

Wendy's January Prayer Thoughts

As we enter another year may we remember that it was the coming of God's Son into the world that split history in two - BC Before Christ, and AD After Christ. Visiting the Holy land today it is possible to see Churches which have been erected to mark the places where Christ ministered. Archaeological digs have uncovered sites where many early Churches were built, so confirming the Gospel narratives. I was excited to read at the end of October 2020 of Professor Adi Erlic and his team from Haifa University revealing the remains of a Byzantine Church from dating from the beginning of the fourth century. It lies in the Banias Nature Reserve on the Golan Heights. In the time of Jesus, Banias was named Caesarea Philippi, and that was where Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say I am." Peter had a God inspired moment as he replied, "You are the Messiah, (the Christ), the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:18. Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the One whom the Jewish people were waiting and longing for. Yet, they failed to identify His presence in their midst, because they gave no credence to His teaching, nor to His miraculous signs. Jesus, simply, did not fit into their mould.

Banias, known as Panias from the third century BC, was holy ground for the populace, renowned for its open air temple, built into the rock, to the Greek god Pan. It was not uncommon for followers of Christ, to build over an existing religious site. Professor Erlic commented, "When Christianity rose to power, they did not look for a new site, they converted a pagan site into a Christian site" By 320 Banias had its own Bishop. Bishop Philocus attended the First Council of Constantinople in 361. The ruins of the Church show a mosaic floor, decorated with crosses and other Christian symbols. More exciting to me is the unearthing of a large dressed boulder on which small crosses have been engraved, most likely by visiting pilgrims, to show that they had been there. It was courageous of Jesus to take His disciples there, and to look at Peter, saying, "You are Peter, (*petros* a stone), and on this rock, (*petra* massive boulder, foundation block) I will build my Church." Peter, in his Epistle, saw himself as a "living stone," and Jesus as the Cornerstone. 1 Peter 2:4-8.

Scripture describes God as a strong immovable Rock. God, the Rock, is the One we visit whenever we come to Him in prayer. Each may come personally, and pray like Hannah: "There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you. There is no Rock like our God." 1 Samuel 2:2. David, on many occasions, referred to God as "my Rock," so stable and reliable. "Blessed be the Lord... my rock and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer." Psalm 14:1a-2. As we make the move to commune with God, we do so in trust, like David. "For God alone my soul waits in silence. From him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation." Psalm 62:1-2. Read the Message translation slowly and let it be a confession of your faith. "God, the one and only - I'll wait long as he says. Everything I need comes from him, so why not? He's solid rock under my feet, breathing room for my soul, an impregnable castle: I'm set for life."

"He's breathing room for my soul." Our response must surely be one of worshipful praise. "O come, let us sing to the Lord, let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods." Psalm 95:1, 3. The Message reads, Come, let's shout praises to God, and raise the roof for the Rock who saved us! And why? Because God is the best. High king over all the gods." David was exulting God, the greatest Rock. It's our joy to sing His praises too! And, as we pray we are reminded, in Psalm 92, that our lives are meant to testify to God's righteousness. God, "is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him." verse 15. This thought must surely lead us to be bold to say: "I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my peace in whom I take refuge." Psalm 18:1-2. God is a Rock Provider, so we may ask for God's help for ourselves and others. "Hear my cry O God... Lead me to the rock that is higher than I!" Psalm 61.