



August 2021

*From the President's Desk***It is Time to Drink of the Living Waters**

By Daniel Gwertzman

*"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." (Genesis 1:1-2)*

One cannot deny that water plays a central part in all our lives and without it, life is not possible. What are the Living Waters and where do we find them? I am afraid that pollution also affects living waters but in this case water purification plants and filters won't help. We are dealing with spiritual pollution.

*"O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters." (Jeremiah 17:13)*

Water is not just a large part of our bodies, it is a synonym for the spirit, a source of divine energy and power. It is also a symbol of the Word of God (Torah) as well as a mechanism for purification. This idea of purification is not just some outdated concept of the past. During the Corona epidemic the idea of repeatedly washing the hands became very important in reducing the spread of the disease.

Water is also the visible sign of chaos as we see during the time of the Flood. God provides order when He limits the watery abyss by separating the waters into Heavenly and Earthly zones permitting the Cosmos to emerge. When dry land appears, God traps the primordial waters under the earth and seals them in place with the Foundation Stone. According to mystical Jewish beliefs this is located on the top of Mount Moriah in the place of the Holy of Holies.

It is the joining together of the heavenly waters with the lower waters that allows the earth to bring forth its produce in abundance. This is the meaning of the Water Libation Ceremony performed during the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) which is to bring forth the rainy season. It is the waters from Heavenly Eden which sustains life in the lower world. Therefore, when one looks for the source of the Living Waters you are drawn to Jerusalem.

*"And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be." (Zechariah 14:8)*

Those who refuse to acknowledge this fact put their trust in falsehood.

*"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (Jeremiah 2:13)*

Indeed, this is not just a teaching for the Jews, it is a teaching for all the families of the Earth to come unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

*"And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain." (Zechariah 14:17)*

This is also the source of Jesus' teaching on the last day of the great feast which was Sukkot (The Feast of Tabernacles).

*"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." (John 7:37)*

The living waters are an invitation to the world to spiritual renewal, hope, salvation and a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

*"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." (Isaiah 55:1-3)*



## Underground Jerusalem: The City That Never Stops Giving

By Rabbi Ed Snitkoff

One of the hidden blessings of this terrible Covid Time is the stellar advancement of archaeological research throughout Israel. Everyone involved in archaeology used the extra time created by zoom learning, lockdowns and a country (meaning tourist sites) empty of visitors, to advance academic projects, research and digs. It seems that every day there is a new announcement of another amazing discovery somewhere in the country, particularly in Jerusalem. These discoveries and excavations are of great importance to all of us who love the Bible, while the Jerusalem discoveries greatly resonate with Christians who want to understand the world which Jesus experienced.

For example, the underground dig at the City of David has completely uncovered most of the Second Temple's half-kilometer pilgrimage road leading from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple Mount entrances. This is a breathtaking project that will soon be open to the public, thanks to the hard work of the teams of excavators and researchers who work there. Just before Covid I walked this road as it was being excavated and can tell you that it is utterly breathtaking, and that it will become a "must do" experience in the coming years.

Imagine walking up this road, while reading: "41 Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. 42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. 43 After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. 44 Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers." (Luke 2:41-47)

This is the main road up to the Temple used by pilgrims. The text gives us hints of the pilgrimage experience. The text tells us that they "went up" to the festival, as Jerusalem is high on the mountains, about 1000 meters above sea level. The Pilgrimage Road moves up in the valley between Mount Moriah and Mount Zion from the Siloam Pool, after the long ascent from Jericho in the Jordan Valley.

In Hebrew, we never say that we are simply "Going to Jerusalem." The term is to "Go UP to Jerusalem." We are always going up to Jerusalem, both physically and spiritually.

We read that there were customs to be followed when reaching Jerusalem: They would have bathed and purified themselves in the waters of Siloam before making their way up the road to the Temple. On Passover, they would bake and eat the unleavened bread, the Matza. There was the Pascal Lamb to be

sacrificed in the Temple Courtyard. They would sit down together at the Passover Meal, the Seder. They would study Torah and discuss the Exodus from Egypt. In fact, the main purpose of the Seder is to provoke the children's curiosity and provoke them to Ask Questions. We see that 12 year old Jesus asked the elders many questions. Clearly the Seder was successful for this family from the small, rural, agricultural town of Nazareth!

Imagine the large crowds traveling up and down the stepped pilgrimage road. One can almost hear echoes of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Aramaic, while ascending the road.

Imagine thousands of people, making their way to the Temple after an arduous journey from all over the world to honor God on His festival. From the book of Luke we see that the entire neighborhood came together from Nazareth- friends and family bound together. It would have taken about five days of walking to get to Jerusalem with a large group.

This was the event of the year! It must have been an amazing community building experience, as they would have stayed together for comfort and safety, sleeping out together and preparing meals together. How many people? Hard to say, but I would venture that 30-50 people would have journeyed together. We notice that Mary and Joseph do not discover the absence of their son for an entire day upon their return journey, so there must have been a considerable number walking together. They just assumed he was with them, walking with friends or family, giving us a sense of the great excitement of this trip.

It is also significant that the text tells us that Jesus is 12 years of age. To understand the importance of this age, we refer to an ancient Jewish text that records a discussion between two first-century rabbis, Hillel and Shammai.

The Question: From what age is a boy obligated to visit the Temple. Shammai says, from the time he can manage to can go up to the Temple on the pilgrimage road for the entire way, while sitting upon his father's shoulders. This would be at about the age of 3.

Hillel disagrees and says that this is too young for a child to be obligated to visit the Temple. Rather, a child must be able to complete the entire walk up to the Temple with his father, on his own. Jesus at 12 certainly completed the walk. We also see that Jesus understands the spiritual meaning of the Temple through his listening and questioning of the teachers in the Temple. It seems to me that Hillel is vindicated! The older the child, the more impactful the Pilgrimage, and the measure is this very road!

While we continue up the Pilgrimage Road, we are led to another recent underground discovery that has transformed







the visual picture of Second Temple Jerusalem. We witness a building complex that was designed to display wealth and opulence, exactly at the entrance to the Temple.

Before we explore this unbelievable discovery, let us spend a moment thinking about the role of wealth in faith and worship, a struggle that continues to this day.

According to the Talmud, the Jewish compendium of Lore and Law the first question God will ask us when we enter the Garden of Eden is: "Were you honest in your business dealings?" Financial integrity, including sharing personal wealth with the less fortunate, is the measure of a good person. That is the first attribute that God will check about us.

Jesus certainly would agree and offered much critique concerning the problematic nature of mixing money, faith, wealth and worship in ancient Judaeen society.

For example, Jesus says:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt 6:19-21)

How jarring it is to read these words (remembering other examples of Jesus expressing this common Jewish sentiment of the time) as we encounter this newest discovery at the base of the Western Wall, literally at the top of the Pilgrimage Road we already visited.

Some background: We know about the dig along the Western Wall, ongoing since 1967. This dig exposed the entire area along the western side of the Temple Mount, and has gifted us the amazing Kotel Tunnels, open to the public since 1994. Many reading this have explored and toured those tunnels that lead from the Western Wall to the northern end of the Temple Mount, half a kilometer long.

It is important to remember that the dig is ongoing and bearing fruit all the time. It was recently announced that a major complex of public buildings was exposed underground, just under and adjacent to the Western Wall Plaza. These structures, soon be open to the public (thanks to this Covid Time), show us the display of opulence that was important to the wealthy segment of Judaeen Society; a segment of society that seemingly mixed their wealth with their worship. This led many to scorn the materialistic nature of the wealthy and urged Jewish society not to emulate them.

I toured a part of this complex before Covid Time and can tell you that this will be another "must do" site. Absolutely breathtaking.

According to the press release of the Israel Antiquities Authority:

“This is without doubt one of the most magnificent public buildings from the Second Temple period that has ever been uncovered outside the Temple Mount walls in Jerusalem,” said

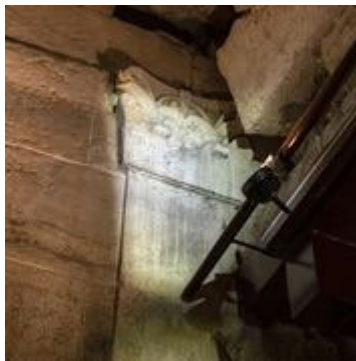
Dr. Shlomit Weksler-Bdolach, who led the excavations for the IAA. “The building, which apparently stood along a street leading up to the Temple Mount, was used for public functions – it may even have been the city council building where important dignitaries were received before entering the Temple compound and the Temple Mount.”



The complex was built while Jesus was a teenager and young adult and served the elite of Jerusalem. It was an enormous and very fancy reception place, apparently to be used before or after visiting the Temple. There are two identical halls, perhaps used as dining rooms and/or reception rooms, decorated with beautiful Corinthian capital topped columns and decorative frescos. According to Dr.

Weksler-Bdolach, the builders were mindful of Jewish law, and to date, no depiction of humans or animals has been found, in contrast to all other such building found throughout the world.

There is even a fountain from which water would flow out of stone, behind which was a system of lead pipes. The water would have flowed from a small reservoir, filled by hand from nearby pools or aqueducts.



It is not hard to understand how the eager child who made the way up to the Temple along the Pilgrimage Road, together with his family and friends from the poor, rural town of Nazareth, would be jarred by the juxtaposition of spiritual and material at the gates of the Temple.

These two places, soon to be open for all to see, help us understand the world of the First Century and the context of the Gospels. Come and visit soon and see for yourself.

Addendum: Wouldn't you know it! As I opened my browser to send this article to the Ami Center, I received an announcement that the archaeologists recently found a missing section of the eastern wall of First Temple Jerusalem. Not only that, but the wall is intact!! Thus, it seems that the Babylonians left part of the wall standing after the destruction in 586 BCE.

The city never stops giving!!!!





## Does Religious Faith Reduce Covid Deaths?

By Daniel Gwertzman

*"And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed." (Numbers 16:47-48)*

The Bible is quite clear about the power of God to heal those who believe in Him.

*"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." (Psalms 103:2-5)*

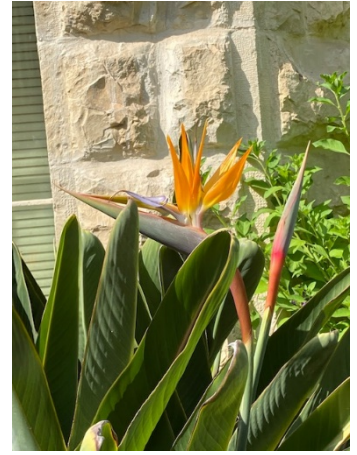
We don't have manna, the heavenly food to sustain us nor do we have the Biblical incense to heal us from the plague. What we do have is our faith.

According to Professor Uzi Rebbum of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem a one percent increase in the number of residents with strong religious identity is expected to reduce mortality rates by about a third. His study which was published in the British Journal Migration Letters, studied population characteristics and environmental factors which effect countries abilities to deal with the Covid pandemic. He used a statistical model to compare 38 member states of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and their morbidity and mortality data in the first wave of Corona virus. At that time Israel was ranked first among OECD countries managing Covid19 and a role model for other countries.

He found the more religious a country is judged by the percentage of the population that prays at least once per week the lower its mortality rate was during the first 100 days of the pandemic. People who have strong religious faith have more social and moral support from their community and religious leaders. They also tend to be more optimistic and believe they can overcome illness beyond the assessment of their doctors. Thus, having faith in God gives them more strength to overcome illness. Literally it prolongs their lives. According to a 2016 Pew Research Center study more than 40% of Israel's Jewish population considers itself traditional or religious.

As we are now entering the fourth wave of the highly contagious Delta variant it has already been noticed by some researchers that this wave seems to be sparing the Haredi population (Ultra Orthodox Jews). Only 4% of the cases based on a weekly average of moderate and serious patients are from this group according to the Health Ministry. This is due to the rate of people who have recovered which is exceptionally high amount the Ultra-Orthodox. This is despite the fact that in previous waves of Covid they were hard hit owing to large families living in small houses, and emphasis on communal events from daily collective prayers to weddings.

This apparent herd immunity should not come as a surprise. It relies on a higher source.



*"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)*

This is the same policy we follow at the AMI Center. We continue our activities whether it be meetings of our choir, lectures for small groups, supporting the work of Bnei Arazim and the Shiloh Israel Children's Fund and providing Bibles to those in need. Also, we provide virtual tours of Israel and are planning Inside Israel Seminars. The Lord's work is never finished. We need your support today to keep this work alive and vital to bless Israel and the Nations. This is a work of faith in progress.

*"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:10)*

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