

BETWEEN THE LINES

A Deeper Look...

#955- ARTISANS: Skilled Hands in the Bible

Herod the great is, arguably, the most skilled designer and builder the world has ever seen. To have one great monument to your credit is one thing, but this man's foresight and then use of the great craftsmen of his day to create multiplied structures of remarkable engineering genius and beauty probably causes him to stand without peer.

In our series on Herod (BTL #934) we go into greater detail and specifics regarding this man but let us take a moment in the our study of the work of artisans to remember the deeds of Herod and his skilled workers...

Caesarea Meritima (Caesar's city by the sea)- The most readily available resource for being amazed by a quick overview of this incredible sight is the *National Geographic* article of February 1987. If you peruse that material you will be astounded at the genius behind the Hippodrome, Aqueduct, Theater, temple to Augustus, and the crowning jewel of Caesarea Meritima, that majestic, ingenious man-made harbor of marble.

The Hebron Wall- The most preserved work of Herod for our time, it is the enclosure created to surround the tombs of the Jewish patriarchs. It has a great deal of similarity to the descriptions of the work of the wall around the Jerusalem temple.

Masada- A most amazing place to visit, it still stands as an awe inspiring monument to the vision and ability of Herod and his workmen. More than that, it challenges modern man with the incredible story of its fall at the end of the first great revolt against Rome in 73 ce/ad.

Caesarea Phillipi- A summer palace and retreat for Herod. This seems not to be as glamorous as some of his creations but it is fun to look at the tiled floor and consider what once was there.

Herod's Jerusalem palace- A fortress with three distinct towers. It dominated the town on the west side of the temple.

The Herodium- We give a great deal of information on this most amazing miniature city cut down into the top of a hill in our study guide for the series on Herod (BTL #934).

The Jericho palace- The apparent location of Herod's death. We are only now beginning to understand the glory of this place. Josephus only scratches on it in the discussions of Herod's final hours and the mass funeral procession that left it.

Antipatris- Northwest of Jerusalem, built for the memory of Herod's father, Antipas.

Machaerus- The palace fortress on the east of the Dead Sea... a probable site for the martyrdom of John the Baptist.

Phasaelis- A town just north of Jericho that Herod built for the honor of his brother, Phasael.

The Temple- This is, of course, the crowning achievement of Herod and his craftsmen. We go into much greater detail on this 35 acre enclosed marble mountain built on 10-ton foundation stones in our series entitled "Herod's Temple" (BTL #913).

Iron in the Ancient Times: Without question, iron changed the course of humanity. It is interesting to note that the Jews never seemed to master the skills of smelting this metal and utilizing it well. Here are some interesting facts regarding this historically transforming metal...

- Historians call the era from roughly 1200 bce to 330 bce "The Iron Age".
(subdivided Iron Age I: 1200-1000, II: 1000-586, III- 586-330)
- I Samuel 13 reveals the disadvantage the Jews had against the Philistines in this.
- Copper melts at 1100 celsius whereas it takes 1530 celsius to process iron.
- A few wrought iron objects have been discovered that predate the 1200 bce date.
- Access to the elements which made bronze (copper and tin) seemed to become scarce and this pre-determined the need to find another substance... iron.
- The advent smelting iron seemed to bring about great geo-political repercussions.
- Iron was found to be more broadly available and easier to extract.
- There is a vivid representation of the work of ironsmiths on a 6th c. (bce) amphora.
- Isaiah 44 speaks of the creation of iron works.
- The hardness of iron is alluded to in a number of Biblical references.
These include Daniel 2, Joshua 17, Judges 3, and Job 20.
- It seems the Philistines brought iron technology to Palestine from the Aegean region.
- There is good evidence that the Jews never had the metallurgical skills in iron that seemed well developed in the technology of their neighbors and enemies.

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**Oil- Sacred and Common Element of Life:** As we have discussed, olive oil has been one of the truly precious commodities of near eastern life for multiplied generations. It has been used in various ways and for many specific purposes of life. These include...

- **Cooking-** As an ingredient, medium for frying, and to keep things from sticking.
- **Illumination-** The oil lamp was a staple of everyday life.
- **Cosmetic-** It conditioned the skin, served as a soap, and was a deodorant.
- **Currency-** It was a trading commodity of universally accepted value.
- **Warfare-** They truly did, at times, pour boiling oil on their sieging enemies.
- **Medical/Therapeutic-** The use of olive oil as a salve was a common practice.

But, what of the sacred use of the oil? It, in many ways, covers the same categories...

**Cooking-** Oil was an ingredient for the sacred loaves and also was wiped on them after baking. The Mishnah states that all meal offerings received oil three times...coating the mixing vessel with oil, mixing the oil with the flour, and coating the baking pan with oil. Beyond that it then states that the baked cakes would be anointed with oil after baking... in the shape of the 22nd Greek letter *chi*- X. (something like a cross!). (Menahoth 6:3)

**Illumination-** The menorah (lamp) of the sanctuary brought oil up from its reservoirs in the branches to the wicks in the terminal bowls. In the Mishnaic commentary (Menahoth 8:3ff) it is revealed that the olives collected from the crown of the tree were most desired for fulfilling the command of Exodus 27 regarding "pure olive oil beaten for light".

**Currency-** We find it as an element both for tithing and temple offerings. The Mishnah tractate "Maaseroth" tells how the volume of tithing of oil was determined in chapter 1.

**Anointing-** The installation of one chosen for special ministry was by the baptism of oil... Exodus 29&30 speaks of the huge volume of oil that was used in anointing Aaron for sacred service. There are many references to the anointing of people for special work (i.e. Saul- I Samuel 10, David- I Samuel 16, Elisha- I Kings 19, James 5 speaks of the ritual of anointing the sick with the oil and prayer.

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