

## On The Way To Jerusalem

The third of a series of letters from Mrs. Vivalene Jackman, who is accompanying Rev. T. R. Jackman through southern Europe, the Holy Land and other countries at the east end of the Mediterranean, has been received by The Sentinel:

The Negev is the name applied to all the vast, barren desert south of Palestine. Part of it belongs to Trans-Jordan, part to Egypt and part to Palestine. All of it is a desolate waste. There are mountainous parts, deep sandy valleys between high granite peaks; there are places where the smooth floor of sand stretches unbroken for miles or rises in rippled dunes like the waves of the sea. There are miles and miles of high plateau covered with gravel and thorn brush. The whole is desolation—and into this wilderness, the Israelites wandered for 40 years.

They must have had the place pretty much to themselves, for the only signs of life today are an occasional camel caravan, a nomad Bedouin family with tents and a few goats, and the lonely outpost of the desert police patrol. Those police are wild, uneducated sons of the desert, but they are polite and hospitable. Each time we stopped beside the rude mud hut, we were urged to drink Turkish coffee, made especially for us as soon as our approach had been noted. This desert hospitality extends to the Bedouins as well. We drove past a wretched dirty camp where two men were huddled over a fire baking a loaf of bread on the hot stones. One of them ran toward the car and, though I doubt not that this was the only food he possessed, pressed half the warm loaf into our hands. It was black and tasted like hot sand but we thanked him profusely and drove on.

We had travelled south from Petra, in the land of Edom, and now about noon we looked across the valley of the Arabah and saw the quiet blue waters of the Gulf of Akaba before us. This other arm of the Red Sea is backed by the dim grey mountains of Arabia on the east and the colorful Sinai range on the west.

At the northern extremity of the gulf is the village of Akaba. It consists of a couple of dozen mud huts situated in a very beautiful palm grove on the edge of the bluest, clearest water I have ever seen. It is a quiet place with no wheeled traffic, no important commerce, no "business district" and no daily paper. In fact, there is no hotel. Instead there is a rest house used by government officials, archaeologists and the handful of tourists who pass that way. This mud structure is built in a square around an open courtyard in the fashion of the old eastern khan. It has been whitewashed and is easily distinguished because it is the only building which isn't mud color. No meals are served, but there is a dining room and a little bare kitchen where the keeper, a lad of eighteen, will prepare any food you may bring

with you. Since Akaba was an unexpected addition to our journey, we had no food, but the young innkeeper agreeably accompanied me to the village market.

I think there is only one store and its shelves looked like Mother Hubbard's cupboard. We bought all the eggs in the village, (five in all), a can of green beans from Belgium, canned pear from Syria and a quantity of small tomatoes from the local gardens. As we returned to the inn a native fisherman met us on the beach and offered to sell us two good-sized fish. The boy managed to fry these and prepare the meal in two hours and he added to the banquet sweet biscuits and tea.

As soon as the blistering sun had cooled I went for a walk along the beach. Colorful shells and bits of coral lay at the edge of the blue waters. There were crabs and fish in the deep clear pools and little brown boys splashed about the water or lay nude upon the warm white sand. Two small boats with huge white sails were floating on the breast of the calm, turquoise sea and we hired one of them for a sail across the gulf.

Never have I spent a more delightful evening. The owner of the boat sang in that strangely unmusical wall of the Arab. The sunset turned the waters to violet and purple and the hills to gold and crimson. The waters were so clear that seaweeds of various colors, coral islands and schools of bright-colored fish could be seen beneath us. Even the marine gardens of Catalina are not superior to those of Akaba. The water was so warm and clear I begged for a swim. The Arab stopped the boat and I slipped over the side and swam a while before we sailed on.

At last the boatman stopped and threw out an anchor. Then he produced lines and hooks for each of us and told us we might fish until dark. During the next hour we caught 19 Alice-in-wonderland fish. They resembled sun perch, are rather wide and flat with a big mouth but the color of them seemed a reflection of the sun. They range in shades from deep red to salmon and pink. Their eyes are like crimson buttons and some of them were covered with bright green dots.

A full moon turned the waters of the sea to silver and outlined the dark shadows of tall palms along the shore. We slept under the open sky in the courtyard, preferring it to the big, dusty rooms of the rest house. This delightful village is an almost forgotten spot today, inhabited by a hundred Arabs who know little of the rest of the world. They live on fish and vegetables from their gardens. Akaba is an oasis in the desert, and that is all, but as I fell asleep I dreamed of the past when times were very different for the village on the gulf.

Long ago there lay at the northern end of the Gulf of Akaba, the city of Elath. It was visited by the Israelites in their trek across the desert and David established a trade from Elath to all parts of the known world. In the days of Solomon it was a key city to commerce, whence sailed his ships

to the great beyond. Through this port flowed to Jerusalem the gold from Ophir, silver, precious stones, sandalwood and peacocks until, the Bible says, silver and gold became as plentiful as stones in the Holy City. In a single year the importation of gold from Ophir was \$15,000,000 (1 Kings 10:14). Later kings of Israel rebuilt and fortified Elath and a Roman legion was there in the first century A. D. Lost under a shroud of Mosaic darkness after the conquest of 630 A. D., its glory disappeared. The channels of its busy sea are now a prey to coral builders, its once strong structures have crumbled to dust, all that remains are recent excavated ruins. We walked through these broken walls, covered by the dust of centuries, with Dr. Glick of the American School of Oriental Research who has excavated the old city of Solomon.

From Akaba to Palestine we crossed the area of Kadesh-Barnes, miles of desert, and arrived at Beer-sheba very hot and thirsty. The wells of Abraham are still filled with good water but riotous conditions today make it unsafe to stop there. We stopped at the military barracks instead and the English soldiers furnished us with welcome lemonade and tea. The major himself accompanied us about the city with an armored car and military escort while we photographed the very wells Abraham dug nearly 4000 years ago.

A very bad outbreak at Hebron the day before had placed the whole area under strict curfew, that is, no one was allowed outside their homes or on the road without a special order from police. Arabs were shooting at cars, telephone wires had been cut and we went on to Jerusalem at great risk. Thanks to the Beer-sheba major who radioed the police along the way to look for us and escort us through each village, we arrived without mishap in the Holy City. In spite of troublous times and dangerous travel conditions we had covered in one day ground that it took

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The Israelites many years to cross—Vivalene Jackman.

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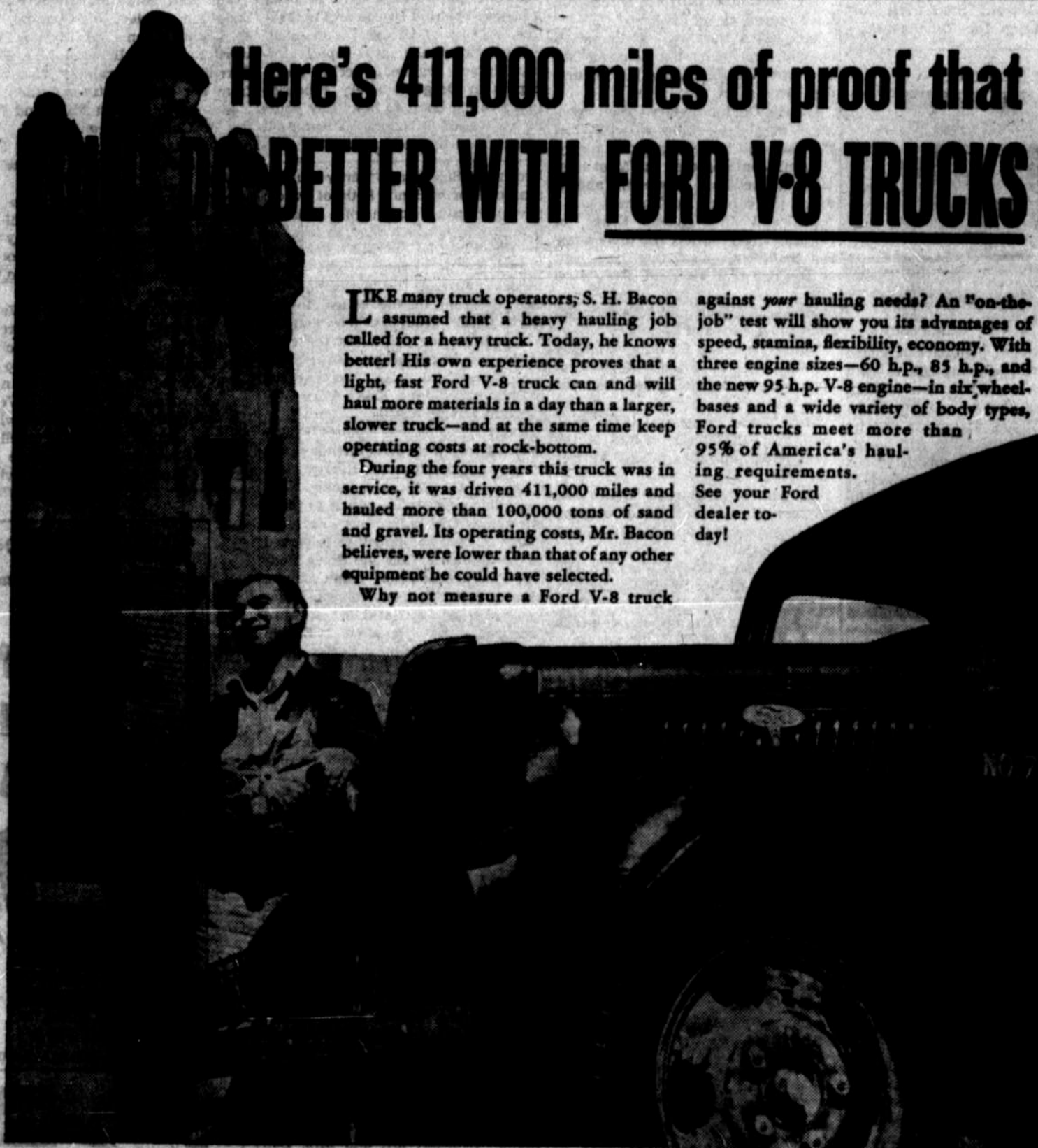
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