending back to the Father made an open shame of Satan. When we think of our Lord’s ascension and privilege to sit with him even now in heavenly places, we also are provoked to offer endless worship to Him (Ephesians 2:6).

“Sing praises with understanding” (verses 6-7).

The praises were to be sung to Jehovah both as God and King. “Zion” originally was the city or stronghold of the Jebusites and occupied the southern portion of the western ridge, the highest, most inaccessible, and easily fortified ground in what became the city of Jerusalem. When it was conquered by David it became his fortified abode or citadel. His palace was built here, and through successive reigns and dynasties, down to the Christian era, it continued to be the royal residence. Until the construction of the temple, Zion held the ark of the covenant. But its primary purpose was to serve as the civil or political center.

In these regards Jerusalem was specially favored, for it hosted both the political center of the nation and the Temple of Solomon which was its religious center. Both the citadel and the temple were within the city walls of Jerusalem. But the city boundaries fell within the territories of two different tribes — Judah and Benjamin. Thus the Temple itself

was within Benjamin's territory. (Please see "Between the Shoulders," *Beauties of the Truth*, November 2009.)

The expression to "sing praises" appears four times, followed by a fifth expression that these praises should be sung with "understanding" (Strong's 7919, *maschil*). Surely, the blessings of understanding in these last days come to mind, and in general *maschil* is taken to mean a song which teaches doctrine.

The word "praises" means a hymn of laudation, and we are enjoined to sing them unto our God and King. This is distinctly different from songs written for the people and sung to the people. This worship is always for God and directed to Him alone.

The word "understanding" tells us that if we do not understand our worship, then it accomplishes no good purpose.

One of the first reforms of Martin Luther was to restore congregational singing. A Jesuit priest observed that this was more influential than even Luther's sermons. After centuries of silence in church from the people, they were once more given the opportunity to use their own voices to praise God in song. What a thrill it must have been to hear all the voices! May we find that true worship when we seek to fathom the depths of who God is. When we find Him, we will be overwhelmed with His presence and true feelings of worship.

Current scholarship (Soncino) now takes this understanding more specifically to mean a **special kind of musical rendering** for which we no longer possess any other details. This musical form must have been engaging for we find that even the enemies of Judah added to the exiles' grief next to the rivers of Babylon by asking them to sing the glad songs of Zion (Psalm 137:3). Possibly, some special voice training was involved — highly trained professional voices may be much admired.

Possibly another *maschil*, or **song with understanding**, is sung in Revelation 14:3. There we see 144,000 singing a new song before the throne of God, and only they could learn that new song.

Like this Psalm, the song heard by John is being sung audibly. Thus it does not seem as though the words are impossible for others to hear and repeat and therefore to "learn." So to "learn" in this context may refer to the quality and beauty of the singing, and the depth of understanding the meaning of the words. Such singing is impossible to master for any but those of this little flock standing with our Lord upon Mt. Zion.

"God reigneth over the nations, God sitteth upon his holy throne" (verse 8).

For God is the King of all the earth, he is not only our King, but the King of the universe. He has no limited power, no confined dominion. Though this is literally true in God's universal dominion, yet more is here meant. God reigns over the heathen when, by the preaching of the Gospel, they are brought into the Church of Christ. He is a holy God;



Temple Singers (for other occasions).

He proclaims holiness. His laws are holy, He requires holiness, and His genuine people are all holy. The throne of His holiness is the heaven of heavens; also the Temple at Jerusalem; and, lastly, the hearts of the faithful.

"The princes of the people are gathered together; to be the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted" (verse 9).

This Psalm can be sung at the deepest level only by those blessed with knowledge and faith in the Divine Plan of God. While under attack by the heathen Assyrians, ancient Judah was to have full faith in God. Likewise, when the New Creation is faced with its enemies, we too should respond in full assurance of faith that God will bring deliverance. During the Millennium, that deliverance will extend to the entire world, who will become "people of the God of Abraham." Even the heathen "princes," the mighty of this age, will gather together as people of Jehovah.

Thus, the prophecy of Jacob concerning Messiah (Shiloh) shall fully come to pass: "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be" (Genesis 49:10, Psalm 87:4, Isaiah 60:3-8). The designation "God of Abraham" is appropriate, as it was to Abraham that the promise was made: "In thee" — "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3, 22:18).

"For the shields of the earth belong unto God." The princes are metaphorically called "shields," as being the protectors of their people (Hosea 4:18, margin). In the Millennium the willing of mankind will gladly receive the word of life. Like the Bereans, of a noble or liberal disposition, when they hear the clear words of the Gospel, they will gladly come unto His light, and present themselves as desirous of being His people.

"He is greatly exalted." Great as secular rulers are, God is greater and is above all — King of kings and Lord of lords. The hearts of kings and governors are in his hand. The greatest of nations and their plans are but dust in the balances. It took faith to sing this Psalm in the face of the might of Assyria and it takes faith to sing it today. Someday, faith will become sight and all shall clap and sing.

— Bro. Richard Doctor

(1) With only a few exceptions, the reading of the RVIC Bible (Bro. Jim Parkinson) is used throughout. The reader may find that version at this site — www.HeraldMag.org — under the button "RVIC."

(2) Note that 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 is in the reverse order of Joshua 6: "they rose early," the trumpet, Joshua commands to shout, and the people shouted.

Top of the Mountains

“In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of Jehovah shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it” (Micah 4:1).

This blessed promise, well known among Bible Students, speaks of re-established Israel as the center of God’s Kingdom on Earth. This text is not yet fulfilled, but the process toward its fulfillment has begun. Already Israel is an independent nation “in the top of the mountains.” In time to come, when Israel has their attention directed to their Messiah, Jesus, and they “mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son” (Zechariah 12:10), then they will take the position God intends for them, under the Ancient Worthies, as a light to the nations (Isaiah 60:1-3).

The regathering of Israel began in the year 1878 with the founding of Petah Tikvah, in the aftermath of the Berlin Congress of Nations. The treaty which came from that gathering allowed equal protection of the law to all citizens of the Ottoman Empire, which at that time governed the land anciently known as Israel. Noticeably, that included Jews, who took advantage of the opportunity to purchase land and settle.

Seventy years later, in 1948, statehood was achieved. This span of 70 years reminds us that it was during the 70 years appointed for the rulership of Babylon that Israel lost their national existence (Jeremiah 25:11,12). Is this a coincidence? Is it only chance that the years designated for Israel’s punishment so long ago happens to match the years of restoration to their national existence in modern times?

70 Years
National Independence Lost
(Jeremiah 25:11,12)

70 Years
National Independence Restored
(1878 to 1948)

If it is not mere coincidence, then it suggests that the establishment of Israel in 1948 did not occur at a random date, but one which reflects a sense of plan, purpose, and intent by of our Heavenly Father. But if this is so, are there other testimonies about this — a second, or a third, perhaps?

SECOND TESTIMONY — PARALLEL EVENTS

Another evidence that 1948 was not simply a random date is found in the series of events by which the State of Israel was developed. As we saw above, the return of the Jewish people commenced in a special way from 1878. But as the Ottoman Empire ruled the land, and they had no interest

in providing an independent state for Israel, we have to look farther ahead to see the first open movement in that direction.

It was in 1896 that Theodore Herzl published his treatise “The Jewish State,” followed the next year by the first Zionist Congress. But not until World War I was there movement to break up the dominating control over Palestine that the Ottoman Empire exercised for 400 years, since their conquest of the holy land at about the time of the Reformation.

World War I was waged between 1914 and 1918. As a consequence of that struggle, England received a protectorate of the Holy Land and in 1917, by the Balfour Declaration, declared their intent to make of it a national homeland for the Jewish people. But other impediments would come, and it was not until 1948 that the new nation emerged.

The formative cause of Israel’s rebirth was the holocaust. This both aroused the sympathy of the world for the plight of the Jewish people, and acutely identified the need of a state of their own for this long dispersed and suffering people. The holocaust began in 1939 when Hitler invaded Poland. As his troops went in, town by town they rounded up the Jewish population and marched them to the outskirts, where they were shot and killed. The gas chambers were a later development.

The rise of the Nazi party of Adolph Hitler in Germany was the cause preceding the holocaust. This rise culminated in a period of three years — from 1932 to 1934. In the elections of 1932 the Nazi party became the largest party in the German Parliament. In 1933 Hitler become Chancellor. In 1934 the aged war hero Paul von Hindenberg died, and Hitler replaced him as President — with unbridled power. Hitler had earlier dictated his plans for the future in his infamous book *Mein Kampf* in 1924.

Thus, here is the sequence of significant years leading to the birth of the nation of Israel — 1914 to 1918, 1924, 1932-1934, 1939, and finally 1948.

When Israel lost their national independence so long ago, during the years of the Babylonian Empire, there was a similar progression of events. We can itemize those years relative to the reigns of Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled that empire for so long a time. Genesis 15:18 gives the northern border of Israel as the River Euphrates (see also 2 Samuel 8:3). Crossing the Euphrates, then, would indicate when Babylon actually came against the land of Israel.

The first time (in that period of history) that Babylon ventured across the Euphrates into the land of promise was during the 19th year of Nabopolassar. “In the month Tishri the king of Akkad [Babylon] mustered his army and marched to Kimuhu which is on the bank of the Euphrates. He crossed the river, did battle against the city, and in the month Kislev he captured the city. He sacked it and stationed a garrison of his in it.”¹ In the 20th year of Nabopolassar the Babylonians crossed the Euphrates again and took three cities, “Shunadiru, Elammu, and Dahammu, cities of Syria.”²

In his 21st year Nabopolassar died at home while his son Nebuchadnezzar led the army to a stunning victory over Egypt near Carchemish on the Euphrates. Nebuchadnezzar pursued Pharaoh Necho southward to the very border of Egypt, and all of the Holy Land fell to his hand, including Jerusalem (Daniel 1:1). During this campaign Nebuchadnezzar learned of the passing of his father and hastened across the desert to take the throne reserved for him. He later returned and “marched about victoriously”³ in the Holy Land.

Nebuchadnezzar continued his conquests in his first and second regnal years. It is at this point, after the conquest of Syria, Israel, and the Philistines, that the prophet Daniel identified Nebuchadnezzar as the “head of gold” (Daniel 2:1, 38). That campaign had consumed four years — from 19 Nabopolassar through 2 Nebuchadnezzar.

But Israel would not abide the punishment God put upon them. King Jehoiakim rebelled. He then died and was replaced by king Jehoiachin for three months until he surrendered to Babylon and was taken captive in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:12). His replacement, Zedekiah, also rebelled and lost his kingdom during a siege of three years (Jeremiah 52:4, 5). The collapse of his kingdom came in the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 52:29).

Sometimes we think that this marks the end of Israelites going captive to Babylon, but Jeremiah 52:30 says in the 23rd year of Nebuchadnezzar he returned to take still more captives — possibly from Egypt, where many had fled for refuge.

Later, in the 25th year of Ezekiel’s captivity — which corresponds to the 32nd year of Nebuchadnezzar — Ezekiel had his vision of restored Israel, described in Ezekiel chapters 40 through 48.

THE COMPARISON

With this testimony of scripture at hand, we can compare the sequence of events in restoring Israel’s statehood in modern times, with the sequence of events by which Israel was consumed by Babylon in ancient times. In the next column (boxed area) is a listing which shows a remarkable parallel between the two.

Specific years discussed above are indicated in **bold** type. Notice that the same pattern appears in each column. This again suggests that 1948 was not merely a random date for the reestablishment of Israel. The repetition of the same sequence of years suggests intent and purpose.

THIRD TESTIMONY — THE FLOOD OF NOAH’S DAY

A third testimony to the same conclusion comes from the narrative about the flood in Noah’s day. According to Peter, the ark represents our redemption in Christ and the waters surrounding the eight persons saved in the ark are a token of Christian baptism (1 Peter 3:20, 21).

World War I	1914	—	19 Nabopo.	Conq. of Israel
World War I	1915	—	20 Nabopo.	Conq. of Israel
World War I	1916	—	21 Nabopo.	Conq. of Israel
World War I	1917	—	1 Nebuchad.	Conq. of Israel
World War I	1918	—	2 Nebuchad.	Conq. of Israel
	1919		3	
	1920		4	
	1921		5	
	1922		6	
	1923		7	
Mein Kampf	1924	—	8 Nebuchad.	Jeho'chin capt.
	1925		9	
	1926		10	
	1927		11	
	1928		12	
	1929		13	
	1930		14	
	1931		15	
Nazi Rise	1932	—	16 Nebuchad.	Siege Zedekiah
Nazi Rise	1933	—	17 Nebuchad.	Siege Zedekiah
Nazi Rise	1934	—	18 Nebuchad.	Siege Zedekiah
	1935		19	
	1936		20	
	1937		21	
	1938		22	
Holocaust	1939	—	23 Nebuchad.	Final captives
	1940		24	
	1941		25	
	1942		26	
	1943		27	
	1944		28	
	1945		29	
	1946		30	
	1947		31	
Israel	1948	—	32 Nebuchad.	Ezek. vision

A chart listing the years from modern history that are significant in the return of Israel to national independence in 1948 — compared to a listing of years from ancient history that were significant in the loss to Israel of national independence.

Thus when the eight persons entered the ark, we see a picture beginning at Pentecost in 33 AD, when those who accepted Christ were able to enter the redemption he provided, and be “saved” from the Adamic curse.

Thereafter it rained continuously for forty days. That downpour removed the old world, and may have a parallel to the 40 years following Pentecost, from 33 AD to 73 AD. It was in 73 AD that Masada fell, the last holdout of the old Jewish world. The Jewish kingdom was broken, “swept away” by the judgments of God (compare Revelation 8:7).

In Noah's day, the waters prevailed for five months before the ark eventually came aground on some high point (compare Genesis 7:11, 8:4, to see that this period was five months precisely, to the day). We suggest that this five month period represents the Gospel Age and that the grounding of Noah's ark brings us to the date 1874.

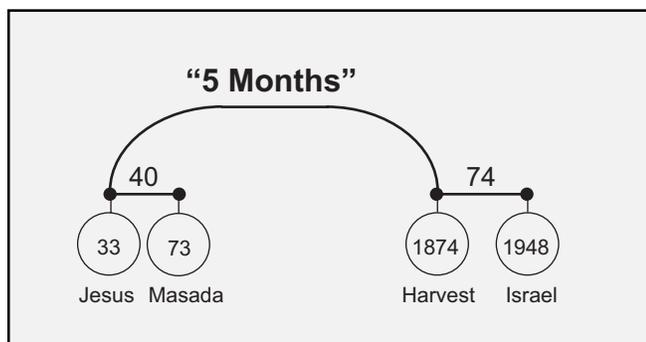
Five is a picture of the new creation — the five wise virgins of the first parable of Matthew chapter 25 for example, depict the elect by this number. The five strips in each of two parts of the first Tabernacle covering represent the two parts of the new creation — our Lord Jesus, and the Church. The five and six strips of the goat hair curtain which overlaid that seem to represent that during this age the Church is still in the sinful flesh (six), but is nevertheless the developing new creation (five). The ram skins dyed red overlay this covering, just as our flesh is covered by the ransom of Christ.

Thus five months is an appropriate length to represent this first age of the spirit. But after the ark came aground, the scene outside looked the same as ever — water everywhere, nothing else visible. So in 1874, as the saints came to the Harvest, or ending period of the Gospel Age, the world around them looked the same as before. But changes would come.

Genesis 7:24 tells us these five months totaled exactly 150 days. This in turn tells us something of the calendar then in use. It was, like the ancient Egyptian calendar, one of 12 months of exactly 30 days each. Of course the Egyptians, and certainly Noah as well, knew that the year was 365 days, and it was part of their calendar practice to insert the extra five days just before the next New Year day.

The observation that each month was precisely 30 days is of value in seeing how long a time lapsed before the next dated event, recorded in Genesis 8:5. "And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month: in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen."

The ark came aground on the 17th day of the seventh month. The tops of the mountains became visible on the 1st day of the tenth month. This is a period of precisely 74 days. This suggests something of interest. Adding 74 years to the date 1874 brings us to 1948, the very year of Israel's statehood.



74 days (years) from 1874 to 1948 — the "Top of the Mountains"

This is a meaningful picture. The first visible, tangible sign among the kingdoms of this world as a portent of the Kingdom of God is the establishment of Israel, which in due time will become the focus of the Kingdom of God. Remember that Micah likened Israel to "the top of the mountains" — the same expression we find here. The top of the mountains were the first tangible sign to Noah and his family as they looked for evidence of the new world at hand.

Genesis 8:13 gives us the next event — the beginning of the next new year. There "the waters were dried up from off the earth, and Noah removed the covering of the ark." When the kingdom begins it will be the establishment of "dry earth," as it were. During that Millennial Kingdom, ultimately there will be no more sea, but only the stable earth of divine government (Revelation 21:1). Then the deliverance for the world in Christ, represented by the ark, will be revealed to all flesh, and the Kingdom of Christ will begin its blessing of "all the families of the earth."

The marker to us in this passage, the assurance that the blessed Kingdom is on the way, the first visible evidence, is the re-establishment of Israel among the nations. Israel is where the Kingdom of God will begin. Remarkably, the days of Noah points out this very date, 1948. The date is non-random. The same date is suggested by all three lines of evidence.

THE FIG TREE

Luke 21:29-31 records, "And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." The sign that portends the Kingdom to us is the very sign that Jesus said would verify that the Kingdom would be relatively soon.

We have already gone 65 years beyond that marker, and likely we have some decades further. But the progress of events is pointing in the right direction, even if the process consumes more years than the saints early-on had supposed.

When King Hezekiah looked for a remarkable deliverance for his people, the sign that it would surely come was the rolling back of the sun's shadow by 10 degrees (2 Kings 20:11, 12). The shadow of God's judgment had been against Israel for a long time. It was imposed by the rule of the "10 toes" of Daniel's image. But now that "shadow" has been rolled back. Those Gentile nations no longer govern Israel. The rolling back of that burden was evident in 1948 when Israel became independent again. That is a dependable marker for us that the complete deliverance of Israel, and the world thereafter, will surely come.

— Bro. David Rice

(1) *Texts from Cuneiform Sources, Volume V, Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, Albert Kirk Grayson, 1975, pages 97-98.

(2) Grayson, page 98.

(3) Grayson, page 100.

Tabernacle Coverings of Sea-cows

“They are to carry the curtains of the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, its covering and the outer covering of hides of sea cows, the curtains for the entrance to the Tent of Meeting” (Numbers 4:25 New International Version, 1984).

The word *tachash* (Strong’s 8476) occurs in the descriptions of the tabernacle in Exodus 25, 26, 35, 36, 39; in the directions for moving the tabernacle in Numbers 4; and in only one other passage, Ezekiel 16:10. In the Ezekiel passage Jerusalem is spoken of as a maiden clothed and adorned by her Lord.

In nearly all these passages the word *tachash* is combined with the word “skins,” and rendered in the King James Version “badgers’ skins,” the Revised Version (British and American) “seal-skin,” and the Revised Version, margin “porpoise-skin.” Gesenius (Leipzig, 1905) cites Bondi (*Aegyptiaca*, i. ff) who adduces the Egyptian root “t-ch-s” and makes the expression “of *tachash*” to mean, “of soft-dressed skin.”

Though the rendering “badger” is favored by the Talmudic writers, the main objection seems to be that badgers’ skins would probably not have been easily available to the Israelites. The badger, *Meles taxus*, though fairly abundant in and near Lebanon, does not seem to occur in Sinai or Egypt. Recent archeological findings strengthen the case for the “sea-cow,” or “dugong,” the cousin of the Florida manatee, to be the source of this leather outer covering of the tabernacle. Most late 20th century translations adopt this interpretation which goes back to the statement of Gesenius under the word *tachash* which adds that the Arabs of Sinai wore sandals of the sea-cow (dugong) skin as reported by 19th century travelers to the region.

This is of interest with reference to Ezekiel 16:10, “shod thee with badgers’ skin” (King James Version). As recently as the 1930’s, manatee leather (*Trichechus inunguis*) was in great demand for industrial use in Brazil. Native Americans also used manatee hides as leather for both shoes and shields and this adds weight to the use of this type of skin for domestic purposes and supports a similar practice in the Ezekiel text.

The dugong grazes on seaweed, and is known by naturalists as *Halicore tabernaculi*, where “*tabernaculi*” is a reference to the belief by taxonomists that this indeed is the actual creature that was used in the tabernacle. More commonly the dugong is known as the “sea-cow.” It inhabits the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean and adjoining waters, with a habitat extending to Australia. The dugong, or sea cow, belongs to the order *Sirenia*, and this gentle mammal has no natural enemies. Once thought to be a mermaid, the mythical half-fish, half-woman creature of the ocean, the dugong is one of the most entrancing mammals of the seas.



Manatee

Adults have brown or gray skin and a small, round face with tiny, wide-set eyes. Its skin is finely wrinkled, allowing for its top layer to slough off. This helps to reduce the build-up of surface algae and other growths on its back and sides, that can lead to injury and infection. There are no hind legs on the dugong and its front legs or “flippers” are paddle-like in appearance and have three or four nails at the tip.

Quite recently, (*Science*, 9 October 2009: “Celebrating the Dugong”), there was a report on the investigation of an ancient ritual mound in the Arabian Gulf that gives a provocative clue bearing on the importance of these creatures and their incorporation into the coverings of the Tabernacle. Apparently, coastal dwellers venerated dugongs.

When paleontologists first came upon a 10-square-meter mound of bones in 1989 on the island of Akab 190 kilometers northeast of Abu Dhabi, they assumed it merely contained the remains of dozens of butchered dugongs. But when archaeologist Sophie Méry of the French national research agency, CNRS, and colleagues excavated the site, they discovered an intricately constructed monument.

Akab’s Neolithic fishers had first laid jawbones of dugongs flat on the ground, wedged them in place with ribs, and drenched the assemblage with a red-ochre solution. On top they placed dugong skulls — all pointing toward the east — and bundles of ribs, as well as rare tubular stone beads and other ornaments. Their average size was 4 meters (13 feet).

“The discovery led us to various lines of questioning,” says Méry, who published the find in the latest issue of *Antiquity*. “Was it a sanctuary, a trophy, or a grave?” No similar site of this age has been discovered anywhere in the world. But, the authors note, aboriginal Australians built almost identical dugong bone mounds for hunting rituals beginning

in the 14th century. Méry thinks similar rites took place on the Gulf coast thousands of years earlier. “The evidence,” says Mark Beech, an archaeologist at Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, “looks very convincing.”

For the Bible Student, these gentle, herbivorous, and possibly ritually clean creatures are like the church. They are out of their natural habitat — “the heavenlies” of Ephesians 2:6 — when they are visible to the world, even as the coverings of the tabernacle were out of their natural habitat, the water. They are not necessarily sightly, but they prove supple and enduring in use.

As noted in the *Tabernacle Notes* of Bro. Anton Frey, Jesus, in his pre-human existence was the Logos (“the Word,” John 1:1). His natural habitat was the spirit plane on which he was created (Revelation 3:4). Hence he was out of his natural habitat. The tabernacle covering was visible from outside the fence and “it was the outermost skin, rough and unsightly” (*Tabernacle Shadows*, page 127). Yet it served well to hide all that was beneath it — the ram skins dyed red; the goat hair curtain, the glorious curtain (i.e., the Tabernacle proper, Exodus 26:1).

These were the dwelling place of Jehovah God and its glorious mystery of atonement. Jesus’ flesh did not reveal him to be what he truly was — the Messiah for whom Israel had so long sought. When he presented himself to them, “his own received him not” (John 1:11) for they beheld in him “no form nor comeliness ... no beauty that they should desire him” (Isaiah 53:1, 2).

The Pilate Stone

A Fragment of History

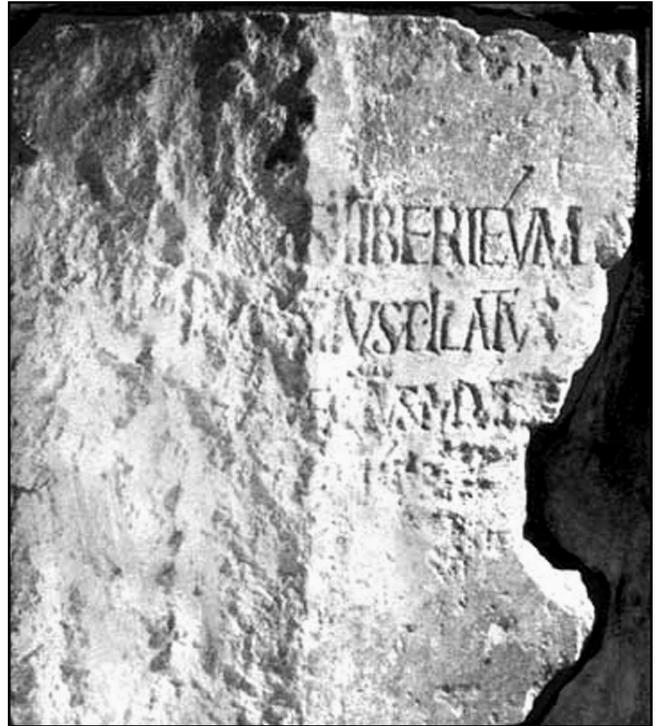
The Pilate Stone is the name of a block of limestone with a carved inscription attributed to Pontius Pilate, a prefect of the Roman-controlled province of Iudaea from 26-36. Pilate is infamous as being the man who condemned Jesus Christ to a painful scourging and death by crucifixion ca. 33. The partial inscription reads (conjectural letters in brackets):

[DIS AUGUSTI]S TIBERIEUM
[PO]NTIUS PILATUS
[PRAEF]ECTUS IUDA[EA]E
[FECIT D]E[DICAVIT]

This is the translation from Latin to English for the inscription, as conjecturally reconstructed: “The prefect of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, erected the Tiberium (temple in honor of Tiberius Caesar) to the August Gods.”

The 82 cm x 65 cm limestone block, was found in 1961 in an excavation of an ancient theater (built by decree of Herod the Great ca. 30 BC), called Caesarea Maritima in the present city of Caesarea-on-the-Sea (also called Maritima).

On the partially damaged block is a dedication to Tiberius Caesar Augustus. It has been deemed as an authentic archaeological find due to the area in which it was



The Pilate Stone

discovered: the coastal town of Caesarea, which was the seat of power of Iudaea during the government of Pontius Pilate.

Pilate also maintained a residence at Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem, but, outside of his annual trek to oversee the Passover celebration, he seldom visited Jerusalem. During Passover, Jerusalem’s population swelled and the possibility of outbreaks of violence increased. Pilate’s presence was to quell a rebellion before it started.

Keeping the peace was of vital importance not only to Pontius Pilate, but to Yhosef Bar Kayafa (Joseph son of Caiaphas), the high priest of Jerusalem’s Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. Caiaphas had been appointed high priest by Pilate’s predecessor, Valerius Gratus ca. 18, and Pilate retained him. The two men likely despised each other, but a rebellion would have done neither man any good. Thus, they shared a tenuous peace.

This is the only archaeological find with an inscription mentioning the name “Pontius Pilatus.”

The Pilate Stone is currently located at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

— Wikipedia

Financial Report

1,832.57	Balance January 1, 2009
3,219.62	Donations
- 3,209.10	Expenses
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1,843.09	Balance January 1, 2010
517	Current Subscribers