



In the plains of Samaria the ancient city of Megiddo was built. It was built upon a “tel”. A tel is an artificial mound that increases the defenses of a city. Megiddo was built by Solomon and is distinguished by its triple gate.



When you walk upon the tel and meander through the dig, much of what you will see will appear like a low outline. It is only the foundation that remains. Time first eroded and then covered each generation.



As you walk the archeological sites you will come upon “strata.” Strata are the layers of earth that often bury the cities of antiquity. The “dig” of an archeological site is to remove the strata and find a time of civilization. When you stand above the dig, you are standing upon centuries of layers. It is as if you are looking down through time.

Most archeological sites in Israel are looking for the 1st century. This is the time of Herod the Great, or Herod the Builder. Herod built a great palace on a tel, the “Herodium.” He built enormous and impressive structures throughout the “levant”. Megiddo, though, was nearly 1,000

years before Herod. When you walk tel Megiddo you will stand where Solomon stood 3,000 years ago.



The tel of the Herodium

The pilgrim path ventures to many archeological sites while in Israel: Jericho, Bet She'an, and Qumran are some of the more famous ones. Each of these sites has reproductions in miniature for you to see what the sites may have looked like millennia ago. The reproductions serve a purpose: most people have a hard time grasping what was from what remains. What remains is stone, often really, really big stones. Time and warfare have ravaged every site we will visit.



Strewn amongst these archeological sites are potsherds. They are small pieces of clay that were once part of a pot or clay vessel formed into pottery. The potsherds are of no value because they are tiny fragments, pieces of an artifact that can never be put back together.



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Although they are of no historical value, I love to pick them up. Each time there is a charge, a connection. I am holding a piece of the past, the ancient past.

As we prepare for the journey to Israel, I would encourage you to engage in a bit of archeology. Don't fear, there are no shovels required. The archeology I would encourage you to do is soulful, personal.

In each of us there are strata. We have layers. There is a layer of childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, maturity, middle of life, the autumn of life, and then the “fourth quarter.” In each layer are rich memories, gains and losses. Imagine if you were the site of a dig. What does your life look like now?

So to prepare for the pilgrimage take some time this week look over the history of your life. Seek to find and describe each layer of your strata. You need only come up with four or five words for each layer. For instance, “My childhood was. . . .” Then go to the next layer: “My adolescence was” Proceed as far as life has brought you. Choose words or events that were defining.

Another way to do this is to look for changes. “My life changed in my childhood when” Consider the key moments in your life when everything changed.

When you have finished this, go back and look for what binds the words together.

Next, try to imagine your heart as filled with memories that may not all connect. Have ever wondered why some memories linger and other do not? Why can I remember a particular meal on a particular day in a particular place when I was 19 years old?

Think of those random memories as your potsherds. They lie about the soul. What if they are not as random or as fragmentary as they first appear? A good preparation for the pilgrimage is to let those memories linger. Grow accustomed to picking them up from time to time and see what marks them.

The pilgrim path is always a purposeful journey, although the purpose is usually unclear in the beginning. In the coming months you have an opportunity to find the pieces within you, to reflect upon them, to put some names to them. This may not help you understand what the caves of Qumran are all about, but it could help you to understand how it is that you are looking at the caves of Qumran. How is does this path reflect or illumine your journey so far in life?



It is too early in our preparations to have a really clear sense of what you may find as a pilgrim. At this point it is enough to define the intent of your pilgrimage as “blessing” or “understanding” or “appreciation.” Perhaps the most classic intent of the pilgrim path is simply: a way of gaining in devotion. “I am going to become more devoted to scripture.” This is a good place to be now for it allows the path and the journey to open before you.

Try to move slowly this week. Take time each day to consider your strata. Find the random memories that often linger. Sit with them. Don’t try to figure them out. Let them be. This kind of patience may come easily to you. Fair warning: it does not naturally to most. But take the time listen to the parts of your life and the memories that remain. Consider how long it took for Megiddo to be excavated; consider how long those potsherds have sat amidst the ruin.

What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

Ecclesiastes 3