



LAND OF THE BIBLE TOUR

Day 1–2: Travel and Arrival

DAY 1–2: TRAVEL AND ARRIVAL

Introduction

Of all places on the earth, God says of the land of Israel that he “cares for it” and that His eyes are “continually set upon it” (Deut 11:11-12). He commanded the people of Israel not to permanently sell the land, “Because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers” (Lev 25:23). He also says concerning Jerusalem, “This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it” (Psa 132:14).

The majority of the stories in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, all took place in the regions in and around present-day Israel. Jesus Himself journeyed throughout the land, traveling from the northern towns of the Galilee to the southern wilderness of Judea. It is therefore no surprise that experiencing the land of Israel causes the Scriptures to come alive in new and profound ways for many people. But at the same time, we at Gateway Church believe that encountering God’s heart for the land is secondary to encountering God’s heart for *the people* of the land. The principle of “to the Jew first” (Rom 1:16) remains a foundational principle for Gateway Church, and we take Scripture at face value when it says that the Jewish people continue to possess a special, irrevocable calling from God (Rom 11:28-29).

By planning trips with consistency and excellence and prioritizing a healthy theology that honors God’s love for the land and people of Israel, we aim to cultivate an atmosphere for the Holy Spirit to impart the truth of God’s Word and initiate an active response on an individual level. The “Why” behind these trips is to help people develop a biblical, sincere

love for the Jewish people that leads them deeper into God's immense heart for all peoples of the earth.

A Brief History of the Land of Israel

The name "Israel" does not appear in historical records until the end of the thirteenth century B.C.E. Before this time, Scripture tells us that God promised the land, which was then called "Canaan," to the descendants of the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 15). After Abraham died, God reiterated His promise again to Abraham's son, Isaac (Genesis 26:2-5). And to Isaac and Rebekah were born twin boys, of whom the younger, Jacob, received his father's blessing (Gen 27:27-29). God further confirmed the promise of the land to Jacob in a dream at Bethel (Gen 28:10-22) and again at Peniel when he changed his name from Jacob to Israel (Gen 32:22-32). Jacob went on to have twelve sons who became the progenitors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Because of famine in the land of Canaan, the descendants of Israel moved to Egypt, where they multiplied and were eventually enslaved by Pharaoh (Exod 1:6-14). Hearing their suffering, God raised up a deliver named Moses who brought them out of Egypt with many signs and wonders. Although Moses died before reaching Canaan, his servant Joshua led the people across the Jordan River to take possession of the land sometime around 1300 B.C.E. The Scriptures then indicate that after a period of tribal leaders called "judges," the people of Israel asked God for a king to rule over them, the first of which was King Saul (1 Sam 8-9), followed by King David (2 Sam 2), and finally King Solomon, David's son (1 Kgs 1). Israel prospered and expanded under Solomon's reign, but he began to drift from the Lord in the latter years of his life. As a result, God declared to Solomon that He would take the kingdom from him and give it to his servant, Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:9-13).

Soon after Solomon's death, a great schism took place: the ten northern tribes followed Jeroboam and became the Kingdom of Israel, and the two southern tribes became the Kingdom of Judah under the leadership of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. But toward the end of the eighth century B.C.E., Assyrian armies invaded the land and conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, dispersing the tribes that are to this day known as "the ten lost tribes of Israel." The Southern Kingdom of Judah continued to thrive for another century and a half until the Babylonians overpowered the Assyrians and emerged as the new dominant power in the region. In 586 B.C.E., the city of Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple with it were destroyed, and the survivors of Judah were exiled to Babylon (2 Chron 36:15-20).

Only seventy years after Judah's exile had begun, however, the Achaemenid Empire defeated the Babylonians, and King Cyrus decreed that the people could return and settle again in the region of Judah and Benjamin (2 Chron 36:21-23; Ezra 1-2). Following this edict, the Second Temple was soon constructed in Jerusalem, and the people of Israel steadily increased in the land under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. Over the next 400 years, the political control over the land shifted from the Achaemenids to the Greeks to the Ptolemies to the Seleucids to the Hasmoneans until finally the Romans intervened and established the land of "Judea" as a Roman client state in 64 B.C.E.

Roman rule lasted until the end of the fourth century, after which the Roman Empire split into East and West, and Israel fell under the jurisdiction of the Eastern Byzantine Empire.

The Christian Byzantine period was short-lived, however, as war with the Neo-Persian Empire gradually intensified, leaving both weakened and vulnerable to the growing Muslim forces in the region. By 650 C.E., the Muslims had defeated the Persians and taken over the southern provinces of the Byzantine Empire, which included the land of Israel. The Muslims would continue to control the land—under three caliphates, then the Mamluk Empire, then the Ottoman Empire—throughout the majority of recorded history, ending only briefly in the time of the Crusades between 1100 and 1300 C.E.

The Ottoman Empire officially dissolved at the end of World War I with the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. At this time, the land of Israel that once belonged to the Ottomans came under control of the British Empire (as mandated by the League of Nations). Britain struggled for years to mediate between the Arab population and the growing Jewish population who both desired independence and a nation to call their own. Ultimately, in 1947, the British handed the reins to the United Nations who decided on a partition plan and the formation of two states in the land—an Arab state and a Jewish state.

The Jewish leaders immediately accepted the U.N.'s plan, but the Arab leaders unanimously rejected it and went to war against the Jewish constituency. Within just six months of fighting, however, the Arab forces were defeated, and on May 14, 1948, Israel declared its independence and the establishment of a Jewish state. Much of the land, like the Golan Heights and the Gaza Strip, did not come under Israeli control until years later in the Six-Day War of 1967. It was this war that proved to be pivotal for Israel to establish its borders and its position in the region. But to this day there is much international debate and tension regarding Israel's borders and the existence of various Israeli settlements throughout the land.

A Brief Overview of the Geography of Israel

The study of the geography of Israel yields many significant insights into Scripture. The people of ancient Israel did not have airplanes or cars to traverse the countryside. A journey from one city to another city could take many days or weeks, which is sometimes not discernible just by reading the biblical text. Knowledge of the main travelling routes, natural water sources, and fertile areas to grow food are all things that the ancient readers of the Bible would have understood but are often missed by those unfamiliar with the layout and topography of the land.

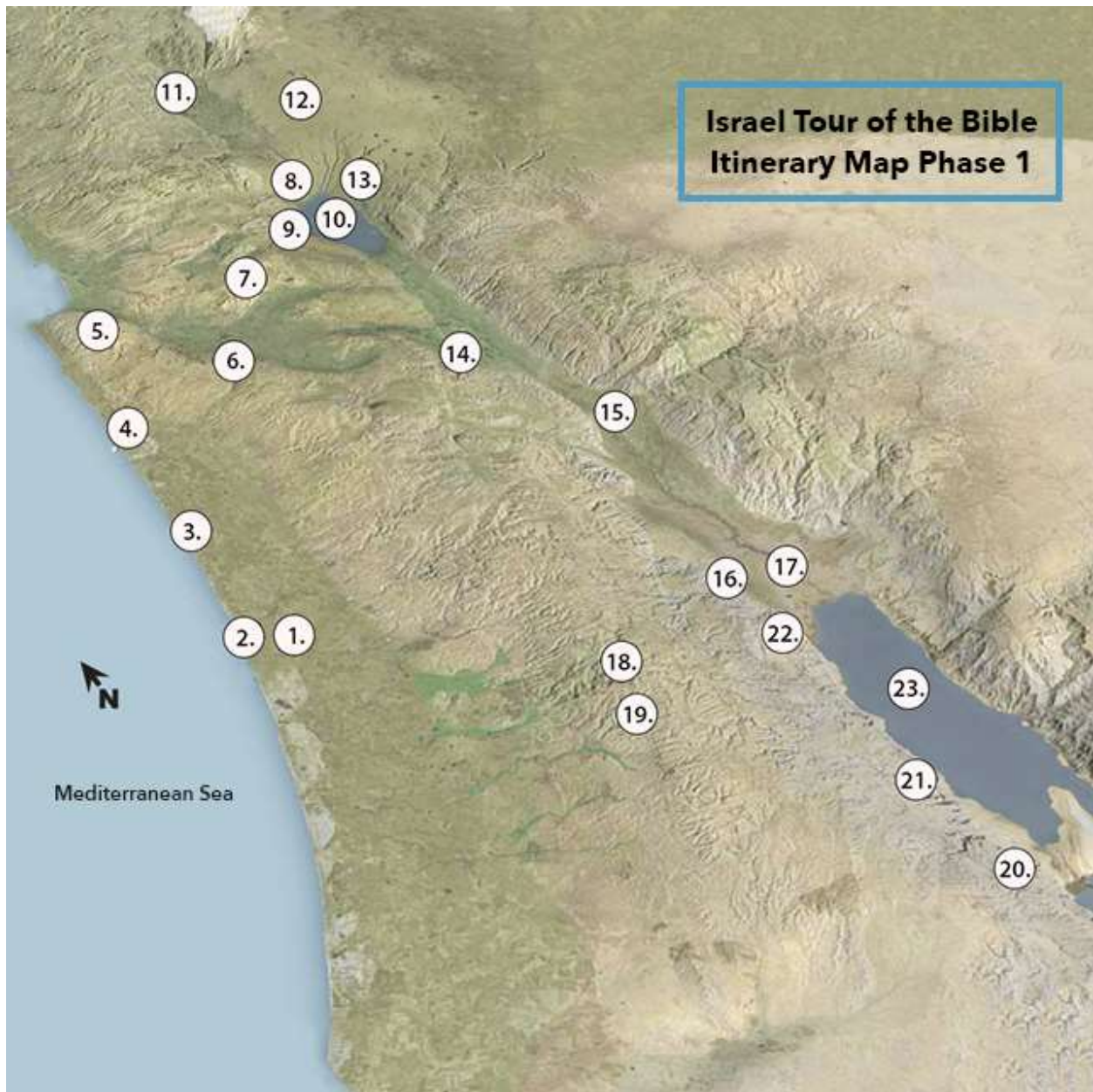
Zooming out on a world map, one can see that Israel is situated as a land bridge in the Middle East between the continent of Africa and the continents of Europe and Asia, making it a vital piece of real estate for the trade routes and caravan routes of the region. It is no surprise therefore that Israel's strategic location has caused it to be occupied by over thirty different sovereign powers throughout its historic existence.

There are four primary geographic zones in Israel running from north to south: (1) the coastal plain, (2) the central hill country, (3) the rift valley, and (4) the Transjordan plateau. Because of these natural valleys and ridges running in vertical lines, the easiest way to travel throughout the country is moving along the zones from north to south or south to north. Whenever one needed to travel from east to west or west to east, they would

generally only cross over where there were breaks in the ridges, such as the Jezreel Valley in the north or the Negev in the south.

When looking at the main cities of Israel, it is important to understand that ancient cities were usually only built in a location that possessed four key qualities: (1) access to drinking water, (2) arable agricultural land, (3) security from enemies, and (4) close proximity to major roads. The number of locations across the land that had all four of these criteria was limited, which means that cities were often built upon each other in the same spots many times over. This has created large earth mounds in many places throughout the land which archaeologists refer to as a “tel.”

There are four main bodies of water in Israel: (1) the Mediterranean Sea to the west, (2) the Sea of Galilee to the north, (3) the Dead Sea along the central eastern border, and (4) the Red Sea at the southern border. Around half of the total land area of Israel is desert wilderness and sparsely populated—primarily the Negev area between Be'er Sheva and Eilat. Even though the desert surrounding the Dead Sea is the lowest point on the surface of the earth, the elevation of Mount Hermon in northern Israel is home to a ski resort open a few months out of the year. The geography of Israel is therefore extremely diverse in topography and climate.



Itinerary Map Key

1. Ben Gurion Airport
2. Tel Aviv / Joppa
3. Netanya
4. Caesarea Maritima
5. Mount Carmel
6. Megiddo
7. Nazareth / Mount Precipice
8. Mount of Beatitudes / Capernaum
9. Migdal
10. Sea of Galilee
11. Tel Dan / Banias

12. Mount Bental
13. OFIR Lookout / Kursi
14. Beit She'an
15. Jordan River Valley
16. Jericho
17. Qasr El Yahud Baptism Site
18. Jerusalem
19. Bethlehem
20. Masada
21. Ein Gedi
22. Qumran
23. Dead Sea



LAND OF THE BIBLE TOUR

Day 3: Coastal & Sharon Plains

DAY 3: COASTAL & SHARON PLAINS





Location 1: Jaffa/Joppa

Located just outside the modern city of Tel Aviv, Joppa is an ancient port mentioned in both the Old and New Testament. (The Joppa spelling is preferred here so as to not confuse it with the “Jaffa” gate in Jerusalem).

What Happened Here?

Joppa is first mentioned in Scripture as the location where cedar wood arrives from Lebanon for the construction of Solomon’s Temple (2 Chron 2:16).

Ezra also records the same type of wood shipment from Lebanon to Joppa is used in the construction of the Second Temple years later (Ezra 3:7).

Being a major port city, Joppa is the location from where Jonah flees to Tarshish in disobedience of God's command to go to Nineveh (Jonah 1:3).

Tabitha is resurrected by the Apostle Peter in Joppa (Acts 9:36-42).

Simon the Tanner had a house in Joppa where Peter stays after resurrecting Tabitha (Acts 9:43).

Peter has his vision of the unclean animals in Joppa on the roof of Simon the Tanner's house, and Cornelius sends messengers here to find Peter and bring him to Caesarea (Acts 10:1-24).

Devotional

At the same port Jonah tried to run away from God's call to go to the Gentiles, the Apostle Peter listened and obeyed by taking the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius. Both men had their reasons for being hesitant, but only Peter immediately obeyed. While at Joppa, consider if there are any areas of your life that you might be reluctant or fearful to obey what God has called you to do. Quoting the Psalms, the author of Hebrews exhorts: "Today if you hear my voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb 3:15; 4:7). Although Jonah eventually obeyed, he went through many difficult trials that he didn't need to go through if he would have obeyed God's call the first time.

Prayer for devotional time: Lord, I pray, "break up the hard ground" in my life (Hos 10:12) and replace this "heart of stone" with a "heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26). Help me to hear and obey Your voice in every area of my life and to respond like Samuel, "Speak, Lord. I'm listening" (1 Sam 3:10). I repent for wherever I have fallen short in the past and have tried to run away from Your voice calling me. Give me grace and empower me by Your Spirit to always obey You without delay. Amen.



Location 2: Caesarea Maritima

Caesarea was built by Herod the Great at the end of the first century B.C.E. and became the capital for the province of Judaea where governors, such as Antonius Felix and Pontius Pilate, were based. Today, it is a well-preserved archaeological site, located on the coast in-between Tel Aviv and Netanya, near the city of Hadera. (The word Maritima means “by the sea,” which distinguishes it from Caesarea Philippi, located in Northern Israel near the base of Mount Hermon).

What Happened Here?

After baptizing the Ethiopian Eunuch, Philip travels north from Azotus (near modern Ashdod), preaching the gospel in all the towns along his way, but he stops when he arrives

at his home in Caesarea (Acts 8:40), where he later hosts the Apostle Paul on his third missionary journey (Acts 21:8).

Picking up where Philip left off in Acts, Peter takes the Gospel to the Gentiles for the first time when he ministers to the household of Cornelius the centurion in Caesarea (Acts 10:24–11:18).

Following his execution of James (the brother of John) and his imprisonment of Peter, an angel of the Lord strikes King Herod Agrippa I dead in Caesarea, and he is "eaten with worms" (Acts 12:23).

Paul is brought in chains to Caesarea and examined over the course of two years by Governor Felix, Governor Festus, and King Herod Agrippa II (Acts 23:23–26:32).

Devotional

Cornelius was a Roman centurion, someone first-century Jews would have avoided contact with (Acts 10:28a). But in a surprising reversal of expectations, centurions are consistently spoken well of throughout the New Testament. Jesus heals a centurion's servant and praises him for his faith (Matt 8:5-13), and another centurion is memorialized at the foot of the cross saying, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Matt 27:54). In the book of Acts, centurions come to Paul's aid on many occasions (Acts 23:10-35; 24:23-37; 27:1-2). The point of the Cornelius story is exactly what Peter concludes: "Now I truly understand that God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34). For just as Scripture says, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord sees the heart" (1 Sam 16:7).

Prayer for devotional time: Lord, help me to see others as You see them. You ate with "sinners and tax-collectors" (Mark 2:16). You embraced the sick, the dying, and the lepers. And You taught Peter "not to call anyone impure or unclean" (Acts 10:28b). Cleanse my heart of any judgment or prejudice I may have toward another person or people group and show me how to love "even the least of these" (Matt 25:40). Amen.



LAND OF THE BIBLE TOUR

Day 4: Jezreel Valley

DAY 4: JEZREEL VALLEY





Location 1: Mount Carmel

The Carmel Mountain Range begins at the Mediterranean coast near the modern city of Haifa and stretches southeast along the Jezreel Valley. The cities atop Carmel are currently home to one of the largest concentrations of Druze people in Israel.

What Happened Here?

Due to plentiful rainfall and lush vegetation, Mt. Carmel is known in Scripture as a symbol of beauty (Isa 35:2; Song 7:5).

Mt. Carmel is where Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal and calls down fire to consume his sacrifice (1 Kings 18).

According to 1 Kings, there had already been an altar built for the Lord on Mt. Carmel that Elijah "repaired" (1 Kings 18:30-32).

Devotional

Elijah's literal "mountaintop" faith experience of defeating the prophets of Baal was quickly followed by a low moment of fear when he fled for his life from Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:1-4). But even as he hid and prayed for death, the angel of the Lord came to him, fed him, and sent him off to Horeb where he encountered "the still small voice" that gave him direction and hope for the future (1 Kgs 19:5-18). The narrative of success followed by failure teaches that "Elijah was a human being just like us" (James 5:17). Even in the deepest, darkest moments of our life, God is there ready to feed us and to encounter us.

Prayer for devotional time: Lord, like Elijah, give me courage to stand up to injustice in my generation and to boldly challenge the false gods of this world. Like Elijah, make me more aware of Your presence—in the thunder and the earthquake, but also in the still, small voice. Help me trust that whether I find myself, whether on the mountaintop or in the valley, You are never too far (Isa 59:1). Amen.



Location 2: Megiddo

Tel Megiddo is one of the most extensive archaeological sites in the land of Israel with 26 stratified layers of ruins. The Jezreel Valley in front of Megiddo is also known as the Valley of Armageddon (from the Hebrew "Har Megiddo," which means Mount Megiddo).

What Happened Here?

The plain of Megiddo is where Deborah defeats the Canaanites (Judges 4) and where Gideon defeats the Midianites (Judges 7:1).

The book of Joshua first mentions that the King of Megiddo was defeated in one of Joshua's conquests (Josh 12:21), after which King Solomon eventually builds the town up as one of his "chariot cities" (1 Kgs 9:15).

King Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo for refusing to accept the judgment of the Lord (2 Chron 35:20-27).

The plain in front of Tel Megiddo is the Valley of Armageddon that Revelation says the final war of the end times will take place (Rev 16:16-18; 19:19).

Devotional

Scripture says of Josiah, "Neither before nor after has there been any king like Josiah who followed the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his strength" (2 Kgs 23:25). Yet, Josiah experienced an untimely death at the hands of invading Egyptians because "He would not listen to what Necho had said at God's command" (2 Chron 35:22). Josiah was presumptuous about what God wanted and didn't realize he was fighting the wrong battle. It is possible to follow God all our lives but lose our way just before crossing the finish line. The life of Moses teaches a similar lesson when he is barred from entering the promised land just before the end of the exodus wanderings (Deut 32:49-52).

Prayer for devotional time: Lord, teach me, like Abraham, to return to the altar (Gen 13:3-4) and to "abide" in You all the days of my life (John 15:4) knowing soberly that "even the elect" can be led astray (Matt 24:24). Give me grace to "continue in the faith, firmly established, not moved from the hope of the gospel" (Col 1:23). I will "finish the race" well (2 Tim 4:7), leaning not on my own understanding but in all my ways acknowledging You and seeking Your counsel (Prov 3:5). Amen.



Location 3: Nazareth

Nazareth appears in historical records around the first century, which means that it was a newer and smaller city during the time Jesus lived there. Today, Nazareth has become the largest city in the Northern District of Israel, consisting of a predominantly Arab population.

What Happened Here?

The Angel Gabriel first visits Mary in Nazareth telling her that the Holy Spirit will overshadow her and that she will miraculously give birth to the Son of God (Luke 1:26-38).

After His birth in Bethlehem and asylum in Egypt, Jesus settles in Nazareth with His family (Matt 2:23). Matthew says His upbringing in Nazareth was to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy of the "branch" (*netzer*) in reference to the coming Messiah (Isa 11:1).

According to Luke, one of the first things Jesus did at the beginning of His ministry, after His temptation in the desert, was preach in the synagogue of Nazareth. Those listening did not accept His message and drove Him to the edge of a cliff to kill Him (Luke 4:16-30).

It is after His rejection in Nazareth that Jesus says the famous words, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown" (Mark 6:1-6).

Devotional

When Philip told Nathaniel that the Messiah was from Nazareth, he mocked him saying, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). It is impossible to fully grasp how the Creator of the universe could choose to take on flesh and become part of His own creation. There is no greater humility possible than for God to become man and to be tortured and sentenced to death by His own people whom He came to save. Meditating on this fact, the Apostle Paul exhorts every believer to imitate this very same humility: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phil 2:5-7).

Prayer for devotional time: Father, conform me into the image of Your Son (Rom 8:29), "to walk in the same way in which He walked" (1 John 2:6). You oppose the proud but give grace to the humble (James 4:6). I don't know how to be humble as I ought to be, but help me respond like Mary did here in Nazareth, "Let it be done to me according to Your word" (Luke 1:38). Amen.



LAND OF THE BIBLE TOUR

Day 5: Galilee

DAY 5: GALILEE





Location 1: Capernaum

The town of Capernaum was a large fishing settlement located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, likely established sometime around the second century B.C.E., in the time of Hasmonean rule.

What Happened Here?

Capernaum is the hometown of Matthew (Mark 2:1, 14) and is located not far from Bethsaida, which is where Simon Peter, James, John, Andrew, and Phillip were born (John 1:35-44).

Although Simon Peter was likely born in Bethsaida, his house was in Capernaum, which is also where his mother-in-law was healed by Jesus (Mark 1:29-31).

Matthew records that when Jesus begins His ministry, He moves from Nazareth and makes Capernaum His "home" (Matt 4:13), calling it "His own city" (Matt 9:1). Capernaum therefore served as a base of operations for Jesus and the disciples.

Because Capernaum is where Jesus lived, the Gospels describe how He taught and healed in the synagogue there (Mark 1:21-22; John 6:59) and performed many different miracles in the city (Mark 2:1-12; Luke 7:1-10; Matt 9:18-33; 17:24-27).

Devotional

As the primary base of operations for Jesus and His disciples, the inhabitants of Capernaum were privileged to experience many miracles, signs, and wonders. Yet Jesus promised that even greater things are on offer for those who have now received the Spirit: "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it" (John 14:12-14).

For devotion, pray to receive an impartation from this city that Jesus loved and called His own. Pray for power and authority; just as Jesus sent the disciples out from Capernaum and gave them authority to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons" (Matt 10:8), pray that He will send you out into a hurting and broken world. Pray for an increase in your faith to believe for the impossible, to step out in boldness and begin praying "mountain-moving" prayers (Matt 17:20)!



Location 2: Mount of Beatitudes

The Mount of Beatitudes is elevated two hundred meters above the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, situated at the tip of a geographic triangle between the sites of Capernaum and Tabgha.

What Happened Here?

As early as the 4th century C.E., the Mount of Beatitudes (also called Mount Eremos) is the traditional location said to be where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7). Although the exact spot is not known, the slopes of the mountainside provide natural acoustics and a wide enough space for a crowd to gather.

Devotional

The Sermon on the Mount is the longest continuous teaching of Jesus recorded in the Bible and is often considered to be one of the most important teachings in the New Testament. With a view of the surrounding Galilee area, many of Jesus' words take on a new light. The poor, meek, and persecuted who were gathered there; the cities built on the surrounding hills; the birds of the air and the lilies of the field—Jesus taught by using His environment and the familiar experiences of the common people.

Although many expected a warrior Messiah who would overthrow the Romans, Jesus taught His followers to be “peacemakers,” to “turn the cheek,” and to “bless those that curse you, do good to those that hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you” (Matt 5:44). Like other rabbis of His time, He taught obedience to “the Law and Prophets” (Matt 5:17-20), but He also applied the Law further and deeper to matters of the heart, “building a fence around the Torah” (*Pirkei Avot* 1:1). It is not just, “Do not murder,” but rather, “Do not even let yourself be angry in your heart” (Matt 5:21-26). For devotion, read through the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5–7 and meditate on the Beatitudes. As you read, imagine Jesus in this environment and what it would have been like to hear Him speak on a hillside out in the open Galilee air.



Location 3: Magdala/Migdal

Magdala is the Aramaic word for “tower,” which in Hebrew is migdal. The city of Magdala is located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee and dates to the second century B.C.E. Recently, one of the oldest synagogues in the land of Israel was discovered in the ruins of Magdala, dating to the early first century.

What Happened Here?

Mary Magdalene was from the city of Magdala, which is where the name Magdalene originates (Luke 8:2).

Due to the early dating of the archaeological site and its location near Capernaum, Jesus certainly preached in the synagogue at Magdala.

Near the ruins of the synagogue, there is a chapel recently built with a “Women’s Atrium” containing eight pillars which signify and honor the women who followed Jesus:

- Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2)
- Susana & Joanna (Luke 8:3)
- Mary and her sister Martha (Luke 10:38)
- Salome, the mother of James & John (Matthew 20:20)
- Simon Peter’s mother-in-law (Matthew 8:15)
- Mary, wife of Cleopas (John 19:25)
- Many other women (Mark 15:41)
- Unmarked Pillar – For women of all time who love God and live by faith

Devotional

It is not known where exactly the “woman with the issue of blood” encountered Jesus, but the town of Magdala is certainly a possibility. A mural painted by Daniel Cariola sits on the bottom floor of the chapel above the original first-century paved street of the port marketplace at Magdala. It is either on this street or on a similar one that the woman pressed through the crowd to touch the fringe of Jesus’ garment while he was on His way to heal Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:21-43). Though the woman violated the Law by touching Jesus in a state of impurity (Lev 15:25-27), healing power flowed to her, and Jesus commended her for her faith. The Gospels record that the woman had suffered for twelve years and had “spent all she had” (Mark 5:26), but “no one could heal her” (Luke 8:43). Yet when she saw Jesus, she was convinced, “If I can just touch the hem of his garment, I will be healed” (Mark 5:28).

Here at Magdala, ask the Lord to impart into you a tenacity to push through the crowd and to take hold of Him, “the Sun of Righteousness” (Mal 4:2), knowing that He will always accept you as you are and not as you should be, because no one is ever as they should be. So also, in consideration of the pillars and what they represent, let yourself be inspired not only by the woman with the issue of blood, but also by the many other incredible women of Scripture and of Church history who often do not get the recognition they deserve.



Location 4: Sea of Galilee

The Sea of Galilee (also called the Sea of Tiberias or the Kinneret) is the largest freshwater lake in Israel and sits around 700 feet below sea level as the second-lowest lake on the earth (second only to the Dead Sea). The water in the Galilee comes primarily from the Jordan River, which flows southward from the base of Mount Hermon.

What Happened Here?

The Gospels refer to the Sea of Galilee numerous times, recording many instances Jesus and the disciples journeyed across the water or rested along its shores.

While on the sea, Jesus tells Simon Peter to “cast the net to the other side” just before his miraculous catch and his commission to be “a fisher of people” (Luke 5:1-11).

Jesus sleeps through a storm on the sea and miraculously calms it when the disciples awake Him out of fear (Mark 4:35-44).

Jesus walks on the water of the sea and Peter steps out of the boat to meet Him (Matt 14:22-36).

After the resurrection, Jesus cooks fish for the disciples along the shore, and He restores Peter after his denial with the words "feed my sheep" (John 21).

Devotional

Of all the disciples, Peter is frequently mentioned in connection to the Sea of Galilee. As a fisherman who lived in Capernaum, he spent many hours a day out on the water. It is along the shore that Jesus first *calls* Peter (Luke 5:1-11), and it is along the shore that He *commissions* him one last time (John 21). The Gospel of John records that Peter denied knowing Jesus three times while standing around "a charcoal fire" (John 18:18). The only other place in the New Testament there is mention of a charcoal fire is when Jesus sits with Peter on the shore and redeems his denial by asking him three times, "Do you love me?" (John 21:9, 15-19).

Prayer for devotional time: Lord, in moments of doubt, when I step out of the boat but begin to sink (Matt 14:30), or when I have courage to show up but then fearfully deny Your witness (Luke 22:54-62), there is little more I can say but, "You know all things" (John 21:17). You have "searched me and known me" (Psalm 139:1), and You alone see my innermost thoughts and intentions. In the very same place where I have failed, You are eagerly waiting to meet me and restore me. Deepen my love for You so I can learn what it means to "lead" and "feed" Your sheep. Amen.



LAND OF THE BIBLE TOUR

Day 6: Hula Valley & Golan

DAY 6: HULA VALLEY & GOLAN





Location 1: Baniyas/Caesarea Philippi

One of the largest of the tributaries for the Jordan River (and thus for the Sea of Galilee) is a spring that flows from Baniyas, an ancient cave formation which was dedicated to the Greek god, Pan, around the second century B.C.E. Before this time, the site was dedicated to Ba'al and known as Ba'al-gad or Ba'al-hermon. At the beginning of the first century C.E., Philip the Tetrarch (one of Herod the Great's sons) built up the surrounding area and named it Caesarea Philippi, which is referenced in the Gospels.

What Happened Here?

Baniyas is the location where Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter responds, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30). When Jesus says, "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18), He

was likely pointing directly toward Banias, which at the time was considered a gateway to the underworld and was the site of pagan cult prostitution and debauchery.

Devotional

The question that Jesus posed to the disciples remains crucial: “Who do you say that I am?” Over the centuries there have been many artistic renderings of Jesus. There are portraits of Him on the cross, walking out of the tomb, healing the sick, and teaching multitudes. Each of these images highlight different aspects of Jesus’ identity. Judaism and Islam have no problem with the lattermost depiction—for the historical Jesus was certainly a gifted teacher. However, C.S. Lewis rightfully argues that there are only three options when it comes to the identity of Jesus: He was either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. In other words, if He was neither a conscious fraud, nor a self-deluded madman, then He was (*and still is*) who He said He was: the Son of God and Messiah of Israel.

For devotion, begin to write down your own description of who Jesus is to you. There are many names for God found throughout Scripture: God my healer, my provider, my protector, my deliverer, my shepherd, my king, my peace, my joy. Using your own words, answer the question as if Jesus were asking you personally, “Who do you say that I am?”



Location 2: Tel Dan

Two miles from the spring at Baniyas is the location of Tel Dan, a sprawling archaeological site with extensive biblical history. The Tribe of Dan was originally allotted an area in the central coastal plain, beginning at the city of Joppa and stretching to the southeast (Joshua 19:40-47), but during the time of Judges most of Dan moved north to take possession of the city of Laish (Judges 18).

What Happened Here?

Since Dan eventually settled the northernmost region of Israel, the phrase “from Dan to Beersheba” is frequently used in Scripture to describe the whole of the land (Judges 20:1; 1 Sam 3:20; 1 Kgs 4:25).

The book of Judges ends the description of Dan's conquest of Laish in a negative light, because the people of Dan brought with them a "graven image" which they continued to worship for many years afterward (Judges 18:30-31).

Jeroboam commissioned two golden calves to be set for Israel to worship, one in the south at Bethel and one in the north at Dan (1 Kgs 12:25-32; Kgs 10:29). The same site could also have been the location recorded in Judges 18:30 where the people of Dan previously set their idol.

Devotional

Because of Solomon's unfaithfulness in the latter part of his life, God gave ten of the twelve tribes over to Jeroboam and promised him that he could have an "enduring house like David" if he would only be righteous and obedient like David (1 Kgs 11:29-40). Yet after he took charge of the northern tribes of Israel, he was too afraid to let his people worship in Jerusalem (which belonged to the two tribes he was not in charge of), so he built altars in his own land for the people to worship at (1 Kgs 12:26-31). Ultimately, Jeroboam's insecurity as a leader led him to disregard the place that God chose for His presence to dwell, choosing instead to build new altars and divert the people away from Jerusalem.

Prayer for devotional time: Lord, search me and know me. You have spoken great destiny over my life—if I would only choose to be obedient and walk in Your ways. Don't let me be like Jeroboam who chose to take things into his own hands because of pride, fear, and insecurity. I want to value and prioritize Your presence, even if it means doing so might put me in a disadvantaged position. I trust Your Word: "Seek first the Kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you" (Matt 6:33). I don't aim to build my own kingdom or to act out of my own strength, but rather to build *Your* Kingdom first and to act only according to "Messiah who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). Amen.



Location 3: Mount Bental

Mount Bental is a dormant volcano located along the northeastern part of the Golan Heights, offering a strategic panoramic view into Syria to the East, Lebanon to the North, and Jordan to the South.

What Happened Here?

In modern history, the Israeli Defense Forces built a military stronghold on the mountain, the remains of which can be freely explored. The surrounding area has been called “disputed territory” or “Israeli-occupied territory” by those who do not recognize the sovereignty of Israel over the Golan Heights.

To the east lies the beginning of the Road to Damascus where Paul had his supernatural encounter with Jesus (Acts 9:1-19).

Directly north is Mount Hermon, which is the natural mountainous boundary between Lebanon and Syria mentioned in Scripture.

Devotional

The Gospels record that Jesus would frequently go up on a mountain by himself to pray (Matt 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12). From this vantage point, it is not hard to imagine Jesus overlooking the surrounding region from north to south, east to west, and being burdened for the hostility and bloodshed that would continue in the land for centuries. Let your heart be similarly burdened in prayer for Israel.

Prayer over Israel for devotional time: Lord God, I pray for peace in Israel. I pray for reconciliation between the descendants of Isaac (the Jewish people) and the descendants of Ishmael (the Arab people). I pray blessings over Your people, that they would prosper in the land, and I pray that You would continue to raise up champions for Israel around the world who will be like watchmen and watchwomen on the walls, not ceasing to remind You of Your promises until You make Jerusalem "a praise in all the earth" (Isaiah 62:7). Amen.



Location 4: Kursi/Ofir Overlook

At the archaeological site of Kursi are the ruins of a fifth-century Byzantine monastery built to commemorate the location where Jesus cast the demons of the Gerasene demoniacs into a herd of swine. Near this site is the Ofir Overlook, which provides a beautiful panoramic view of the Sea of Galilee.

What Happened Here?

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniacs (Mark 5:1-20; Matt 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39). Each account highlights different details that are left out of the other. For example, it is in Matthew that we learn there were two demon possessed men, not one!

The region of the Gerasenes began on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, near the town of Kursi. The area was largely Gentile, which helps explain why there was a large herd of swine in the story.

In Matthew, it is directly after Jesus calms the storm on the Galilee that He arrives to the other side and delivers the two Gerasene demoniacs (Matt 8:23-34).

Devotional

Jesus' ministry was primarily to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24), which makes His journey to the region of the Gerasenes significant. The fact that Jesus interacted at all with Gentiles made Him unique in His day, as Peter records in Acts, "It is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile," for they were considered "unclean" (Acts 10:28). Yet it is troubling that even after Jesus delivers two demoniacs who were terrorizing the region, the Gospels record that the whole nearby town came out to meet Jesus and "begged Him to leave" (Matt 8:34; Mark 5:17; Luke 8:37). Because the herd of swine was so large, it would have been a main source of income for the city, and the people were likely offended at Jesus.

The story helps remind us that though Jesus was unconventional in ministering to tax collectors, sinners, and Gentiles, the cost of following Him was still great: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross, and follow me" (Matt 16:24). He says, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matt 19:21). Upon hearing these words, the rich young man was sorrowful in his heart because he could not part from his wealth. For devotion here in Kursi, ask God to help you steward your resources and finances well and to not be offended if He chooses to take anything away. Know that where your treasure is, there your heart is also (Matt 6:21). Choose to treasure in Him alone, because He is the "pearl of great price" (Matt 13:45-46).



LAND OF THE BIBLE TOUR

Day 7: Jordan River Valley

DAY 7: JORDAN RIVER VALLEY





Location 1: Beit She'an

The ancient city of Beit She'an (named Scythopolis in Greek) is seventeen miles south of the Sea of Galilee where the Jezreel Valley and the Jordan River Valley meet, making it a strategic and important location for the wider region. In Roman times, it was a leading city of the Decapolis (a group of ten prominent cities on the eastern front of the Roman Empire). Today, it is one of the largest and best-preserved archaeological sites in Israel.

What Happened Here?

During the conquest of the land, Beit She'an was given to the tribe of Manasseh, but Judges records that they did not drive out the Canaanites completely from the city (Judges 1:27-28).

After Saul and his sons were defeated on Mount Gilboa, the Philistines took their bodies and hung them on the walls of Beit She'an (1 Sam 31; 1 Chron 10).

Solomon is mentioned to have built up Beit She'an as a city from which one of his twelve officials ruled (1 Kgs 4:7-9).

The New Testament does not mention Beit She'an explicitly, but it does reference the Decapolis to say where some from the crowds who followed Jesus were from (Matt 4:25) and where the Gerasene demoniac went away to proclaim what had happened to him (Mark 5:20).

Devotional

Scripture says that the men of Jabesh-Gilead were those who risked their lives to recover the bodies of Saul and his sons. Jabesh-Gilead is a city with history connected all the way back to Judges 19–21, when 400 virgins were spared to preserve the Benjamites who were almost totally wiped out for their sin. Many years later, King Saul—who was from the tribe of Benjamin—fought on behalf of the people of Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam 11). Even though Saul was an insecure leader who was ultimately killed in battle for not heeding the voice of the Lord, the people of Jabesh-Gilead remembered his kindness toward them and honored him by recovering his body. When David is anointed king, the first thing he does is send messengers to Jabesh-Gilead to honor them in return, saying: “May you be blessed by the Lord, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your lord, and buried him! Now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you! And I too will reward you because you have done this thing” (2 Sam 2:2).

For devotion, remember those in your life who have been like Saul and helped you in a time of need but who might not be doing so well or might even be distant from the Lord now. Pray for them and bless them. It is easy to forget about those individuals in your life, but they still deserve to be remembered and honored.



Location 2: Jericho

Jericho is located in the Jordan River Valley just 16 miles east of Jerusalem and 10 miles north of the Dead Sea. The city is an oasis in the surrounding desert region because of a nearby spring that flows throughout the year. Although the territory is currently part of the Palestinian West Bank, Tel Jericho is one of the most excavated sites in all of Israel.

What Happened Here?

When Joshua and the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the promised land, the first city they came across was Jericho. After they circled seven times with the Ark of the Covenant, the walls of Jericho miraculously fell, and the Israelites took possession of the city (Joshua 6). Joshua then pronounced a curse for anyone who might try to rebuild the city

(Josh 6:26). This curse is seen later when Hiel of Bethel loses two of his sons for rebuilding the city (1 Kgs 16:34).

The spring near Tel Jericho is named Elisha's Spring after the biblical story when the people of Jericho told Elisha that the water of the spring was bad. Elisha commanded them to throw a bowl of salt into the water, and the water miraculously began to be life-giving again (2 Kings 2:19-22).

The road between Jerusalem and Jericho is the context for the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

Jesus heals the blindness of Bartimaeus at the entrance of Jericho after he cries out to him, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43; Matt 20:29-34). After healing Bartimaeus, Jesus sees Zacchaeus perched in a fig tree and asks to stay in his home (Luke 19:1-10). This scene is also the backdrop for the parable of the Ten Talents and Jesus' Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:11-48).

Devotional

Zacchaeus was like the Apostle Matthew. Both men were Jewish tax collectors, loathed by the wider Jewish population, but Jesus saw them differently. The Greek word for fig tree in Luke 19:4 is *sykomorea* (translated "sycamore" in English). In the same passage, Zacchaeus says that he has been accused of "defrauding" others, using the Greek verb *sykophanteo*, a play on words that literally means "to show figs." Zacchaeus clung to the fig tree so he could see Jesus, and though he was viewed by others as a self-server, Jesus saw him bearing the fruit of repentance, good fruit ready for harvest (Luke 3:7-8; 13:6-9).

Prayer for devotional time: Lord God, make me "like a tree planted by streams of living water that bears its fruit in due season and whose leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:2). It was near Jericho that John the Baptizer called the Sadducees and Pharisees "a brood of vipers" (Matt 3:7) and told them that they must bear fruit worthy of repentance, "for every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt 3:10). All have fallen short of the glory of God, and all need repentance (Rom 3:9-26). Like Zacchaeus, I cling to the tree of life. I cling to Your cross, from which You have asked to be my guest. I know that I am not worthy to host Your presence, but may your salvation come to me and my entire house (Luke 19:9)! Amen.



Location 3: Qasr El Yahud Baptism Site

The Jordan River at Qasr El Yahud commemorates where Jesus was baptized by John. Today, the site is located along the southernmost portion of the Jordan River that flows through the West Bank, just a few miles east of Jericho and north of the Dead Sea.

What Happened Here?

In the time of Joshua, the Jordan River was the natural border that separated the land of Canaan from the Plains of Moab in the south and from Gilead further north. When the Israelites first cross over the Jordan, the waters split, like the waters of the Red Sea did, and Joshua set up a twelve-stone memorial at the site (Joshua 3–4).

Elijah struck the water of the Jordan River with his cloak, and it parted. Soon after, his disciple Elisha does the same thing by using Elijah's cloak, and the water parts again (2 Kings 2:7-15).

John the Baptizer lived in the Judean wilderness, but he would frequently go to the Jordan River to preach and immerse as many as were repentant (Matt 3:1-6). Luke says that his ministry was based in "all the region around the Jordan" (Luke 3:3).

Centuries after Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha, Jesus is baptized by John in the same portion of the Jordan river. But rather than the water splitting, the heavens split and a voice from heaven says, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-22). Matthew records that Jesus was baptized by John "in order to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:13-17).

Devotional

Ritual water immersion in a *mikveh* was a common Jewish practice in the first century, but immersion in the Jordan River was meant as a reminder of Israel's first entry into the land of Canaan. For Jews living in the land, it would have been symbolic of Israel's exit out of the wilderness and into the promises of God—out of slavery and death and into freedom and life. Paul writes in Romans 6 that something similar happens in the life of the believer. Paul certainly knew about the baptism of repentance that John the Baptizer taught, but he makes a distinction that after John there came "baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus." It is this latter baptism that leads to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7). Thus, he writes in Romans, "We have been buried with Him by baptism into death, so that, just as Messiah was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we will certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His" (Rom 6:4-5).

For devotion, meditate on the above passages and consider what it means to be "united" with Messiah through water baptism. According to Paul both in Romans and Acts, water baptism should lead to baptism in the Holy Spirit. Whether today might be your first time being baptized or whether you have already been baptized, pray and believe for a fresh outpouring of the Spirit in your life!



Location 4: Mount Scopus, Jerusalem

*Mount Scopus is a mountain ridge on the northeastern edge of Jerusalem that acquired its name because of its views of the city—the Latin word *scopus* means “watcher.” Its Hebrew name is “Har HaTzofim,” translated into English as “lookout mountain.” Today, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the second-oldest university in Israel, is located at the peak of Mount Scopus.*

What Happened Here?

Though Mount Scopus is not mentioned by name in the Bible, it is one of the seven hills of Jerusalem and part of the eastern range that includes the Mount of Olives on the central eastern edge of Jerusalem along with the Mount of Corruption to the southeast.

Ascent up the Mount of Olives range in Jerusalem is first mentioned in 2 Samuel 15:30, when David mourns the rebellion of his son Absalom. The “summit” of the mountain “where God was worshipped” (2 Sam 15:32) could have possibly been the peak of Mount Scopus.

Because of its strategic vantage point over Jerusalem, the Romans built an encampment on Mount Scopus during the Siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. just before the destruction of the Second Temple.

Devotional

The Torah lists three pilgrimage feasts for Israel throughout the year: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 16:16). During these three feasts, every Jewish man is required to make the ascent to the Temple in Jerusalem and appear before the Lord. In the book of Psalms, there are fifteen chapters called the “Songs of Ascent” (Psalm 120–134). These songs have been traditionally recited as pilgrims make their ascent to Jerusalem.

For devotion, read through Psalms 120–134 and thank God for the privilege to join in the footsteps of countless others throughout history who have made the ascent to Jerusalem to worship the living God of Israel.



LAND OF THE BIBLE TOUR

Day 8: Jerusalem - Part I

DAY 8: JERUSALEM PART I



Location 1: Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives is an elevated range on the east side of Jerusalem, extending from the north at Mount Scopus to the south at the Mount of Corruption. Because of the different peaks, some people only refer to the central portion of the range as the Mount of Olives. Today, it is recognizable by the tens of thousands of graves covering its slopes.

What Happened Here?

As discussed at Mount Scopus, the ascent of the Mount of Olives is first mentioned in the story of David weeping over the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam 15:30). The Mount of Corruption in the southern part of the range is where Solomon set up altars for his foreign wives to worship their gods (1 Kgs 11:6-8), which King Josiah later tore down (2 Kgs 23:13-14).

In Ezekiel's vision of the glory of God departing the Temple just before the Babylonians destroyed it, he records that the glory momentarily paused "above the mountain east of the city," which we know is the Mount of Olives (Ezek 11:23).

Jesus takes the path from Jericho up to Jerusalem but stops on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives to find a donkey to ride into the city. As Matthew clarifies, this was to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, "See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey" (Matt 21:4-5). Jesus then rides the donkey down the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem (what is now called the "Palm Sunday Path"), and the people begin to chant "Hosannah" (which means "save us"), waving palm branches in honor of Him (Matt 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19).

Just as in Ezekiel's vision, Matthew records how Jesus—who *is* the glory of God (Heb 1:3; 2 Cor 4:6)—departs from teaching in the Temple, prophesies its soon destruction, and goes to sit on the Mount of Olives where he gives the "Olivet discourse" (Matt 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21).

After the resurrection, Jesus ascends into heaven from the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, near the village of Bethany (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-12).

Devotional

Zechariah prophesies that in the end times the Messiah will set His feet on the Mount of Olives and it will split in half (Zech 14:4). Knowing this prophecy, Jews over the centuries have been buried on the Mount of Olives (an estimated 150,000!), hoping to be the first to be resurrected and meet Messiah. The book of Acts also confirms Zechariah's prophecy: "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Since Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives, this means that He will also return to the Mount of Olives. Though many in Israel will think it is the Messiah's first appearance, we know that it will be His second!

Standing on the Mount of Olives we are therefore not only reminded of its great history, but also of its great future. For devotion, let your prayer be: Maranatha! Lord, come. The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come" (Rev 22:17). We are those who "eagerly long for your appearing" (2 Tim 4:8; Heb 9:28), so we make it our aim "to hasten the coming day" (2 Peter 3:12).
Amen.



Location 2: Garden of Gethsemane

At the western foot of the Mount of Olives is a series of olive tree groves commemorating the traditional site of the Garden of Gethsemane. The Greek word gethsemane likely comes from the Aramaic gad smane, which means “oil press.” Although the trees visible in the garden are no more than a thousand years old, it is possible that the underground roots of the trees are the very same ones that existed in the time of Jesus.

What Happened Here?

The Gospels say that the Garden of Gethsemane was a place where Jesus and the disciples often went to pray (John 18:2; Luke 22:39).

Following the Last Supper, Jesus brought the disciples to Gethsemane to pray. It is here that Jesus prayed the words, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not My will but Yours be done” (Matt 26:39).

Because Gethsemane was a place where Jesus and the disciples commonly went to pray, Judas knew exactly where to take the Romans to arrest Him (John 18:2). After Judas kisses Jesus on the cheek, Simon Peter then draws his sword and cuts off the ear of one of the soldiers, but Jesus heals the soldier and peacefully surrenders (John 18:10).

Devotional

After Jesus willingly gives Himself up in the garden, Matthew and Mark record a painful and sobering moment: “Then all the disciples deserted Him and fled” (Matt 26:56; Mark 14:50). These words are devastating to read. Peter would go on to deny even knowing Jesus (Matt 26:69-75), though he previously promised he would rather die than deny Him (Matt 26:35). Seeing everything in advance, that He would be betrayed and abandoned by those closest to Him, Jesus knelt in the garden and cried out to the Father, sweating drops of blood (Luke 22:44).

Philippians 2:3-8 exhorts us to model our lives after Jesus, “who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” Because of what Jesus went through, His prayer, “not My will but Yours be done,” can also be *our* prayer. Because Jesus first drank the cup, we also can have strength to drink. The Garden of Gethsemane is a place Jesus often went to pray, and it is the place of His greatest humility, where He submitted fully to the will of the Father. For devotion, begin to ask the Lord what areas of your life you might need to show humility and submission in and to drink “the cup,” despite how painful it might be. With whatever you may hear or feel, let your response be, “not my will but yours be done.”



Location 3: Via Dolorosa

The Via Dolorosa is a route that passes through the Old City of Jerusalem which commemorates the path that Jesus would have taken on His way from His trial to His crucifixion. The words via dolorosa are Latin for “way of suffering.”

What Happened Here?

Primarily taught in the Catholic tradition, there are nine sites called “stations of the cross” located along the Via Dolorosa, and there are five more inside the Holy Sepulchre, altogether constituting what is called the Via Crucis, the “way of the cross.” The fourteen stations are listed below:

1. Jesus is condemned to death (Luke 22:66-71)
2. Jesus takes up His cross (John 19:6, 15-17)

3. Jesus falls for the first time
4. Jesus meets His mother
5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the Cross (Mark 15:21)
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
7. Jesus falls for the second time
8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem (Luke 23:27-31)
9. Jesus falls for the third time
10. Jesus is stripped of His garments
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross (Luke 23:33-34)
12. Jesus dies on the cross (Luke 23:44-46)
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross (John 19:38)
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb (Matt 27:57-60)

Devotional

Because only eight of the fourteen stations have clear Scriptural attestation, the Catholic Church updated the list in 1991 to reflect the biblical record more closely, beginning with the Garden of Gethsemane and ending with Jesus' burial. Over the years, the fourteen stations have also been criticized by some for ending at the burial of Jesus and not mentioning His resurrection. As a result, the Via Lucis, or "way of light," has emerged as a second track of meditation. The Way of Light consists of fourteen stations beginning with Jesus' resurrection and ending with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

For devotion, as you walk the narrow roads of the Old City, mediate on these two paths, the "way of suffering" and "the way of light." Paul expresses his heart's cry: "to know Messiah and the power of His resurrection and the sharing of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:10). Paul elsewhere builds upon this in a slogan that is one of the few repeated in Scripture, signaling its importance: "If we died with Him, we will also live with Him" (Romans 6:8; 2 Timothy 2:11). Let these words be your meditation today, praying that as we are "conformed to His death" we will also be conformed to His victory, glory, and life.



Location 4: Holy Sepulchre

Since at least the time of the fourth century C.E., the site of the Holy Sepulchre has commemorated the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The current building dates to the eleventh century, but many renovations have taken place over the years since then. Although the church serves as the headquarters for the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, numerous Christian denominations share the space according to a formal “simultaneum” agreement.

What Happened Here?

Jesus was crucified alongside two other men at a location called Golgotha outside of the city walls (Luke 23:33; Heb 13:12), and He was then buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb nearby, which John describes as being a cultivated “garden” at the time (John 19:38-42).

Three days after His burial, the large stone used to cover the tomb was rolled away and His followers found His tomb empty (John 20:1-10).

The Gospel of John records that as Mary remained just outside the tomb weeping for the missing body of her Lord, two angels appeared to her and then Jesus Himself appeared to her, though she at first mistook Him as the gardener (John 20:11-18).

Devotional

The Gospels say there were two criminals who were crucified alongside of Jesus (Luke 23:32-33). One of the criminals was angry at Jesus, but the other honored Him by saying, "Lord, remember me when you come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Seeing his great faith, Jesus replied to him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Only the Gospel of Luke records this scene, and it has confounded theologians for centuries. The criminal was received by Jesus in the final moments of his life, despite not having lived a holy life, or been baptized, or even formally confessed Jesus as Lord. Yet He is fully accepted by Jesus just as he is.

The penitent criminal on the cross appears in stark contrast to the impenitent criminal. No matter what a person's sins or crimes may be, this story is included in the Gospel to give hope that God is always willing and able to save if we respond in faith. Perhaps there are people in your life that you have given up hope on, not sure if they will ever turn to the Lord. Be encouraged today that the cross is enough. The blood of Jesus shed for us is able to do in a single moment what we could never accomplish on our own in a million lifetimes. Take courage today and don't give up on those whom you are praying will come to the saving knowledge of Jesus.



Location 5: Upper Room

The Upper Room, also called the Cenacle (Latin for “dining room”), is a room traditionally said to be where the Last Supper and the Pentecost outpouring took place. Today, it is located in a larger building known as King David’s Tomb, just outside Zion Gate south of the Old City of Jerusalem.

What Happened Here?

Desiring to have a Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus ordered Peter and John to enter the city and follow a man carrying a pitcher of water into a certain house. Jesus told them once they enter the house to ask for a room where all the disciples could eat Passover dinner together. According to the Gospels, Peter and John did just this and were given a room where they were able to prepare for Passover (Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:8-13).

The Gospel of John has the most extensive report of what happened in the Upper Room. It is here where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples (John 13:3-20); where He calls Judas out for the betrayal that was in his heart (John 13:21-30); where He foretells of Peter's denial (John 13:36-38); and where He gives a long teaching and prayer known as the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17).

Not elaborated in the Gospel of John, however, is the significant moment when Jesus took communion with His disciples, saying, "This is My body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19) and "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28). Paul also attests to this moment in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Just as Jesus and the disciples gathered for the feast of Passover in the "upper room" (*anagaion*) [Mark 14:15; Luke 22:12], the book of Acts says that the disciples gathered in the "upper room" (*hyperoion*) for the feast of Pentecost (Acts 1:13). Since the two Greek words used in the Gospels and Acts are similar but different, there is some debate whether they both refer to the same room. But the Upper Room has nevertheless historically commemorated both events.

Devotional

It is in the Upper Room that Jesus kneels down to wash the feet of the disciples, teaching them, "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15). Jesus continues by giving them a "new" commandment: "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Sometimes it is easier to imagine loving those far off in another land, those who are hurting and broken and in need of a Savior. But Jesus clearly says that the true test is not only how we love those who don't know Him but how we love our fellow believers.

The Church's greatest testimony to the world is how we love one another. For devotion, take a moment to mediate on the entire chapter of John 13. Let yourself be reminded of those around you—those closest to you—whom God has called you to humbly serve and to love extravagantly. Jesus has given us the perfect example, so let us follow in His footsteps!



LAND OF THE BIBLE TOUR

Day 9: Israel Museum,
Yad Vashem, & Bethlehem

DAY 9: ISRAEL MUSEUM, YAD VASHEM, & BETHLEHEM



Location 1: Israel Museum and Temple Model

First established in 1965, the Israel Museum is located in central Jerusalem, spanning over twenty acres and containing various exhibitions on the history, archaeology, and art of Israel.

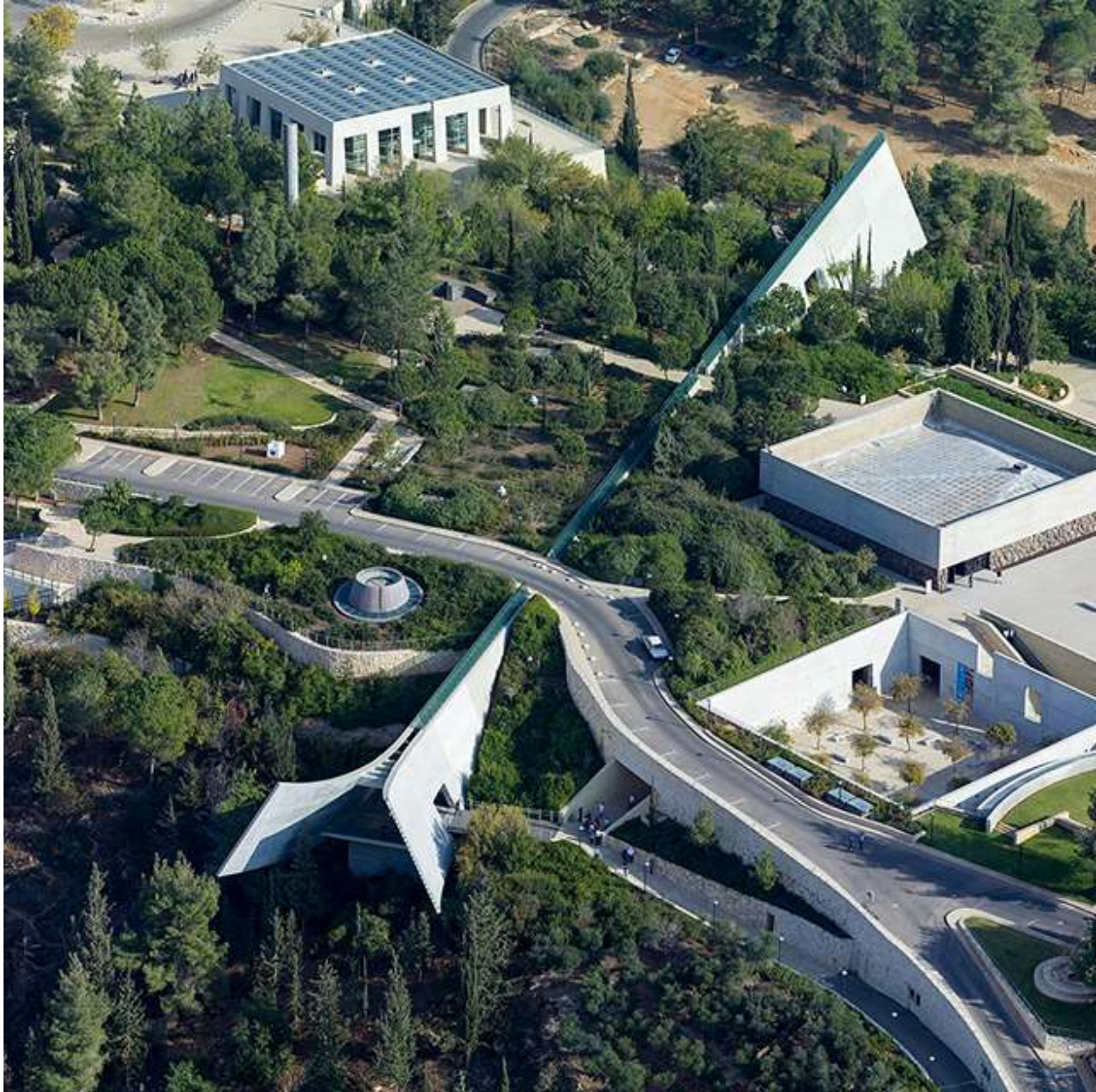
What Happened Here?

Although there are various exhibits that are noteworthy—such as the Dead Sea Scrolls at the Shrine of the Book—the Model of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period is especially helpful to see to better grasp biblical history. The model is a re-creation of the city in 66 C.E., just before the Great Revolt. It is this Jerusalem that Jesus and the disciples would have known well, though there are a few differences, such as the existence of a northern wall which began to be built around 40 C.E. The model nevertheless offers much insight into the stories and teachings of the New Testament.

Devotional

Psalm 48:1-2 describes Jerusalem saying, “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of all the earth is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.” The phrase “on the sides of the north” is unique because it alludes to how the original city of Jerusalem was located on the slope of Mount Zion and was thus vulnerable to attacks from the north. In fact, the vast majority of times Jerusalem has been conquered has been from the north (the two exceptions are Joab coming up the water shaft and the IDF entering through the Lion’s Gate in 1967).

One way to think about the geography of the city is that God *intentionally* created Jerusalem with a vulnerability. God wanted His people to depend upon Him and to trust Him, rather than to trust in their own defenses or their own strength. It is the same thing for us as individuals. Each of us have places of vulnerability in our lives—places that we are forced to trust God with. The Apostle Paul refers to “a thorn in the flesh” that was given to him. He says, “Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for You, for power is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Cor 12:7-9). Recognizing those areas of vulnerability and weakness in your life today, pray for His power to fill you! “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people both now and forever” (Psalm 125:2). He is your strength and shield, your refuge and fortress; so let your heart trust in Him (Psalm 28:7; 91:2)!



Location 2: Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum

Established in 1953, Yad Vashem is a museum, research center, and memorial built to honor the victims of the Holocaust. It is located on the western edge of the city of Jerusalem along the slopes of Mount Hertzl, overlooking the Jerusalem Forest.

What Happened Here?

Mount Hertzl and Yad Vashem are sites with relevance for the history of modern Israel and not necessarily for biblical history, but learning about the Holocaust nevertheless remains essential for grasping God's heart for Israel in the twenty-first century. Over six million Jewish men, women, and children were murdered in the Holocaust, making it one of the worst tragedies of human history. The impact of these horrific events is still deeply felt in the collective consciousness of the Jewish people worldwide.

Devotional

Part of the memorial building for the Holocaust at Yad Vashem is intentionally built sloping downward, symbolizing the descent of suffering and despair that the Jewish people endured throughout the war. However, at the point in the memorial where it turns to the history of the end of the war, the building begins to slope upwards, and it ascends outside into a view of the Jerusalem Forest and a sitting area called “The Square of Hope.”

As you make your way through Yad Vashem, open yourself up to experience the immeasurable depth of pain and hopelessness that the Jewish people experienced in the Holocaust, trying to imagine how you would feel if it were happening to you and your own family. Then as you begin to make the ascent out of the memorial, marvel at the miracle of “life from the dead.” Take time to remember and honor not only those who unjustly lost their lives but also the many “righteous among the nations,” like Oskar Schindler and Corrie ten Boom, who risked everything to save as many as they could. Despite the horrors that the Jewish people have gone through over the centuries, from Egypt to Exile to Holocaust, they are today established in their own land declaring, *am Yisrael chai*—the people of Israel live!



Location 3: Shepherd's Fields of Bethlehem

The city of Bethlehem is located in the West Bank, only six miles south of Jerusalem. Near the city are several pastures which have been used to grow crops and herd animals for thousands of years.

What Happened Here?

In a walled off area north of Bethlehem on the Patriarch's Road to Hebron is Rachel's Tomb, the third holiest site in Judaism. Genesis records that when Rachel died, Jacob buried her near Bethlehem and set up a pillar of remembrance upon her grave (Gen 35:19-20). The earliest mention of the tomb in historical records dates to the fourth century C.E., making it an important pilgrimage site for Christians and Muslims, as well.

A wealthy man named Boaz owned a grain field in Bethlehem where Ruth the Moabite began to work. Ruth's insistence to Naomi, "Your people shall be my people" (Ruth 1:16), led her to work here and eventually marry Boaz, earning her a place in the lineage of the Messiah (Matt 1:5).

In these same fields, the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz spent many years tending sheep and defending them from predators. It was here that the Prophet Samuel first visited David in secret and anointed him king (1 Sam 16:1-13).

Many centuries later, a host of angels appeared to Levitical shepherds in these fields who were tending sheep set apart for Temple sacrifice nearby in Jerusalem. The angels announced to them that the Messiah was being born in a manger in Bethlehem (Luke 2:8-20). These shepherds left their sacrificial sheep behind to pay homage to the "spotless Lamb of God" (1 Peter 1:19).

Devotional

From the line of Jacob, Boaz, and David would eventually come the Messiah Jesus Himself. The humble town of Bethlehem has therefore been pivotal in God's plan for world redemption. At the time of Jesus' birth, the great city of Herodium could be seen in the distance from the fields of Bethlehem. Herod the Great spared no expense and built an incredible mausoleum for himself. Yet in the years immediately following his death, it was pillaged and ransacked. Despite all the wealth that Herod tried to display and the name he tried to make for himself, it would nevertheless be the small town of Bethlehem that countless people over the years would visit.

For devotion, consider how 1 Corinthians 1:28-29 says, "God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God." Here in Bethlehem, in a lowly manger, the Savior of the world was born. Jesus did not choose to be born as royalty, or as the son of the High Priest or some other famous religious leader. Rather, as the Gospel of John says, "He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him; yet the world did not know Him. He came to what was His own, and His own people did not accept Him" (John 1:10-11). Sometimes the glory of God is revealed in ways that we least expect. "Do not despise the day of small beginnings" (Zech 4:10), because God often uses the small and seemingly insignificant to change the world.



LAND OF THE BIBLE TOUR

Day 10: Dead Sea

DAY 10: DEAD SEA





Location 1: Ein Gedi

Four springs converge in the barren Dead Sea area to form what is known today as the Ein Gedi Nature Reserve. The site sits just inside Israeli territory on the southern border of the West Bank, a few hundred feet from the coast of the Dead Sea.

What Happened Here?

Ein Gedi is first identified in Scripture as an Amorite city called Hazazon-tamar, which was conquered in the battle of Siddim during the time Abram lived (Gen 14:7). When Abram heard that his nephew Lot had been captured in the battle, he led a group to defeat the invaders and rescue Lot. It is after his victory that Abram gives tithe to King Melchizedek (Gen 14:17-20).

David hid in a cave at Ein Gedi as King Saul was hunting him down to take his life. It is here that Saul went into the cave to relieve himself, and David snuck up behind him to cut one of the tassels off his robe—proving that he could have killed him but chose not to (1 Sam 24).

Ein Gedi is where the Moabites and Ammonites gathered before trying to invade the Kingdom of Judah. Jehoshaphat, the fourth king of Judah (contemporary of Ahab, King of Israel), sent out the worshippers ahead of the army, and the battle was miraculously won as the invaders turned on one another (2 Chron 20:1-30).

Devotional

The story of David refusing to harm King Saul at Ein Gedi, despite everything Saul had done to him, is inspiring on multiple levels. David knew that he was the rightful king because of Samuel's anointing many years prior. He also knew that Saul hated him and would kill him on sight. Yet, David trusted in God's plan and was convinced that God was in control: "As surely as the Lord lives...the Lord will strike him down, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But God forbid that I should lay a hand on His anointed" (1 Sam 26:10-11). David valued Saul enough to call him anointed. That is not something Saul deserved, but it is what David sincerely believed.

David did not try to force anything, because he knew that the Lord's purpose will always prevail. As his son Solomon would write years later, "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Prov 19:21). Although it is often tempting to take matters into our own hands, be challenged through this story to honor those that God has put in leadership over you—even if they have many blind spots, inadequacies, or insecurities. If we continue to honor and respond well to the Sauls in our lives, then God will also honor us and promote us in due time.



Location 2: Qumran

Qumran is an archaeological park dating back to at least the second century B.C.E., located just outside Kalya, an Israeli West Bank settlement at the northwest corner of the Dead Sea.

What Happened Here?

The original inhabitants of Qumran remain a debated topic, but it is likely that a Jewish sect known as the Essenes were based here. Scholars have also suggested that John the Baptizer could have visited this location or been trained as an Essene, because there are many similarities between their ascetic lifestyles and John lived and ministered in the area.

Many ancient scrolls were found at Qumran in the late 1940s after a young Bedouin threw a rock up into a cave and heard the sound of a jar breaking. When all the caves in the area were investigated, a treasure trove of documents were found which are known now as the "Dead Sea Scrolls." These scrolls have helped to verify the accuracy of later biblical manuscripts and have provided much insight into the diversity of early Judaism.

Devotional

In the first half of the twentieth century, the earliest Old Testament manuscripts were dated to the tenth century C.E. Scholars were forced to trust that scribes had faithfully preserved the words of the earliest manuscripts. But when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, suddenly there were manuscripts from 1,000 years earlier—before the time of Jesus—that were nearly identical to the tenth-century manuscripts. Isaiah 40:8 says, "Though the grass withers and the flower fades, the Word of the Lord endures forever." The Dead Sea Scrolls help to prove that the same Hebrew Scriptures the earliest followers of Jesus read are the ones the Church continues to read today!

For devotion, read through Psalm 119, which is an extended prayer thanking God for His Word. Psalm 119 is actually the longest chapter in the entire Bible, which highlights its importance. As you read, consider how God has watched over His Word for thousands of years, guarding it and preserving it for every generation to be able to learn from it and encounter Him. Like the psalmist, let your heart be filled with worship and gratitude to the Lord.



Location 3: Masada

The fortress of Masada is an isolated rock plateau located a few miles off the southwestern corner of the Dead Sea. Although the site was originally fortified by Herod the Great around 31 B.C.E., it became a Jewish zealot stronghold in the years immediately following the destruction of the Second Temple.

What Happened Here?

Masada is not mentioned in the Bible, but it has great significance for the history of Israel, acting as a symbol of the strength and resolve of the Jewish people. For many years, IDF soldiers ended their induction ceremony atop of Masada, vowing the words, “Masada will not fall again” (now these ceremonies are held at the Western Wall instead).

Once Rome heard that Jewish zealots had holed up at Masada, they began to siege the fortress. Due to the extremely narrow and steep passes to the top, the siege lasted months, eventually leading the Romans to build a siege ramp out of the surrounding earth and rocks. Once the zealots saw that their fate was imminent, they agreed it would be better to take their own lives than be captured by the Romans. According to Josephus, 960 of the Jewish inhabitants of Masada were willingly killed by one another, the last one falling on his own sword. The fall of Masada officially marks the end of the Great Revolt in 73 C.E.

Devotional

Masada is a reminder of the hardships the Jewish people have endured throughout history. Though it was a place of past tragedy, it now stands as a monument of resolve for the future. After years of being scattered in exile, God is regathering His people to the land. Where there was once hopelessness, there is now a sound of victory.

There are often seasons of life where we feel surrounded on all sides, seeing the enemy's siege ramp rising, not knowing if we will make it out alive. But thanks be to God in Messiah Jesus, we know the end of the story! As you experience Masada today, the steep incline, and the arid desert heat, be reminded of the end of the story; be reminded of the hope of the glory that is to come—not only for you and your family but also for Israel.



Location 4: Dead Sea

The Dead Sea is a salt lake located in the Jordan Rift Valley, straddling the border between the three regions of Israel, the West Bank, and Jordan. The sea and the surrounding area are the lowest point on the surface of the earth.

What Happened Here?

The Old Testament never uses the title “Dead Sea” but instead refers to it as either the Sea of Salt (Gen 14:3), the Sea of the Arabah (Deut 4:49), or the Eastern Sea (Joel 2:20). Joshua 3:16 uses both “Sea of Salt” and “Sea of the Arabah” in the same sentence.

Most likely, Sodom and Gomorrah were located just south of the Dead Sea. Whether the original cities were on the Israel side or on the Jordan side of the border is a matter of

dispute. Both countries have their own salt pillars that they've identified as "Lot's wife" (Gen 19:24-26).

Ezekiel's prophetic vision of the New Temple describes a river that will flow from Jerusalem all the way to the Dead Sea, causing the salt content to dissipate and life to flourish in the sea, like the Sea of Galilee today. The banks of Ein Gedi are also specifically mentioned as a place where people will one day go to fish at the Dead Sea (Ezek 47:1-12).

Like Ezekiel, Zechariah also prophesies that "living waters" will flow from Jerusalem into the Dead Sea (Zech 14:8).

Devotional

Scientists have verified that the Dead Sea area was once a lush, fertile area fed by the Jordan River—just as Genesis confirms when Lot first settled the area. It is an amazing promise of Scripture that the driest, lowest place on the face of the earth will one day bloom and be nourished by a river of life. Though it may seem impossible, God is in the business of making dead things come to life again.

Prayer for devotional time: Lord, I cry out with David, "In a dry and weary land where there is no water, my soul thirsts for You" (Psalm 63:1). You alone can satisfy my thirst and the longing of my soul. You alone can make dead things come to life again. Breathe on these dry bones (Ezek 37) and renew within me a steadfast spirit (Psalm 51:10) that I might see "the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Psalm 27:13). Come break up the hard ground of my life and water every dead or unfruitful part of my soul with Your streams of living water (Isa 43:19). Amen.



LAND OF THE BIBLE TOUR

Day 11: Jerusalem - Part II

DAY 11: JERUSALEM - PART II



Location 1: City of David

Just outside the southeastern walls of the Old City in Jerusalem is the City of David, the original Jebusite settlement that David first conquered after becoming king of Israel. From this site, the city of Jerusalem expanded to the north under Solomon and eventually to the northwest under Hezekiah.

What Happened Here?

David conquered the city through the efforts of Joab, who climbed up the water shaft near the Gihon Spring (1 Chron 11:4-9; 2 Sam 5:6-10).

The Ark of the Covenant remained in the City of David for many years. David built a tabernacle for the Ark, and he employed thousands of musicians and singers to worship before the Ark every day and night (1 Chron 16).

It is atop his palace in the high point of the city “at a time when kings go to war” that David sees Bathsheba and sins against the Lord (2 Sam 11; Psalm 51).

At the end of the eighth century B.C.E., King Hezekiah saw that the Assyrians would soon try to invade Judah just as they had done with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. One of his primary defense measures was to dig a tunnel through the mountain connecting the Gihon Spring on the east side of Jerusalem to the Pool of Siloam located on the southern side of the city. This ensured that the invading Assyrians would not have access to any water source (2 Chron 32).

Devotional

When David became king, the Ark had been in the possession of Israel for centuries. But through all the time of the Judges, there was never a leader who valued the Ark to the extent that King David did. After giving him instructions for how to make the Ark, God first told Moses, “There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the Ark of the Covenant, I will deliver to you all My commands for Israel” (Exod 25:22). No doubt, David knew this passage and the many other instances of the Ark going before the people and the enemies of Israel being scattered (Num 10:33-36). He knew of the times when Moses went into the tent of meeting and “heard the voice speaking to him above the mercy seat” (Num 7:89). David meditated on these stories, and he longed for the same experiences. In the same way that Moses said, “If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here” (Exod 33:15), David knew he could not lead Israel forward into the future without the presence of God.

For devotion, consider the resolve of David to make God’s presence a priority. You do not have to be a leader of a large ministry or corporation to need God’s presence in your day-to-day life. When Joshua was just a young assistant to Moses, he nevertheless made God’s presence a priority and would follow Moses into the tent of meeting and remain there even after Moses left (Exod 33:11). As you experience the City of David and see the area where the Ark was kept and where 24/7 worship was conducted, ask God to increase your hunger and desire for His presence.



Location 2: Saint Peter de Gallicantu

St. Peter de Gallicantu is a church that commemorates where Peter denied Jesus three times—the Latin word gallicantu means “rooster crow.” It is also believed to be the location of Caiaphas’ house. The chapel itself dates to the twelfth century C.E. but was recently rebuilt in 1931.

What Happened Here?

The Gospels record that Jesus was taken from the Garden of Gethsemane to the house of Caiaphas and tried by the Sanhedrin (Matt 26:57).

The general vicinity around the church is where Peter waited for Jesus' trial, warming himself by the charcoal fire (John 18:18). And it is here that he also denied Jesus three times before hearing the rooster crow and fleeing in anguish (Matt 26:69-75).

On the slope near Caiaphas' palace there is an original paved walkway where Jesus would have been led up to the palace from the valley. Luke records that Jesus was mocked and beaten along His way from Gethsemane (Luke 22:63-64).

After Jesus calls Himself "the Son of Man," Caiaphas tears his clothes crying "blasphemy!" and the crowd spits on Jesus and beats Him (Matt 26:65-68).

In the vaults below the church, there is a pit believed to be where Jesus was lowered and left alone to await His trial before Pilate the next day. It is also possible that this same holding cell was used for some of the disciples during the years following Jesus' ascension—when Peter and John are arrested after the healing of the beggar at Beautiful Gate (Acts 4:1-3), or when the disciples are later arrested, flogged, and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus again (Acts 5:17-42).

Devotional

Jesus likely spent His last moments before His trial and crucifixion alone in the holding cell now located beneath St. Peter de Gallicantu. After being betrayed by Judas, abandoned by the rest of the disciples, and bruised and beaten by His own people, it is not hard to imagine Jesus praying the words of Psalm 88, "I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like one without strength. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily on me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; my eyes are dim with grief" (Psalm 88:3-9).

Prayer for devotional time: Jesus, we will never be able to comprehend the loneliness or the depth of pain You felt physically, spiritually, emotionally. You endured the torture, the brokenness, and betrayal all "for the joy set before You" (Heb 12:2). Here in this place, I say thank You. Thank You for dying for me and for taking my sins upon Yourself. There is no greater love than this, that while I was still a sinner You gave Your life for me (John 15:13; Rom 5:8). I worship You and thank You and respond with my whole life—as You were broken for me, I will be broken for You. I will take up my cross and follow You (Matt 16:24).



Location 3: Southern Steps

The Southern Steps are located in front of the southern retaining wall of the Temple Mount that Herod the Great built near the end of the first century B.C.E. (though the current wall dates to the sixteenth century). The steps lead to the Huldah Gates, which were sealed with stones in the Middle Ages.

What Happened Here?

Because the entrance at the Huldah Gates was used for commoners, it is guaranteed that some of the stones of the Southern Steps are the very same stones that Jesus and the disciples walked on whenever they visited the Temple.

Joseph and Mary came up these stairs whenever they dedicated Jesus in the Temple at forty days old, which is also when Simeon and Anna prophesied over Him (Luke 2:22-38). The Gospel of Luke says that Jesus' family continued to make pilgrimage to the Temple every year for Passover, indicating that Jesus walked these steps many times even as a young boy (Luke 2:39-52).

The remnants of at least 50 *mikvot* (Jewish ritual baths) have been found near the Southern Steps. The baths were necessary because of the great number of people visiting the Temple who needed to immerse in water to become ritually pure before setting foot in the house of God. Considering the number of baths, it is possible that the mass baptisms of 3,000 people on the day of Pentecost took place here (Acts 2:41). In fact, it is possible that all the events recorded in Acts 2–3 took place near the Southern Steps rather than the Upper Room.

Some scholars have also suggested that one of the Huldah Gates was the “Beautiful Gate” mentioned in Acts 3, when Peter and John heal the beggar after saying the famous words, “Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give to you: In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk!”

Devotional

When the Spirit is poured out on the disciples, Acts records that there were “Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:5). The reason why so many were gathered is precisely because it was Pentecost (the Feast of Weeks), one of the three pilgrimage feasts mentioned in the Torah (Deut 16:16). The timing of this feast in Jerusalem means that the Southern Steps and nearby *mikvot* would have certainly been crowded with many people making their way into the Temple.

For devotion, imagine what it would be like to see this excitement. Imagine the crowds gathering on their way to the Temple to see a small group of people who appeared to be “drunk,” and then 3,000 people from the crowds choosing to be baptized in response to Peter’s message (Acts 2:41). Not too long after this, another group of 5,000 respond again to Peter and John’s healing of the crippled beggar (Acts 4:4). Whether or not the outpouring of the Spirit happened at the Southern Steps, it is clear that the disciples continued to use this entrance often and there was much excitement in and around the Temple with new people “daily” being added to the movement (Acts 2:46-47).



Location 4: Western Wall

Toward the end of the first century B.C.E., Herod the Great doubled the area of the Temple Mount by extending the Temple platform and building four retaining walls around it. The Western Wall (also called the Wailing Wall or Kotel) is a small, exposed section—about one-eighth—of the original retaining wall. Since Jewish citizens are banned from accessing the Temple Mount, the Western Wall is the closest place near the former Holy of Holies they can pray.

What Happened Here?

The peak upon which the altar of Solomon's Temple was built is traditionally said to be the very place Abraham laid Isaac on the altar—Mount Moriah (Gen 22).

King David purchased Araunah's Threshing Floor, located on Mount Moriah, where he commissioned his son, Solomon, to build the Temple (2 Sam 24:18-25; 1 Chron 21:18-30).

After the destruction of Solomon's Temple, first Zerubbabel and Jeshua, then Ezra and Nehemiah, led a campaign to build up the Second Temple near the end of the sixth century B.C.E. This Temple underwent renovations over the years, culminating with the expansions made by Herod the Great.

Devotional

Upon the first Temple's completion, Solomon prayed and dedicated the site to the Lord saying, "Also concerning the foreigner [Gentile] who is not from Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country on account of Your great name and Your mighty and Your outstretched arm, when they come and pray toward this house, then hear from heaven, from Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, and fear You as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name" (2 Chron 6:32-33). At the end of Solomon's prayer, fire fell from heaven and glory filled the Temple (2 Chron 7:1). The Lord then appeared personally to Solomon saying, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice...Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house so that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there always" (2 Chron 7:12-16).

Solomon confessed from the start that God could not be contained within the Temple (2 Chron 6:18). He knew that "The Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands, as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool'" (Acts 7:48-49). But God nevertheless chose this place, Mount Moriah, to be a special place where His eyes are always watching, and His ears are always listening. As you go to pray at the Western Wall, let your faith be stirred, recognizing that you are praying at a place of incredible significance; a place where God promised His focus will remain perpetually. Go "with prayer and with supplication and thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Phil 4:6), believing that He will "hear from heaven" and "do according to everything" you ask (2 Chron 6:32).



Location 5: Garden Tomb

Like the Holy Sepulchre, the Garden Tomb is another location believed by some to be the tomb of Jesus. First discovered in 1867, it is widely visited by those in the Protestant faith tradition.

What Happened Here?

Most scholars agree that the tombs located here are likely dated to around the eighth century B.C.E., which would discredit them from being Joseph of Arimathea's "new tomb" (Matt 27:57-60; John 19:41). Nevertheless, since Joseph's tomb was surrounded by a cultivated "garden," the Garden Tomb is helpful for framing images of what Jesus' tomb could have looked like.

Devotional

The Apostle Paul calls Jesus “the firstborn from the dead” (Col 1:18) because He was the first human to be resurrected never to die again. All others who have been resurrected in history went on to live a normal life and die a natural death. But after Jesus resurrected, He ascended in His glorified body, never to die again. It is interesting to consider the scene when Mary sees the resurrected Jesus near the tomb in the garden but does not recognize Him (John 20:14). It is not until He says her name that she realizes who is standing before her. A similar thing happens for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. It is not until Jesus breaks bread with them that “their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him” (Luke 24:31).

There is a sweet presence of the Lord that can be felt at the Garden Tomb. As you take communion, let your eyes be opened to recognize Jesus anew (Luke 24:31). Let your ears be opened to hear Him lovingly call your name, as if for the very first time (John 20:14). Take the cup, which is the blood of the new covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins, and take the bread, which is His body broken for you for newness of life. If Jesus was not resurrected from the dead, then our faith is futile (1 Cor 15:14). Confess your faith in Him again today and receive resurrection power from Jerusalem as you begin the journey back home tomorrow!