

PROVIDENCE BAPTIST CHURCH

the **Holy Land
Journal**

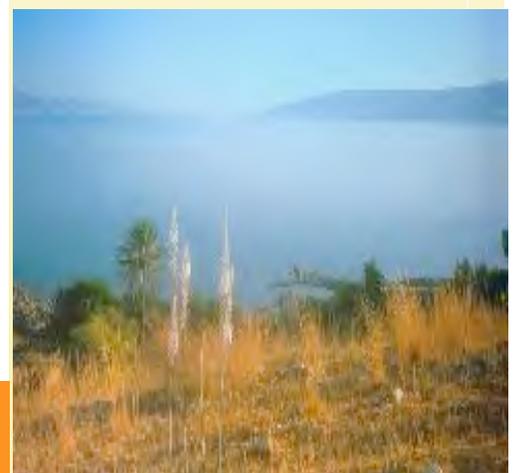


Devotions,
Prayers, Pictures
and Memories

From deserts to mountains to Jerusalem....
Providence in the Holy Land

Consider this booklet my gift to you, good friends and fellow pilgrims to the Holy Land. May this offer you some moments of devotion, reflection, perspective and inspiration as we travel together in the footsteps of Jesus.

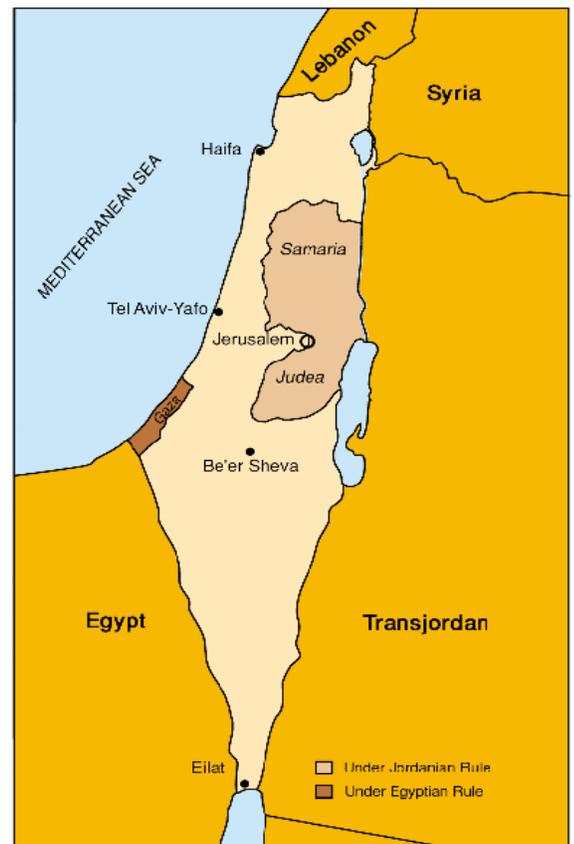
Love, David
Spring, 2014



Providence Baptist Church in Israel and Palestine

A Brief (and generalized) History of Israel

- The Patriarchs (2000 – 1300 B.C.)**
- The Exodus (1300 – 1200 B.C.)**
- The Conquest (1200 B.C.)**
- The Judges (1200 – 1000 B.C.)**
- The United Monarchy (1000 – 922 B.C.)**
- The Divided Kingdom (922 – 722 B.C.)**
- The Assyrian Period (721 – 605 B.C.)**
- The Babylonian Period (605 – 539 B.C.)**
- The Persian Period (539 – 333 B.C.)**
- The Greek Period (333 B.C. – 167 B.C.)**
- The Hasmonean Period (167 – 63 B.C.)**
- The Roman Period (63 B.C. – 330 A.D.)**
- The Byzantine Period (330 A.D. – 638 A.D.)**
- The Islamic Period (638 A.D. – 1099 A.D.)**
- The Crusader Period (1099 – 1260 A.D.)**
- The Mamluk Period (1260 – 1516 A.D.)**
- The Ottoman Period (1516 – 1917 A.D.)**
- The British Period (1917 – 1947)**
- Israeli Independence (1947 – present)**



Armistice Lines, 1949

The map upper right denotes Gaza and the Occupied West Bank before 1967. Below right shows the United Nations expected partition of Palestine in 1947.





A Guide to Our Readings and Devotionals

I have tried to organize this booklet roughly on our itinerary for the trip. However, you will notice occasional diversions on other somewhat related topics or pertinent issues. I've tried to balance the contents with enough helpful material for history and perspective to enhance your learning, but also with enough devotional thoughts and biblical reminders so that both hearts and minds are stimulated. I also make reference in some of the readings to additional material that I hope to be sharing on that particular day and that particular spot. It might be that you will need to remind me of my plan! Sometimes Munzer (our guide) and I will get carried away on a subject and I will get distracted from my intentions – so feel free to remind me! Just please be gentle and kind! Enjoy and thanks for joining me on this amazing journey!



Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem

Built initially by Helena, the mother of Constantine, in Byzantine style, it was later rebuilt by the Crusaders and added on to in various styles and time periods since...

Prepare my heart, O Lord!

What do I hope to learn?



Prayers for My Journey:



Learn
to
Pray

Providence in the Holy Land!

Welcome to the land of Jesus!

Watch carefully – keep your eyes open and ready to see remarkable scenes, memorable scenery, and unforgettable landscapes that will help you to read the Bible as never before. And remember, we are walking in the steps of Jesus, so miss nothing, see everything, learn as much as you can – and enjoy!

TEL AVIV – City on the sea

Built adjacent to Joppa, the port city of departure for Jonah, and the place of Peter's dream, Tel Aviv rose from the sands of the Mediterranean and was merged with Joppa in 1950 just after the establishment of Israel (1948) to make one municipality.



Herod The Great's Amazing Project

With no natural harbor, Herod's early kingdom needed one. So he, with the help of Roman engineers, made one for the ages. We will see the remains that include the amphitheater below.



Caesarea Maritima, a harbor and city constructed right out of the sea



Reconstruction of the Harbor's Entrance



The mosaics above are from Antioch in Syria where Luke tells us that people in the Early Church were first called Christians. Artistic expertise and elegance is evident in the shadows, shading and subtleties of color. Israel held an abundance of this kind of art work as well. We will be seeing some, so pay attention!

The Romans were cool...they knew how to run an empire and they ran it with style. Whether art, engineering, architecture, science, math, or the technology and art of war...the Romans stole ideas whenever and wherever they could and then made them better. Whether the mosaics at the left, or the harbor of Caesarea (Herod used Roman engineers) or the aqueduct shown below left, that carried water from far away Mount Hermon to Caesarea, the Romans successfully made their indelible marks on history in virtually every corner of the Mediterranean world and throughout the Middle East.

We will also see fine examples of Roman and Herodian work in Jerusalem, Tiberias, Masada, Beth Shan, Petra...even Nazareth shows evidence of the Roman occupation. In short, virtually everywhere we look, we will see the clear fingerprints of the strong Roman influence during Jesus' lifetime.

The Romans and Their Incredible Imperial Reach:



From the Caspian Sea in the east to the Atlantic coast of Spain and Morocco in the west; from the southern boundaries of Scotland in the north to the southern borders of Egypt and the Red Sea, Roman culture surrounded the Mediterranean Sea which they called *Mer Nostrum* (our sea) and the empire itself spanned one of the larger land and sea masses for a longer period of time than of any other in western civilization history.

BENEFITS FOR THE GOSPEL: Thanks to the Roman control of this enormous area, the spread of the Gospel was vastly enhanced: a highway system, postal service, safe, affordable travel, and a common language (Greek) were just a few of the many contributions to the Christian faith.

Tel Aviv: “Modern Cool” *From the Romans to modern Israel, the new chic is found in this modern city, the financial and style capital of Israel and in this part of the Middle East. Founded in 1909, Israel's stock exchange is located here as is the U.S. embassy.*



ENTERING ISRAEL: *“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth”* (Isaiah 40:28).

Welcome to Israel! This is where it all began, from Abraham’s original sojourn to the ministry of Jesus. The land you are entering pulsates with the stories and life-changing history that continues to live. So be ready to experience all that this land of promise has to offer!

The days we will spend together will be filled with sights and sounds that might seem foreign. And yet, there will be familiarity, too. For the people and places are part of the stories we have learned since we were children. This is the place where the Bible will come alive.

This scripture from Isaiah 40 asks two questions: “Have you not known? Have you not heard?” We need to know and we need to hear! We will have fun and laugh; we will be amazed and anxious; but most of all, I hope we will come more closely in touch with where we come from, where God’s dream for our world began to unfold, where Jesus preached and taught and laughed and even played as a little boy. We need to know and to hear...



We will hear facts and figures; we will ask questions and be confronted with far more information than we can possibly digest in our brief time together. So take good and thorough notes. Take pictures and keep careful track of the when, where and what. Be kind, gentle and patient. But we need to know and to hear...

So stand in awe before the mystery of what we will experience together. Be prepared to hear the heartbeat of history beating and to see scenes that will make the Bible come alive. This land is holy, and you are here. So be reminded again: *“The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth!”*

Today's experiences:

Prayer for today

Lord, allow me to be your humble servant during these days. Allow me to stand in awe at the wonder of your creation, the beauty of your world, and the transforming power of your salvation history. Give me an open mind that I might be informed, a willing heart that I might be inspired, and a ready spirit that I might be given more fully to your holy purpose for this day and every day. Amen.



Use the space above for your thoughts and reflections on the events of the day. You will want to keep track of what you did and saw! You also might want to write your own prayers for each morning or evening.

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless God's holy name ... who redeems your life ... so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

(Psalm 103:1-5).



Local entertainment just like in the old days?

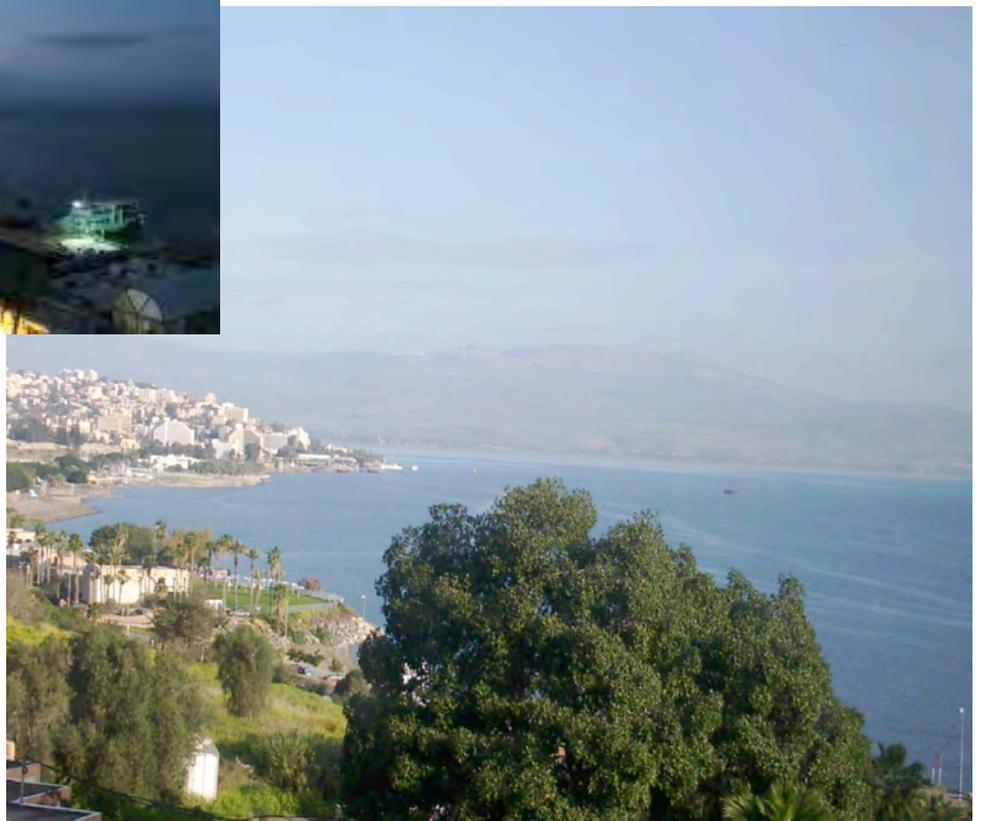
Resort for the Rich and Famous: **TIBERIAS!**

The Bible never speaks about Jesus being in Tiberias. But his home was walking distance, just up the shore of the lake at Capernaum. And there is good evidence that others he knew well had considerable dealings with this very important resort city. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great build Tiberias specifically to attract royal and wealthy visitors. His goal was to make Tiberias, named after the Emperor of Rome at the time, an irresistible attraction to any wanting to be counted in the ranks of the rich and famous. In doing so, he needed lots of food, especially fish, the local delicacy, to show off the beauty and abundance of the land he controlled. Several of the disciples, and Mary Magdalene (Magdala was right next door) surely dealt with, visited and interacted with this resort. Just as it was in Herod's day, Tiberias was famous for its hot springs and mineral waters. So in addition to great food, incredible scenery, good shopping and convenient setting, this city was the perfect place to enjoy relaxing days pampered by royal servants, catered to by spa and massage experts, enticed by local merchants, and refreshed by crystal waters of the lake and hot mineral waters of the earth.

Whether at night or during the day, Tiberias is a feast for the eyes, while the Sea of Galilee is an elixir for the soul. Enjoy the beauty, history and spirit of this amazing place!



Completed in 18 A.D., Tiberias was built by Herod Antipas to impress the Romans of his power and to attract outside money and interest. He accomplished his goal. This younger Herod never built on quite the scale his father, Herod the Great did (we will see the much of his work soon!). But Tiberias is not a bad effort!



PROVIDENCE IN THE HOLY LAND

The Sea of Galilee

"To walk where Jesus walked"



We will be looking at views like this one that look much the same today as they did when Jesus walked these shores. The same mountains and geographical features surround this remarkable body of water as they did thousands of years ago. So look carefully, imagine well

and remember what you see. Reading the Bible will never be the same. Jesus began his time in the Galilee in the little hamlet of Nazareth. But his three years of ministry were spent in and around Capernaum, right on the Sea of Galilee.

DATES OF SIGNIFICANCE

Old Testament:



922 - The United Monarchy splits. Solomon's Kingdom is divided into The Northern Kingdom of Israel and The Southern Kingdom of Judah. Samaria made capital of Israel.



721 - The Assyrian Empire invades Northern Kingdom, Israel; carries off the leading citizens. These become known as the "Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. They are never heard from again. Those left intermarry with Assyrian colonists; aka: "Samaritans."

New Testament:



66 - 70 A.D.; Romans invade in response to Jewish revolt. Temple destroyed. Arch of Titus in Rome erected celebrating Roman victory.



132 A.D. - Second Jewish revolt against Rome. Leader Bar Kochba and rebels defeated. Emperor Hadrian renames area Palestine. Jews forced to leave in *Diaspora*.

"Study to make thyself approved unto God, a worker who needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of Truth." II Timothy 2:15

The Fascinating World of Jesus: The Area of The Galilee

The area of Galilee looks serene enough. The quiet shores of what appears to be a placid lake evoke thoughts of gentle waves, fishing villages and simple fishing boats. But discoveries over the last hundred years tell us of cosmopolitan towns, raucous parties in Tiberias thrown by Herod Antipas, international

trading conglomerates selling salted fish, dates, pomegranates and olives to clients across the empire. Absentee landlords owned large tracts of formerly locally owned farms often evicting tenants if unable to pay rent on time. This is likely why Jesus had so many following him: they had nowhere else to go!

The Crossroads of Cultures

It helped to be multilingual in the first century Roman Empire. It was a global economy that necessitated good communication in a common language: Greek was the English of the first century; it was the most widely spoken and most easily adaptable.



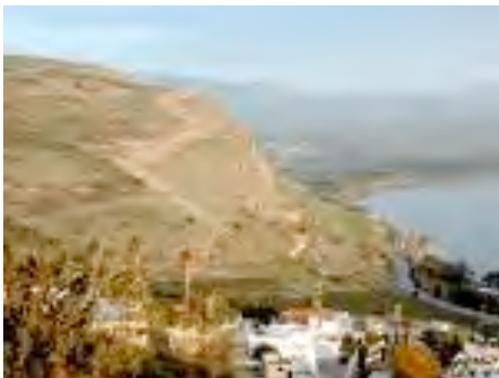
Jesus spoke Aramaic like most other Jews living in Roman Palestine. However, also like most Jews of his day, especially those living in Galilee and Jerusalem, Jesus also likely had a working knowledge of Greek. He was from a traditional family from a small town, so unlike Paul

who seemed to be fluent in Aramaic and Greek, Jesus probably still needed a translator when with those in largely Greek speaking areas like Bethsaida and The Decapolis.



The fertile land around the Sea of Galilee was sprinkled with oak forests during the time of Jesus. There were also plentiful olive, date and pomegranate trees, rich gardens and vineyards with wine presses nearby.

Tiberias, overlooking the Sea of Galilee just as it did in the time of Jesus.



In the dry season of summer, the hills around the sea turn brown in the heat.

Built as a spa city by Herod Antipas, contemporary of Jesus, he named this beautiful city for the Caesar of the Roman Empire at the time. Its palaces and recreational facilities drew visitors from all over the empire and made fishing enterprises around the lake all the more profitable. Peter, Andrew, James, John and Mary Magdalene were likely familiar with and involved in the Tiberias culinary needs for fresh fish. Magdala, Mary's home



town boasted a huge fishing industry with massive warehouses and large volumes of fish for sale, dried or fresh.

Thank you, Lord!

Prayer for Our Galilean Journey

**GALILEE
PRAYER, Day
Three in Israel**

Our Heavenly Father, we pause during our busy journey in your holy land to give you thanks – thanks for bringing us here safely, for the rest and food we have enjoyed so far, and for the opportunity to see the land where our Christian ancestors walked. We are especially blessed being where Jesus came to save us so long ago.



As we look out across the Sea of Galilee, help us to remember the miracles that Jesus performed here. Also, let us recall that he chose several disciples from here with the promise to make them “fishers of men.”

Help us to use this time to gain spiritual strength that we may become closer to you and your son, Jesus.

We pray that you will comfort and protect and calm those who need it now just as Jesus calmed the disciples here when this was a stormy sea. Bless those of all faiths that we encounter in this land.

In the name of your precious son, Amen.

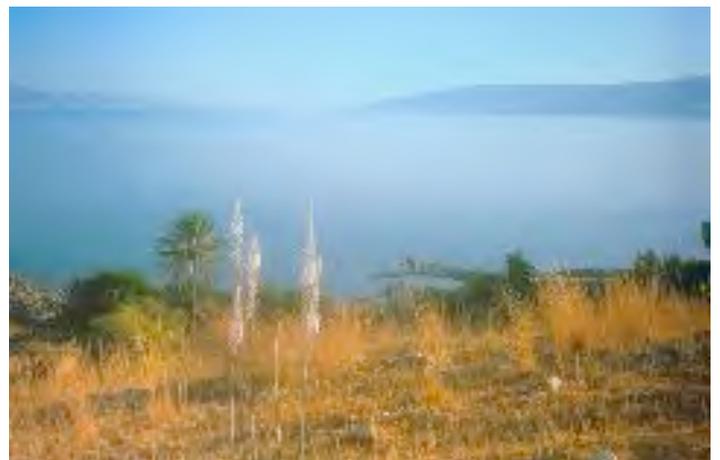
rdThank
You
Lord

- Frances King



What I did and saw today...

What I did and saw today...



"Gonna lay down my burdens, down by the riverside..."

"I ain't gonna' study war no more, down by..."

The Jordan River

Baptism in the Jordan? If it were good enough for Jesus...



Spring, 2014

Jesus' Baptism ...

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him...and a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'"

Matthew 3:13-17



What We Need...

Since the time of the Exodus¹ when God led the children of Israel out of slavery from the land of Egypt, passing through any kind of moving water² has symbolized rebirth. When the Hebrews fled from their land of captivity and in the direction of a land of promise, they had to go through the Red Sea. This was the line of demarcation between slave and free, from imprisonment by forces outside of themselves to liberation under the leadership of God's spirit.

In the same way, the Jews of Jesus' day recognized immersion in water as a purifying, cleansing awakening to new possibility under God's guidance.³

Our tradition of baptism, both Protestant and Catholic, comes from this same Jewish understanding that led Jesus to initiate his ministry with this powerful ritual. In what we call the sacrament or ordinance of Baptism, we, too, recognize a new commitment, new and deeper reliance upon God, a public profession of an inward grace and transformation. The old is washed away and new creation emerges from the waters. In some traditions, we say: "We die to the old self and rise again to the new self in Christ Jesus."

What is God saying to you today?

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him...and a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’” Matthew 3:13-17

CON’T FROM PREVIOUS PAGE - We also understand this same journey from slavery to freedom: God rescues us from the bondage of sin to the promised land of salvation. So as we enter the waters of baptism, we are to remember at least two things:

1. Our Sinfulness: *We have done both less and more than what God had hoped for us - less goodness and grace; more selfishness and foolishness. In baptism, we symbolize that God’s power saves us from ourselves.*

2. God’s Direction: *We are called to move towards God’s promise and purpose for our lives by saying “no” to distraction and temptation and “yes” to God’s grace and truth, and to the power of God’s salvation.*

Regardless of the Christian tradition we know or the Jewish origins we remember,⁴ the power and beauty of this sacred symbol of baptism that Jesus demonstrates in each of the gospels remains a moving opportunity to openly celebrate our Christian commitments as his followers.

¹ In Greek, the word “Exodus” means to “go out” or “to exit.”

² Also known as “living water,” this was moving water that was seen as unhindered by human involvement, coming straight from God in the heavens above (where the rain originated) to creation below. As the living water moved past the individual in the moment of baptism, it carried the “sin” and dirt away to the sea.

³ There was surely the idea of forgiveness, too, but especially for Jesus, this moment with John at the Jordan River signified his commitment to a total reliance upon God’s guidance. Further reading into chapter four of Matthew reveals Jesus’ temptation following this commitment testing the depths of his commitment to God’s purposes (Matthew 4:1-11).

⁴ Many Jews today still participate in a ritual of purification similar to baptism in a type of “baptistry” in some synagogues known as a *mikveh*.

Today's Prayer:

Dear Lord,

For all that we have we give thanks. We thank you for the blessing of life, health and for the joy and fellowship that you allow us to experience through travel. As we travel we seek to learn more of you and your teachings, in the places that you lived and taught. We ask that you open our hearts and our minds to the glory of your physical presence in these places in the past and your continued presence in our lives today and in the future. We pray your blessings on our journey. May our words and deeds be a blessing to you. Amen.

- Tom Philson

Today's Lessons:

**If you would be interested, we have planned a time of baptism at the Jordan River for any and all who feel led to follow in the steps and sacraments of Jesus.*

PBC in Israel...

“To walk where Jesus walked...”



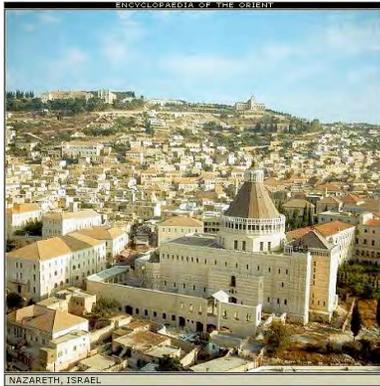
NAZARETH, ISRAEL

Nazareth, the childhood home of Jesus

Nazareth is in the news again, this time for a house that Jesus must have seen...

Above is pictured the Church of the Annunciation (that we will see today!), the traditional site where Gabriel came to Mary to tell her of God's plan for her to be the mother of Jesus. The area next to the front of the church is where archeologists explore a new discovery: a first century home

that Jesus would have surely seen, and possibly even worked on as a builder (see the following devotion on Nazareth). Today the town is Israeli Arab. In previous years, the vast majority were Christians. Now the Muslim population has increased due to wars, refugees and immigration.



The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone ...

March 27, 2014

“Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, returned to Galilee... When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because

He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,

And recovery of sight to the blind,

To let the oppressed go free,

To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Luke 4:14-19

Maybe you have heard or read the reports: Archeologists are currently exploring a recently discovered home in Nazareth that dates to the time of Jesus. This might not sound like that big a deal. There are countless ruins in Israel that we will be seeing dating from the first century AD when Jesus lived.

But this one is different and more exciting. For the first time, we have available to us not only the very stones, but a house that Jesus would have seen and possibly even entered. In his day, Nazareth was only a village of some 50 homes or so. The chances of his knowing the family and being in the house, perhaps even working on the walls himself are considerable.

Jesus did manual labor that was called in Greek: *tekton*. This has been translated over the years as: *carpenter*. In fact, the better

translation, according to most scholars is: *workman/mason, or one who builds and moves things* (think “tectonic plates”). So prior to his ministry, Jesus was actually someone who was probably in the business of building houses. And in those days, all the houses were built out of stone. Very few things were made of wood (window sills, a few pieces of furniture, roof supports...) because it was expensive and didn’t last as long.

So now we come to the possibility that the stones that lie in the foundation of the home (it is adjacent to the Church of Annunciation (that we visit before long!) were put in place by Jesus himself. No one knows for sure; but just imagine if it were so...



DAY THREE IN ISRAEL:

Caesarea Maritima

*“In Caesarea, there was a man named
Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort.”
(Acts 10:1)*

God expands the early believers: Like Caesarea, Joppa was a city on the Mediterranean Sea. Joppa was the same seaside town where Jonah set sail in his attempt to flee from God’s call to preach to the people of Nineveh. And it was in Joppa, at the house of Simon the Tanner, that Simon Peter had a similar call.

Peter’s call came in the form of a dream; we read about it in Acts 10. Peter, like Jonah in the Old Testament, thinks of himself as a loyal Jew, devoted to the Law and certain of God’s intentions regarding the covenant with the Jewish people. Yet in both cases, Jonah and Peter, God has other plans.

With Jonah, the whole episode of the storm and the big fish serve to underline that the dreams of God go beyond our understandings. The Ninevites, hated enemies of Israel and Judah, repent of their sinful ways and are welcomed by God into the family of faith. Jonah is furious.

In the case of Peter, his dream of food items that are declared by God to be clean sends a deeper and, like with Jonah, a troubling message to Peter. All that he previously believed is now thrown into flux. Peter had been clear on what it meant to be part of the covenant people. Now he wonders. And just as he is shaking off the sleep from his nap and awakening from his dream, there is a knock on the door.

A small delegation from Caesarea, just up the coast from Joppa, informs Peter of a

man, a Roman Centurion, a Gentile, non-Jew, head of a group of soldiers occupying his land. He was named Cornelius. It turns out that this soldier was a God fearing man from the Italian cohort and had generously contributed to Jewish causes in Caesarea. God had also inspired Cornelius through a dream, calling upon him to send for Peter.

Three day later, Peter stands in the home of this Roman centurion, the visit itself, a potential act of sedition (see Acts 10:28). He proclaims the gospel, and in this most Roman of Judean cities, this place of occupation and city divided between Jews and Greeks and Romans and Syrians, here two men who days before would have been enemies, now are brothers in the Good News of Jesus. For that day, Cornelius and all his household were baptized. How beautiful are the unexpected miracles of new faith in surprising people. And it all happened in Caesarea where we will be...

Lord, when I am blinded by my own agenda, when my prejudices tarnish the beauty of your creation, or when my silence quietly condones injustice, awaken me as you did Peter and Cornelius. Show me the way in your will; give me the courage to stand for your wisdom; and give me the insight to adjust and deepen my convictions. Amen.

Valley of the Shadow



"Jesus replied, 'A man was on his way from Jerusalem down to Jericho'" (Lk. 10:30).

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death..." (Psalm 23:4).



The setting of this story Jesus tells in Luke 10 is not arbitrary. The land we will be experiencing is the actual valley, the very place where Jesus sets his story. We will be standing on the ground that Jesus knew well and expected us, his audience, to understand. The rocks, the danger, the waterless, treeless landscape... Today, we will

see the Monastery of St. George along the far wall of this Valley of the Shadow of Death. But in Jesus' day, as with David's day when this Psalm was first composed, this valley was the place that robbers disposed of their victims. They were tossed to the side of the road, and sometimes over the precipice into the valley itself. Thus the name. So the story connects immediately to this place

– and to the psalm that also contains these words: *And you make a place at the table for me in the presence of my enemies ...* These are confusing words. In the presence of my enemies? Why would that be a good thing? But these words, along with the location, are crucial to understanding what follows in Luke 10.



Thus, Jesus had real audacity in his choice of hero. What was he saying? What did he expect his audience to hear? And how were they then and are we now to respond?

Besides Psalm 23:5, the additional implicit scriptural reference in the story is to Leviticus 19:34: "Love the alien as you love yourself; for you were once aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord." The Samaritan is clearly not a neighbor in the traditional sense of the word. There are no common links, no proximity, and few recognizable or acceptable similarities. Rather, there is distance, distrust, bifurcated history, anger, hatred—and prejudice in the extreme. The one common link is ancient slavery in Egypt. The common ancestors of both of these children of Israel had been aliens in a foreign land at the mercy of the kindness of strangers. So the Samaritan demonstrates the unrequited offering of freely given compassion to one he doesn't know and is supposed to hate. And, in doing so, this unnamed Samaritan anonymously contributes a prime example of God's colorblind, unbounded, and eternally risk-taking love. It is this divinely breathed love that changes an enemy into a friend: "... you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows" (Psalm 23:5).

Jesus incorporates a surprise ending his audience would have understood immediately. So, the creative connection of this conclusion to the powerful but confusing words of Psalm 23 adds a marvelous layer of importance.

Jesus builds the parable on a progression of two characters:

The Priest, the most important and influential

The Levite, helper of the priest and influenced by his actions

And there is a third and anticipated character that the audience then would assume to be the next character on the scene: the hero, looking and acting a lot like them:

The Jewish layperson, the expected hero making those in Jesus' audience feel better about themselves and able to chuckle about the cluelessness and

selfishness of the first two. At least, this is what they thought was coming.

The subversive nature of Jesus' stories had likely become an enjoyable and distracting staple for insight and entertainment. But this one has an unexpected twist: the shocking hero who replaces the expected Jewish layperson – is a *Samaritan*. As we learned earlier, there is a sad and sordid history between Jews and Samaritans. From the Assyrian colonization and intermarriage (during the Assyrian Period), antipathy had grown to dangerous levels by Jesus' day. Acts of terrorism both from Jews and from Samaritans were common. Consequently, any Samaritan was suspect, treated with extreme prejudice, and essentially racially profiled in both the Jewish and Roman occupation of Samaritan areas.





“Entering Jericho, he made his way through the city” (Luke 19:1).

He entered Jericho ... (Luke 19:1).

This lovely oasis town that we will be seeing is in the desert just north of the Dead Sea. It is the oldest consistently inhabited town on earth. For ten thousand years, this amazing place has been blessed with a multitude of fresh springs that offer abundant water. Consequently, it has thrived in the middle of hostile surroundings. Palm trees, lemon, orange and all manner of citrus trees, bananas, figs, dates—virtually any vegetable or fruit flourishes because of the rich soil and abundant water. Even today, the markets of Jericho are filled to overflowing with some the biggest and most beautiful eggplants, peppers, tomatoes, squash, and some of the sweetest bananas

I have ever tasted. You name the fruit or vegetable, and Jericho has it, spilling from market stalls out into the streets off the central square—a colorful sign of vitality both for Jericho and for the rest of Palestine and much of Israel.¹ This was the town of Zacchaeus and these were likely the same conditions when Jesus walked that way two thousand years ago—abundant food and colorful surroundings, but also oppressive policies that stunted spiritual growth, stifled the heart and created disillusionment. Hidden within this biblical story about Zacchaeus is the daily reality of oppression, injustice, and greed—along with the fear and small mindedness necessary for such policies to remain. It also, ultimately, has to do with the *tough*

(Continued)

love – and salvation. We will talk about this more on the bus!

Today during our visit and as we drive, think of areas in the world where ordinary people like you and me, through no fault of their own, live under unjust laws and in difficult circumstances they cannot control. Imagine what it would be like—how would it feel to live under an authority that had little regard for you or your family’s well-being?

Make this day about gentleness, compassion and imagination. Pray for those who are suffering under oppressive policies and harsh conditions. They share your humanity—and are connected as brothers and sisters to our common source of life.

Thoughts from the day

Thoughts from the day



“...that your love may overflow... more and more, with knowledge and full insight...” PHIL. 1:9

Jerusalem!



Yesterday

Started as a Jebusite city, captured by David (1000 BC) and focal point of countless conflicts, the city of three faiths endures.

Today

A holy city Christianity, Islam and Judaism, it continues to be a source of conflict and symbol of hope for millions.

Tomorrow

Respect for Palestinian rights, the safety of Israelis and the protection of Christians will likely remain an ongoing tension.

From the Mount of Olives, a picture paints a thousand words...

ABOVE: See the Dome of the Rock from a quiet sanctuary on the Mount of Olives...

A rabbi prays at the Western Wall, at right, while the picture above gives a picturesque perspective of Jerusalem's Old City through the window of a Christian church.

Such are the contrasts of sights, sounds, smells and experiences in the holy city for three of the world's monotheistic religions. All three faiths claim Abraham as their common patriarch and all three consider Moses the great lawgiver. And with many other common

threads of faith, these three spiritual cousins understand Jerusalem to be a spiritual focal point.

For Jews, it is the navel of the world, the center of the land God gave to Abraham. It was from just under this Temple Mount that Abraham was to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. For us as Christians, it is the land of Jesus, the place where he taught, suffered and died, where he rose and from where he

ascended.

And for Muslims, Jerusalem is the third holiest city behind Mecca and then Medina, both in Saudi Arabia. It was from here that Ishmael, Abraham's first-born son, was about to have been sacrificed until God's intervention. Mohammad was believed to have ascended into heaven from the same rock of Abraham's intended sacrifice.





The Temple Mount and The Dome of the Rock

Tradition claims that Isaac was to be sacrificed on Mt. Moriah. It was later here, that Solomon constructed the First Temple. The Second Temple, built by Herod and seen by Jesus, was destroyed by The Romans in 70 A.D. The Dome of the Rock was constructed over the ruins from 688 to 691 A.D.

A Place of People and Empires

The stark beauty of Jerusalem is surpassed only by the complexity of its history. With each twist and turn of every staircase and avenue, one is faced with a living story of people and empires converging on this sacred ground.



And with empire comes a new architecture, a new outlook on the world, exposure to new religious and spiritual perspectives and interaction with new types of people.

Such exposure was often less than pleasant. Many a ruin under the city streets of modern Jerusalem tells the story of invasion, destruction, foreign control, civil war, domestic unrest, new invasion and another source of outside influence.

Architecturally, the strange, beautiful and multilayered convergence of styles that is Jerusalem confounds even the wisest of scholars. Yet, as the puzzle pieces of history are repositioned, the fascinating

timelines of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Italy all converge on this tiny and fertile land bridge of the Middle East.

Where else in the world would Catholic monks, Orthodox priests, Jewish rabbis, Palestinian Christians, Palestinian Muslims, Druze, Samaritans (yes, they are still around!), and every brand of every sect in Christianity, Judaism and Islam all lay claim to this land that we all consider holy?



A city of old and new mixed together with cutting edge and ancient; chic and unbearably out-dated...and most likely, it has always been that way...



The Garden of Gethsemane
and the place of Jesus: "Not
my will, but thine be done..."

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, soon I will see this garden where Jesus prayed through the night, sweated drops of blood and agonized over his coming trial and crucifixion. Make me worthy of this sight. Prepare my heart and my spirit. Allow me to enter into this place both with humility at my own sinfulness and in awe at your graciousness. Fill me with your compassion that remains alive when I depart. May others see Jesus in me, even as I see Jesus in others. And in this small way, allow your spirit within me to be used to make a little difference somewhere in your world. I pray this in the beautiful name of Jesus, Amen.



ABOVE: The Russian Orthodox Church of Mary Magdalene on the side of the Mount of Olives near the Garden of Gethsemane. The money for its building was donated by Czar Alexander III.

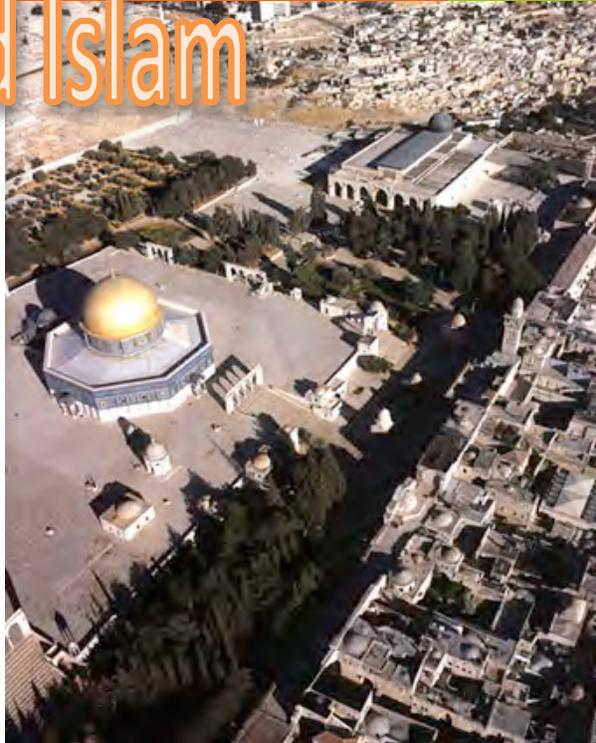
Jerusalem and Islam

It is the Third holiest city after Mecca (1) and Medina (2) and has in it:

The Dome of the Rock (picture right)

Al Aqsa Mosque (picture right)

The vast majority (67%) of the population in Jerusalem was Arab/Palestinian before 1900, and had been for over 1300 years.



The Dome of the Rock today, sits atop the Temple Mount where the First Temple of Solomon stood (before being destroyed by Nebachnezzar in 587 BC.) and the Second Temple built by Herod the Great just before and during the days of Jesus. All three of these structures were built over the traditional site of Abraham's near the sacrifice of Isaac (or in Islam, Ishmael...).

WWII and the aftermath...

FOR THE JEWS

The Holocaust: 6 million Jews slaughtered

Land ownership in Palestine, 1947: Jews – 7%

Population in Palestine, 1947: 678,000 Jews

Few would argue the need for the Jewish people to have a place of peace and security for themselves. Following the horrors of WWII, sympathy for a Jewish homeland was strong. However, the tragic

FOR THE PALESTINIANS

12,000 enlisted and fought for the British against Hitler

Land ownership in Palestine, 1947: Palestinians – 93%

Population in Palestine, 1947: 1,269,000 Palestinians

displacement of the Palestinian people from their homes and the land of their ancestors has created the unintended result of over a million Palestinian refugees, many of them living in refugee camps since 1948 and 1967.





Things I Saw and Learned Today:

Things I Saw and Learned Today:

“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual worship.”

- Romans 12:1

A Jerusalem Prayer:

Prepare my heart, heavenly Father, as I walk the streets of this Holy City. Allow me to feel your presence here and to love you more deeply because you have allowed me to make this journey. Protect me and all of us as we travel this land. I ask all of this in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

- Colette McCollum

“...that your love may overflow... more and more, with knowledge and full insight...” PHIL. 1:9

My thoughts:



Bethlehem

“O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie...”

IN PREPARATION LET US HEAR WHAT MIGHT WELL HAVE BEEN...

REMEMBERING BETHLEHEM – 4 B.C.:

“I WAS JUST A LITTLE BOY AT THE TIME, ANGRY AT MY FATHER BECAUSE HE MADE IT MY JOB TO CLEAN THE STABLE THAT NIGHT. THE INN WAS SO CROWDED, SO MUCH HAPPENING, AND HERE I HAD TO GO OUTSIDE IN THE DARK WITH THE ANIMALS TO CLEAN OUT THE ANIMAL MESS AND ADD FRESH HAY TO THE FEEDING TROUGH...”

I WAS ANGRY TO BE MISSING ALL THE EXCITEMENT OF ALL THE PEOPLE, ALL THE STORIES, ALL THE INTERESTING THINGS GOING ON IN MY FATHER'S INN...

AND OF COURSE, I HAD NO IDEA WHAT WOULD BE HAPPENING LATER THAT NIGHT...IN THE VERY PLACE THAT I CLEANED, AND THE FEEDING TROUGH, THE MANGER THAT I HAD PREPARED...

SINCE THEN, AND NOW AS AN OLD MAN, I HAVE NEVER FORGOTTEN THE LESSON, THE POWER AND THE BEAUTY OF THAT NIGHT: YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN AN EVERYDAY DEED MIGHT JUST PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD...

SIMPLE ACTS OF KINDNESS, THE GRACEFUL WORK AT MUNDANE JOBS, THE DETERMINED COMPLETION OF THANKLESS TASKS...THE CLEANING OUT OF AN ANIMAL STALL...WHO KNEW?

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, TAKE HEED: IN ALL THINGS GIVE THANKS; AT ALL TIMES BE READY FOR GOD TO ENTER IN; AND IN SURPRISING WAYS AND UNEXPECTED PLACES, BE PREPARED TO WELCOME JESUS – ESPECIALLY IN THIS LAND WHERE YOU NOW WALK – AND THE LAND WHERE I - WHERE WE – BECAME MEN...”

Be with us today, O God. Teach us new things so that we might be better followers of you, devoted disciples of your word and better stewards of your grace and goodness. Amen.

A Bethlehem Prayer



Dear Lord:

Since childhood we have heard, read and sung about Bethlehem. As we prepare to place our feet on Bethlehem soil, we bring that holy ground to a new and deeper place in our hearts. May the spirit of Jesus that began many years ago right in the place we will be standing tomorrow, touch us in such a way that the significance of your birth in that little town radiates through us to others.

Thank you for making it possible for all of us in these past few days to walk the very ground where you walked. As we prepare for tomorrow, and for all the tomorrows after, protect us and guide us as we walk with you in our hearts.

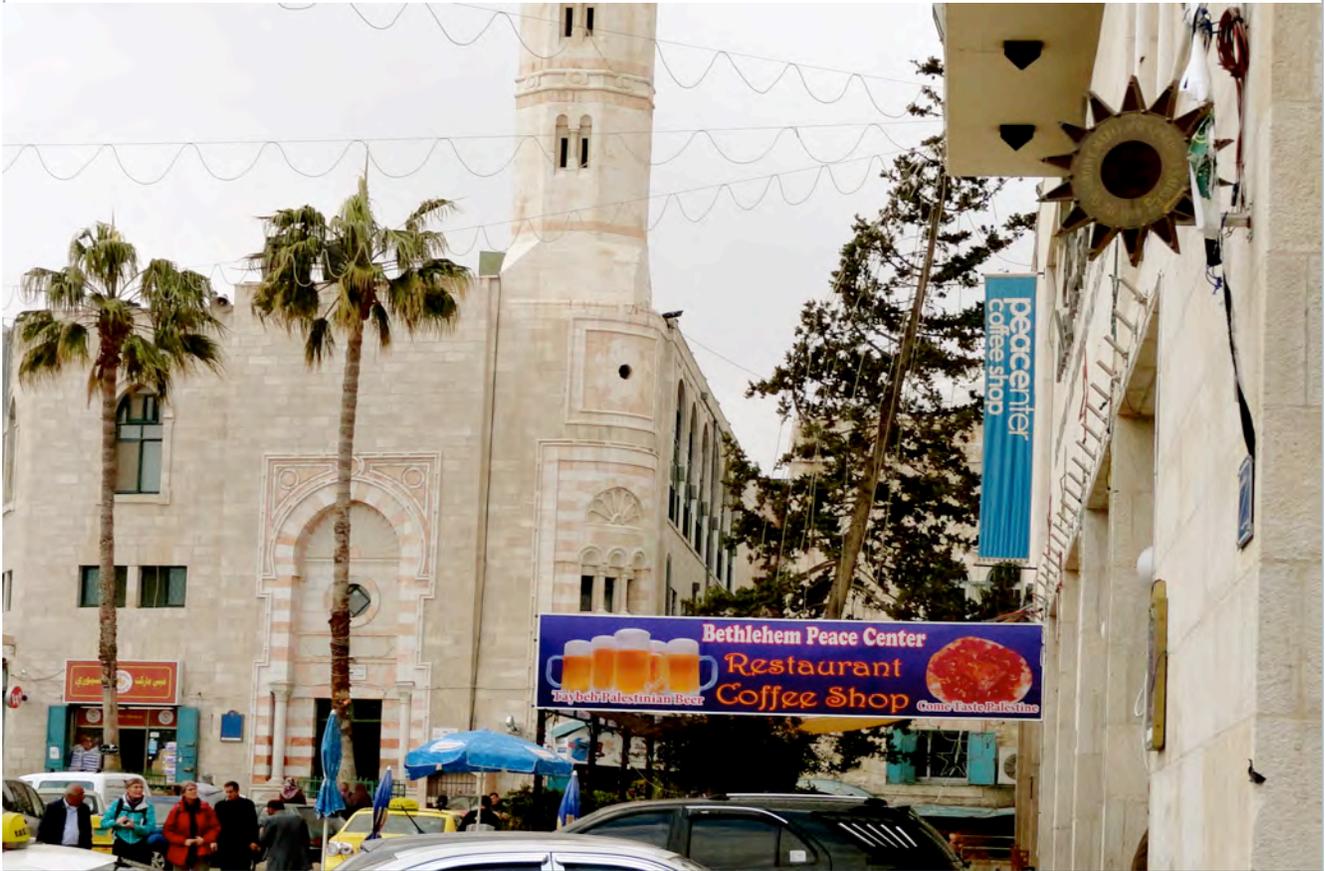
It is so humbling, overwhelming and joyous, that right here on the very soil of your birth, death and resurrection that I can end this prayer with "in Jesus' name we pray..." Amen.

- Stewart McCollum

Things I experienced today:

My Prayer:





In those days a decree went out ...

From Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered ... (Luke 2:1).

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night (Luke 2:8). We will be sharing lunch in the Tent restaurant, and will travel just down the road to what is called the “Shepherd’s Field”. This is the place traditionally considered to be the spot where the above scripture took place. There are trees. There is a series of caves. The land is both barren and vegetated, flat and hilly, open and cluttered. A church and pilgrims like us mingle in and around an area where angels once spoke and sang to a group of men keeping sheep. These were people who were on the outskirts of society. They slept outside, interacted consistently with sheep, had no education and little future. They were the lowest of low, the

least of the lost and the very last ones to be considered worthy as conveyors of important information. And yet, it was these losers of the ancient world to whom God entrusts this new inbreaking, this good news that will change everything. Shepherds - near Bethlehem. And then there is the Inn, that place of the birth, the stable where Jesus was born. A cave, perhaps, where the animals were kept out of the cold and the heat. The Church of the Nativity stands over that traditional spot today, a combination of Byzantine and Crusader styles, we will talk some today about the history of this place. But for now, consider the fact that it was built and why – Jesus was born not far from where lonely people who were left out were first included in the beautiful good news of Jesus.

Continued...

“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth...”

March 30, 2014

Jerusalem, too

Day three in the Holy City



A Jerusalem Prayer

As We Walk Where Jesus Walked...

Dear Heavenly Father:

As we walk today where Jesus walked, we give thanks for this opportunity to experience Christ and through him, you, in a special way.

Grant that with each step we take through this holy city of Jerusalem, we will come one step closer to thee. As our lives and spirits become enlarged through this new awareness within us, may this experience be used to draw others to thee.

In all that we do, here, now and in the future, may we always seek to glorify thy kingdom.

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

- Pauline Bethea

The Upper Room: Blessed to Be A Blessing

“Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him...” John 13:5

The Upper Room on Mt. Zion, in Jerusalem, is the setting for this scene. All four gospels speak of this room.¹ But only three of the four record the disciples sharing a meal on this sacred ground.² John tells us a different story with a different agenda. This gospel is the only one that records Jesus’ washing the disciples feet.³

A couple of summers ago, one of our High School/Middle School mission projects just before the beginning of school, was sorting shoes. This was with an organization called *Samaritan’s Feet*, a ministry inspired by Jesus’ example in John 13.

Shoes of all types and sizes, all brand new, had been donated by people and organizations for children living in poor parts of the world.⁴ Medical missionaries had discovered that in Africa, virtually 90% of the infectious diseases that killed children came from microorganisms that entered bodies through the feet.

Therefore, they concluded, if they could get shoes to these parts of the world, thousands of lives could be saved. But the people of this mission organization, added a couple of valuable pieces to the ministry.

Not only would they seek to deliver shoes for those in need; each volunteer delivering the shoes would wash the feet of those to whom the shoes would be given. And after washing, they bless the shoes and the feet and say a prayer for the person – each person – as their feet are held by the volunteer.

It was and it is the message of Jesus as he prepared them for sharing in the Passover meal. For the whole point of John 13 appears to be the imperative of recognizing the immanent value of the person before you, and a powerful recognition of Genesis 12:5 when God calls Abraham and says: “I am going to bless you...so that you and all your descendants will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Blessed to be a blessing...may it be so for you this day...”

Help me Lord, to be the blessing that you intend for the coming day. Let me fulfill your dream for me in this holy city and in every city. In the beautiful name of Jesus, Amen.

¹ Though the room we saw yesterday is of later architecture, the place over which we stand is likely the same. ²The meal was a longer version of what we have come to call “The Lord’s Supper.” Probably the Jewish *seder* (the word means “order” in Hebrew) for celebrating the Jewish Passover, Jesus led his disciples in sharing the traditions and memories of their ancestors leaving the captivity of Egypt for the hope of the Promised Land. ³ ***Maundy: from Old English; “to wash.”*** So Maundy Thursday is the day during Holy Week that is to be set aside to wash one another’s feet as Jesus did. ⁴The shoes for our project were going to the children of Burundi, in Africa.

Jews Rebel!

May, 66 A.D.

The glorious Second Temple is no more!

The fabulous Temple, built by Herod over the sight of the original Temple of Solomon, was completely destroyed by the Roman forces under Vespasian after the revolt from 66-70 A.D.

The Temple, at right:



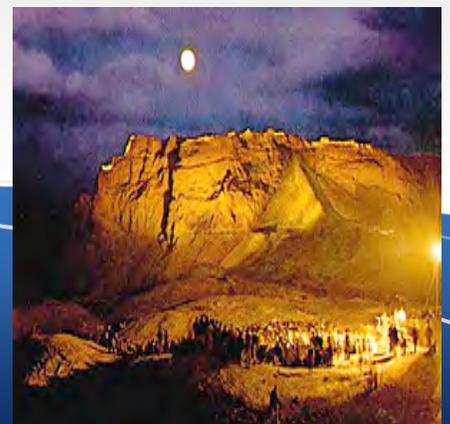
A Stunning Revolt Rocks Powerful Roman Empire!

In May of 66 C.E., the Roman procurator, Florus, sent troops to plunder Jerusalem, and the Jews retaliated, overpowering Roman garrisons all over Jerusalem. Thus began the First Jewish Revolt. Pressing onward, they continued to recapture Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. From 67 to 68 A.D. rebels ruled the entire country, and four leaders began to emerge: John of Giscala, Simon ben Giora, Eleazar the Priest, and Joseph ben Matthias. The Roman response to this rebellion was predictably brutal. Jews all around the empire were massacred. Wanting to put down the rebellion as soon as possible, the emperor, Nero, sent Flavius Vespasian, to command the Roman troops charged with quelling the Jewish resistance. They first surrounded Galilee, where Joseph ben Matthias led the Jews. Within a few months Galilee had fallen. Joseph eventually became the Roman court historian, renaming himself Flavius Josephus in Roman fashion. (pp. 165-170 – internet source, below).

Important Dates

- 63 B.C. Judea, Samaria, and Galilee become a part of the Roman Empire.
- 37 B.C. Herod the Great, with the help of Rome, is made King of the Jews.
- 4 B.C. Herod dies. Rome divides the kingdom among his three sons.
- 66 A.D. Jewish forces rebel against Rome. Details are told at the left.
- 70 A.D. Roman forces finally put down the rebellion and destroy the Temple.

At right, a dramatic nighttime picture of Masada, the final rebel stronghold of the Jewish Zealots. We will see the remains of the Roman camps and ramp that proved to be the rebels undoing and the end of the revolt in 70 AD.



The Final Pieces of Rebellion Quelled by Roman Forces...

By 68 C.E. the only remaining Jewish strongholds existed at Jerusalem and Masada; but as Vespasian zeroed in on Jerusalem, Nero died, bringing chaos upon Rome. Vespasian was then proclaimed emperor, and he sent his son Titus to finish putting down the rebellion (pp. 165-170). <http://www.the-colosseum.net/images/titus.jpg>.

The End

Titus brought the rebellion to a bloody conclusion, especially at Masada, one of Herod's former fortified palaces.

Over 900 Zealot rebels committed suicide rather than be enslaved by the victorious Romans. To celebrate his victory over the Jewish nation, Titus held a victory parade through the middle of Rome displaying the thousands of Jewish prisoners of war and priceless Temple treasures taken from the Jerusalem Herodian Temple before it was destroyed. The Arch of Titus in Rome still commemorates this tragic event in the life of the Jewish people.



A Roman statue of Titus, son of the Emperor Vespasian, and both the general of the forces who finally defeated the Jewish rebellion and later after the death of Vespasian, an Emperor himself.

What is it like to know the revenge of Rome?

Furthermore, thousands of Jews inside the city were dying of famine and plague, while Titus continued to pick away at the city's walls. Once inside, Titus' troops burned the temple, taking some Jews captive and slaughtering others. An estimated total of 1,100,000 people had died during the course of the war, and the revolt finally ended when the last group of zealots was put down in Masada three years later.



The indescribable and unimaginable burning and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

What did you see?

A Masada Prayer

O Lord, as we understand it: the Zealots of Jerusalem took refuge within the fortress on the hill of Masada to combat their enemies.

The Scriptures tell us that God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble.

Mature our faith, O Lord, so that no matter what befalls, we may be still and know that thou art God.

In the everyday-ness of our lives, may we live in the certainty that you are our refuge and fortress in whom we can trust. May we be zealous in adhering to the commands of loving you with all of our being and loving others as You love us.

May we be joyful and enthusiastic in sharing the Good News of your Love, Grace, Forgiveness and Fruit of the Spirit. When we fall short of your will, help us to remember that you are the God of yesterday, today and all the days to come. Amen.

- Vivian Philson



Prayer Requests

Thoughts for the day:

Rejoice in the Lord, always, and again I say, rejoice!



PBC @ Masada!



Herod's Palace on a desert plateau...

Thirsty? Wait 'til you see the view!

Living in the desert was never so good as when the Zealots fled there from the Romans in 68 AD

Hoping to get the Romans out of Judea for good, a militant faction of the Pharisees called the Zealots rose up against Roman authority from 66-70 AD. It took almost four years, but the Romans brutally retook the land. The final remnant, about 900, of the rebels



retreated to the desert fortress palace of Herod the Great. The Romans surrounded it after a long siege, built an enormous ramp

(still there!) and battered down the wall...

Hot sun on top!



A pool?

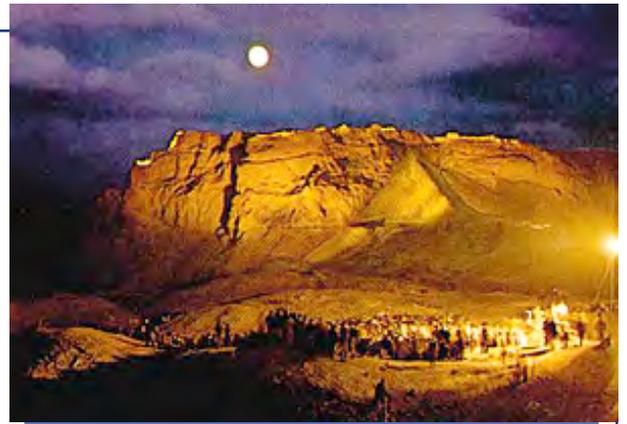
The Zealots were not only well-fortified, but also well supplied. Huge cisterns deep within the plateau kept enormous amounts of water fresh and cool; and yes, there is speculation that indeed, the above was a pool for Herod to enjoy a dip when up for a visit...

Jesus saw this coming...

“But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be, then those in Judea must flee to the mountains...”

- Mark 13:14

Though Jesus’ time of ministry was some thirty years before the tragedy of the Jewish Revolt and subsequent Roman invasion that ended with Masada, the signs of the times pointed to what ultimately occurred. Though many of his teachings were attempts at helping people avert the very catastrophe that unfolded in 66 A.D., the passage above also indicates that Jesus suspected that some kind of major war against Rome was looming over the horizon. Sadly, many scholars believe that as many as 1.1 million Jews in and around the area of Judea/Palestine were killed during these four years of war. This almost inconceivable number of fatalities only hints at the further devastation of land, villages, farms, fields, animals and overall environment. There were large tracts of Judea that were unlivable for a generation. If only they had listened to Jesus!



Your Masada Prayer...



Herod the Great

We don’t know exactly what he looked like, but the image at left is said to be a pretty good rendering from his later years. A friend of the Romans, hated by his subjects, feared by his enemies, and respected by his contemporaries who appreciated good building projects, Herod gained his fame by his many remarkable buildings, palaces and vast improvements to places like the Masada. His rebuilding of the Temple was a marvel and considered one of the greatest achievements of his day.

The Hanging Palaces of Masada



Things I Saw Today:

The three palaces above “hang” off of the front of Masada. Hopefully we will be able to walk down to see these ourselves...

Psalm 139:7-18

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I go from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take to the wings of the morning, and settle at the farthest limits of the sea
Even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night."
Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day,
For darkness is as light to you. For it was you who formed my inward parts;
You knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
When I was being made in secret,
Intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
All the days that were formed for me,
When none of them as yet existed.
How weighty are your thoughts, O God!
How vast the sum of them!
I try to count them –
They are more than the sand;
I come to the end – I am still with you.



Thank you Lord, for the beauty of this land...

The final day...

The Garden Tomb



But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body...suddenly two men in dazzling clothes ... said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen..." (Luke 24:5-6).

Thank you Lord, for the beauty of this land...

The final day...



What I Saw and Learned Today:

My Prayer:

Any final thoughts and reflections
from our Holy Land journey:

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ISRAEL

Patriarchs, The United Monarchy, Divided Kingdom, Assyrian Invasion

A nomadic people settle in strange land between two giant and shifting empires. Genesis 12 and the dream of God; Famine and self-imposed exile; Exodus and the Conquest of Joshua; Judges to Monarchy; Division into Israel and Judah. Half is conquered and carried away by Assyria. The other is at the mercy of a new empire.

The Babylonian Exile to the Persian Period

A vulnerable Judah makes foolish choices and allies with the wrong power. The result is catastrophic defeat, the destruction of the Temple and exile in a foreign land. The beginnings of the Bible's compilation; Babylonian power wanes, Persian power ascends; exile ends; hope returns; a new language; a new name....

The Greek, Hasmonean, Roman, and Byzantine Periods

Hellenism and the spread of and excitement over Greek ways; a revolt and a hundred years of independence; the coming of Rome, Herod the Great, the days of Jesus, the beginning of the Early Christian Church, two revolts, the destruction of the second Temple, The Jewish Diaspora. Byzantine rule and Helena's building projects (the mother of the Emperor Constantine).

Islamic, Crusader, Mamluk, Ottoman and British Periods (and Zionism)

Mohammad and the spread of Islam; Arab and Muslim rule; The Crusades and European rule; Arab reconquest; Mamluk and then Ottoman rule. Changes in the land; the British Mandate; Theodore Hertzl and Jewish Zionism; Holocaust and rising tensions...

The Land Today: Israelis and Palestinians – Things to think about...

The current situation; stories of Israelis; stories of Palestinians. Who is right and who is wrong? Whose land is this anyway? There is legitimate comparison between Native Americans and Palestinians. What did Jesus think about the land?

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If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take to the wings of the morning, and settle at the farthest limits of the sea
Even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night."

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For darkness is as light to you. For it was you who formed my inward parts;

You knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

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