



## Middle East Report November 2007

### ISRAEL/JORDAN HOLY LAND TOUR

*'And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 An I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed'*—Genesis 12:2-3 KJV

The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) gives frequently travel advisories. Regarding Iraq, it says that you are strongly discouraged from visiting the country (understandably so). Regarding Israel and Jordan, you are asked to 'reconsider' your travel plans because of previous terrorists incidents (though these have not been so recent). DFAT is offering a good service for the people of Australia. It represents common sense. Yet, I have long learned that ultimately, one has to *'walk by faith, and not by sight'* (II Corinthians 5:7). This is not to say that one is to court danger or to act presumptuously, which is not the nature of faith. Instead, they are to continually look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 11:2). Through such faith and patience you will receive the promises (Hebrews 6:12).



So in faith a group of sixteen from Australia (this also included two New Zealanders and one pastor from Singapore) trekked to Jordan and Israel to walk in the land of faith. The situation in the region was tense. Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, the Gaza Strip, have all faced unrest. U.S. President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice are trying to 'kick start' the

stalled Middle East peace process with a summit at Annapolis, Maryland, late in November 2007 (thirty years after Egyptian President Anwar al Sadat flew to Israel to talk peace with then Prime Minister Menachem Begin and sixty years after the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state). The violence in Iraq is becoming tamer and the U.S. and Iran have actually been dialoguing with each other, for the first time in thirty years, over the fate of the troubled nation. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert clings to power despite a damning Winograd Report over his role in the

controversial and inconclusive Israel-Hizballah last year. He has also been diagnosed with prostate cancer.

In the midst of all this, the 'Teach All Nations GROUP 2007' arrives in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to begin a two-week life-changing tour of the Bible sites. Throughout we will have Scripture readings, Bible tutorials, singing and praise. We will taste local foods like falafel, hummous, and even the Arab pastry called *kanafe*, a specialty from Nablus.

Throughout the journey I stressed the fact that we were **not** tourists, meaning people who travel for the purpose of pursuing leisure activity (what tourist in their right mind would come to a 'war zone' for their leisure holiday?). Instead, we are 'pilgrims,' a Biblical concept which speaks of a people on a long journey in search of the sacred. Our Christian life on earth is like the traveler in Hebrews 11 who is heading to a 'city with foundations' whose builder and maker is God. What makes a pilgrim is not their outward activities, but the faith in his or her heart, as well as their sacred destination (in this case, the holy land and holy city).

## HIGHLIGHTS

### JORDAN (3 Nights)

**Mount Nebo:** For some, this was the highlight of the entire trip and we visited it on the first day. Mount Nebo is located in the land of Moab, which is east of the Jordan (Rift) Valley. Moab is where Ruth came from when she migrated to Judea and married Boaz. On this mount Moses viewed the promised land:

*And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed him all the and of Gilead, unto Dan (Deuteronomy 34:1).*



On the site is a modern church built on ancient remains, a nice walkway, and a monument to commemorate the papal visit of John Paul II in the year 2000. For us, the most important thing was the view. Though it can be normally hazy, we had a better than average view of that day.

One man was especially impressed and talked about Nebo for the remainder of the trip. From Nebo we could view the Dead Sea, Jericho, the path of the Jordan, and the hills of the West Bank (also known as Judea and Samaria).

In many ways, Nebo is a poignant place because here Moses, the servant of the LORD, was prevented from leading his people into the promised land because of striking the rock, rather than speaking to it (Numbers 20). Nebo would be the place where he viewed the inheritance he had longed for all his long life (120 years), but he would not enter in. He also died here and was buried in such a manner that his grave would remain unknown and undiscovered (a wise thing considering it would have become a worship shrine). We reflected on how we, the Aussie pilgrims of 2007, would be able to do what Moses could not: enter into the Land. But through God's grace and glory, Moses eventually entered the Promised Land centuries later when he met with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17).

**Amman:** Capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Amman is also Biblical Rabbah Ammon (Old Testament) and Philadelphia during the New Testament era (do not confuse this with the Philadelphia in the Book of Revelation, which is located in western Asia Minor [modern Turkey]). This city had only 15,000 people when Amir Abdullah came in the 1920's. It was built on seven hills. Jordan became an oasis during the many turbulent periods of modern Middle East history, welcoming refugees from Palestine in the west and Iraq in the east. As a result, Amman has grown into a city of two million people built on 25 hills.



It universally utilizes handsome sandstone and many places have an up-market ambience. Real estate prices are very high. Abdoon Circle has a great 'café culture' and many of the familiar western fast food icons are found in Amman. A real treat at Abdoon is 'Bless Jordan' Ice Cream Shop which is run by a Lebanese Pentecostal Christian named Roger.

The lookout of old Amman by the Roman pillars, the small but interesting archaeological museum which has some remains of the **Dead Sea Scrolls** (Qumran, where the scrolls were discovered, was part of the West Bank and administered by Jordan from 1948 to 1967), and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D. Roman coliseum (the only one to have an altar of sacrifice) were worth an inspection.

**Petra:** This is the crown jewel of any visit to Jordan. It is a four hour drive south of Amman, the capital and located in the region known as Edom. We stayed at Wadi Mousa (Moses), rode horses 600 meters until the start of the 1.6 kilometer Siq, a narrow passageway that has spectacular colors depending on where the sun and shadows meet. Then seeing the 'light at the end of the tunnel' as the grand, columned 'Pharaoh's Treasury' comes into view, has go to be a highlight. Past the treasury is a theatre. It takes 3

days to inspect Petra, which is only partially excavated, but it clearly has to be one of the unique historic sites on earth.

Scripture has some harsh things to say about Edom, a highland that was blessed with trade routes. They apparently applauded when the children of Judah were attacked by their enemies. According to Isaiah 34:5-8 and the Book of Obadiah, Edom will be punished for their callous and unfriendly attitude to the chosen people.



Eventually the Nabateans (Christianized Arab tribes) settled here and conducted robust business for a time, with a string of settlements in the Negev between Petra and Gaza, on the Mediterranean. They eventually faded into history and so did their city, which remained hidden for many centuries. Only in 1812 did Burkhardt discover the place again and told the world. Some consider Petra the place where some of the Jews will take refuge after the fall of Jerusalem under Antichrist (Revelation 12).

**Baptismal Site:** I went to this place after the tour returned to Australia as part of my extended stay in Jordan. It was my very first visit, particularly because it has been a military zone since the June (Six Day) War of 1967. They pointed out 'Elijah's Hill,' where the prophet ascended to heaven in a chariot (II Kings 2:11). The actual baptismal site is a bit inland from the Jordan River itself and the puddle of water comes from a spring, not the river. The river evidently changed course over the last two thousand years. A series of archaeological remains has experts convinced that this site is authentic. The Jordan River is very low at the end of the summer and when we walked to its banks, it was only 3-4 meters to the Israeli-held side. You could talk to people on the other bank, in theory, but were discouraged to do so. Like Yardenit Kinneret, the baptismal site where the Sea of Galilee empties into the Jordan, built by the Israeli government for Christian pilgrims to get baptized, it is also possible for 'evangelicals' to be baptized at this site. I will seriously consider having my next holy land baptism here.

**Other Sites in Jordan:** We visited the ancient city of Madaba, in the land of Moab, where a 5<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. Byzantine mosaic on the floor shows the Holy Land as it was at that time.

## ISRAEL

### Dead Sea Region (2 nights)

**Qumran** was our first port-of-call in Israel after leaving Jordan. Our first 'tourist site' was a young looking chain-smoking priest at the door of the



souvenir shop. He caught everyone's attention. As we walked among the ruins and viewed the nearby caves of the Judean wilderness, we were taken back in time to the first century A.D., when the Essene community lived here and gave to the world the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, the most significant literary find of the 20<sup>th</sup>

Century (we saw a sample in Amman), stored them in clay jars and hid them those nearby caves, where they remained for nearly two millennia. Thank God they did!



We discovered the table-top fortress of **Masada**, Herod's masterpiece and the zealots last stand. This mountain is at sea-level but towers 400 meters above the nearby Dead Sea. Herod had terraced hanging palaces, 29 storerooms, a synagogue, and cisterns that could hold a 2 year supply of water. Years later after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the zealots made their last stand

against Rome and chose to commit suicide, rather than surrender to Roman slavery. It is an iconic and emotive monument to ancient and modern Israel.

We hiked in the **En Gedi** nature reserve and visited the possible cave where David hid from Saul (I Samuel 24). The Nubian ibex were in great abundance at the field school and reminded us of Habakkuk saying that *'The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills'* (3:19).

The experience would not be complete without a chance to float on the **Dead Sea**, where the mineral-heavy water (31% solid) cause you to float, no matter how much you weigh. Oily to the touch, the water is warm at the top and cooler on the bottom. The sensation of floating is something you will not forget.



### Sea of Galilee Region (3 nights)

It is less than 200 kilometers from the southern **Dead Sea** region to the city of **Tiberias** on the **Sea of Galilee**, however the journey takes all day. This is because there is much to see and the topography is amazingly diverse. Most of the time we were below sea level but for a brief time we were on top of the mountains!

**Mount Tabor** was our first stop, which is where Deborah and Barak had their great victory in Judges 4. It is also the traditional site of the Transfiguration, where eternity touched earth. At **Nazareth** in the hills of **Lower Galilee** we saw the **Basilica of the Annunciation**, probably the largest church in the Middle East, commemorating where the angel appeared to Mary to tell her she would be mother of The Christ. **Nazareth Village** is a new site, run by Christian Arabs, that has a reconstructed view of Nazareth in the time of Jesus, with people dressed like ancient Jews, with dwellings and equipment that resembled that of the first century A.D.

What was Nazareth like in Jesus' time? It had 150-300 people, and five kilometers away was the capital of Galilee, **Sepphoris**, with a population of 20,000. Joseph and sons probably walked there and provided carpenter services to the thriving metropolis. What amazed me was the small size of the synagogue; it looked not much bigger than some people's dining and lounge rooms. You can imagine how hot tempers reached boiling point in such a confined space, when they rejected Jesus and tried to throw Him over the Brow of the Hill (Luke 4:16-30).

**Tiberias:** Built by Herod Antipas in A.D. 18, this place was near to Jesus' ministry but due to its unsavory reputation He probably never visited there. It is the main city on the **Lake (Sea) of Galilee**, and the mind whirls when you consider how many Gospel events happened along the shores and even on top of the water! Our boat ride across the lake was a special treat. Initially, the boat hoisted the Australian flag and played



*Advance Australia Fair* (the national anthem), but then we were informed we were on the wrong boat!

Thank God we changed boats! We were given ample time to meditate as we traveled on these 'holy waters' and, at one point, the motor deliberately stopped and we could silently reflect on the things of the Lord. About 10 minutes before the end of the ride, the captain of the boat informed me that he was a Messianic believer in Jesus and a musician. Would I like to him to play for us? Sure.

So he played *Amazing Grace* in Hebrew! Heaven came down! We were left breathless.

The day around the Sea of Galilee is the most Gospel focused of all, since so many events of the Gospels happened around the shores of the lake:

- [Luke 5:4-9](#): Catching the big haul of fish;
- [Matthew 4:18-19](#): Disciples are called to follow Christ;
- [Matthew 5-7](#): The Sermon on the Mount;
- [Mark 1:23-28](#): The demoniac is healed;
- [Matthew 8:14-15](#): Peter's mother-in-law healed;
- [Matthew 11:20-24](#): Cities of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida are rebuked;
- [Mark 4:35-36](#): The Gadarene voyage;
- [Luke 8:23-25](#): The stilling of the storm on the lake;
- [Mark 5:1-20](#): Gadarene demoniac is healed;
- [Matthew 14:13-21](#); [Mark 6:30-44](#); [Luke 9:11-17](#); [John 6:1-14](#): Feeding of the 5,000 (the only miracle mentioned in all four gospels);
- [Mark 6:45-52](#): Jesus walks on the water;
- [Matthew 15:32-38](#): Feeding of the 4,000;
- [Mark 8:22-26](#): Blind man healed at Bethsaida.

The **Mount of Beatitudes** commemorates the most famous sermon in history. It has a magnificent Barluzzi church, surrounded by beautiful gardens and an unparalleled view of the lake, looking southward. The place of the sermon is a natural amphitheatre that cascades down to the lake. **Capernaum** was the hometown and headquarter of Jesus after He was rejected in Nazareth. Today, it is basically an archaeological site that has an impressive ancient synagogue, basalt millstone, and the remains of Simon Peter's mother-in-laws house. **Kursi**, on the eastern side of the lake, marks the site of the deliverance of the Gadarene demoniac, with a steep hill that cascades down to the water.

The remainder of the trip was full of sites of historical and sacred association. Of interest, **Tel Dan** in the far north took up more time than any other site. Why is it important? It was Israel's northernmost city in the Biblical era; it has a reconstructed city gate and *bemah* or altar/high place. Remember King

Jeroboam I of the Northern Kingdom of Israel who set up a sanctuary for the golden calf at Bethel and Dan? Dan also is one of the sources of the Jordan River.

The remainder of the sites include:



Lake Huleh  
Overlook  
Tel Dan  
Banias



(Caesarea Philippi), where Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ  
The Golan Heights  
Muhraha (Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal)  
Haifa Viewpoint  
Caesarea  
Jaffa



Mount of Olives  
Dominus Fleuit (the Lord Wept)  
Garden of Gethsemane  
St. Stephen's Gate  
Pool of Bethesda  
Sisters of Zion  
Via Dolorosa  
Church of the Holy Sepulchre  
The Western Wall  
The Temple Mount or Hara mesh Sharif

Shepherd's Field (Bethlehem)  
Church of the Nativity (Bethlehem)  
Bethlehem Bible College  
Garden Tomb Communion  
Upper Room (Mount Zion)  
St. Peter-in-Gallicantu (Mount Zion)  
City of David (micro tour)  
Davidson Center & the Temple Steps  
The Baptismal Site (myself)  
Jordan's Dead Sea Coast

For me as the tour leader, of the above list, I think the important places include:



- **Mount Carmel** and **Muhraka**, where a vital victory was won over heathenism by Elijah;
- **Caesarea** as an impressive archaeological site of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel, with durable Roman style ruins. What is even more impressive is that the Holy Spirit first came down on the Gentiles in this place.
- **The Mount of Olives** panorama give an outstanding sweep of Jerusalem's history, all from one viewpoint.
- **The Temple Mount** and **Western Wall** are extremely significant historical and holy sites that would take hours to explain and are best experienced first hand;
- the **Garden Tomb** is probably the only 'Protestant' holy site in Jerusalem. It is very popular with evangelical Christians because it is an open-air shrine, surrounded by beautiful gardens, that demands quiet reflection on Christ's ultimate sacrifice for us.
- While some of the tour members disliked the interior and practices of the ancient churches of **The Holy Sepulchre**, Jerusalem, and the **Church of the Nativity** in Bethlehem, I strongly believe that these places are necessary stops in terms of Bible and history.



### Special Guests

We were blessed to hear from some special guests, including Pastor S. with his large Pentecostal church in Jordan. They are involved in church planting and charitable work, including among Iraqi refugees. His church is also very free in the Spirit. **Bishara Awad**, founder and president of Bethlehem Bible College, also spoke to our group about the training of Arabic speaking students for Christian ministry in Israel and the Palestinian territories. **Shlomy Abramov** spoke to the TAN Group for a second year in a row. Along with his wife **Miriam**, they are pastors in a small messianic congregation and also evangelists for Jesus for Jesus in Israel. Shlomy, a big man from Kurdish Jewish background, has a powerful testimony of how he came to Christ. He says he is now a 'fisher of men.'



### Post-Tour Events

After the tour ended, I remained in the Middle East for another ten days. During that time I was in two Arab countries, one being on the Persian Gulf. On one Sunday, we had a time of 'Pentecost' where God Baptized in the Spirit some of the Arab people present. In the evening at the same church, the service lasted for four hours as I prayed and prophesied over all who desired, which was most everyone. They all had their mobiles phones ready

to record every word. One man, who is unchurched and not present in the service, came to pick up his sister, saw the prayer line, and joined it! As I prayed for him, it was obvious to me that he did not know the Lord. So I led him to Christ and he left the church building with a mile-wide smile on his face. His brother, also unchurched, was waiting for him outside and wanted to know why he was so happy. So he came into the church and I led him, too, to the Lord. Their names are Rami and Amin. Pray for them!

In the Gulf country I spoke in five churches. One highlight was with a church that I did not speak in (on this trip, though I did in 2004). It happened to be an Arabic-speaking congregation where I spoke almost four years ago. At that time, it was a small congregation. After the sermon, the Holy Spirit graciously came down and we had 'Arab Pentecost.' The Egyptian pastor was ecstatic: 'I have waited 16 months for this day!' he exclaimed. Forty-four months later, I happened to drop in briefly on my way to another meeting. The congregation was literally double the size. A young Lebanese man and woman whom I received the Spirit during my first visit, were now married and serving as assistant pastors. The church is still experiencing momentum from that blessed day in March 2004. *Come Holy Spirit*

### Prophetic Prospects

The Middle East is a wonderful place to visit, with warm, charming people and the best cuisine in the world! It is also a very religious and strife-torn region which traditionally has been very gospel-resistant. A few things to consider:

- **Jewish Believers:** Native born Israeli Jews are coming to Christ in increasing numbers. An Israeli man came to visit me and revealed to me that he accepted Jesus six months ago and was now born again. Some estimate there could be upwards to 12,000 local messianic believers and 100 congregations, so far.
- **Arab Christians:** While numbers of Jewish 'Christians' are increasing, the number of Arab Christians in the Middle East is decreasing. Christians constituted 24% of the Middle East population in 1914; today, there are no more than 5% today and shrinking. In Jerusalem, birthplace of the church, Christians may be no more than 1% of the population. Part of this is due to high Muslim birthrates but also due to Arab Christian emigration to South America, Europe, USA, Canada, and Australia. These Christians feel they have no future in their homeland, hence they leave. It is a very disturbing trend.
- **Expatriate Workers in the Persian Gulf:** There are literally millions of expatriate workers in the Middle East, especially concentrated in the oil-rich nations of the Persian Gulf. Apart from Saudi Arabia, believers among the expatriates are given full freedom of worship, perhaps even more than in their native countries. Because of this, many of

these workers are coming to the LORD—again, they and their colleagues are more reachable here than in their home countries. So do wonderful purposes are happening:

1. The Gulf countries, due to their high need of expatriate work and freedom of religion, are becoming unintentional mission and evangelistic points;
2. Many of the Christians expatriates are filled with the Spirit; have enough of them in one place and certainly the native Arabs will be affected.

### **Land of the Bible 2008 10-24 November**

You are cordially invited to join with us on a trip of a lifetime. Land of the Bible 2008 is a *'A Spirit-filled Pilgrimage to the Land of Faith.'*

#### **Jordan**

5 Nights: **Aqaba** on the Red Sea,  
**Wadi Rum**,  
The Rose-Red City of **Petra**,  
**Mount Nebo**, in the land of Moab, where Moses viewed the Promised Land,  
**Madeba**,  
**Amman**, Capital of Jordan,  
**Dead Sea**, lowest point on the face of the earth,  
**Jesus' Baptismal Site** near the Jordan River.

#### **Israel**

8 Nights: **Jericho**, oldest city in the world, the first conquered by Joshua,  
**Nazareth**, where Jesus lived and grew up,  
**Sea of Galilee**, stage of Christ's ministry,  
**Mount Carmel**, where Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal;  
**Armageddon**, scene of history's greatest campaign,  
**Caesarea**, Roman capital of Palestine and place of Gentile Pentecost,  
**Joppa**, where Peter received the vision of Gentile mission,  
**Mount of Olives**, place of Christ's ascension,  
**Mount Zion**,  
**Old City of Jerusalem**,  
**Bethlehem**, city of David, birthplace of Christ,  
**Herodian**, Herod's palace,  
**Hebron**, burial place of the Patriarchs.

**Land of the Bible 2008** provides you distinctive:

**Information:** where the Bible becomes the “textbook” and the Land becomes the “classroom.”

**Inspiration:** this is a Spirit-filled pilgrimage, so holy sites become venues for prayer, praise, and worship. Your Bible reading will come alive!

**Living Stones:** you will have opportunity to connect with local Jews & Arabs.

*This distinctive combination ensures that you, your Bible reading, and even newspaper reading, will never be the same again!*

**Your Host:** Dr. Kameel Majdali, Director of Teach All Nations Inc. ([www.tan.org.au](http://www.tan.org.au)). He is an experienced Bible teacher and tour leader. Dr. Majdali has specialized in post-graduate studies in the Holy Land and Christian pilgrimage.

#### **Testimonies from the Previous Tour:**

*'Israel for me was a very moving and personal journey, confirming what I believe, why I believe, and most of all, Who I believe. My life was impacted'—ANGIE*

*'Being in the Holy Land was so life-changing and fundamental to my faith. Standing on Mt Zion and "seeing" Jesus' final days before the Crucifixion laid before me, brings tears to my eyes till now...I now read the Bible with previously unimagined insight'—JOHNNY*

*'It was life-changing'—JULIA*

#### **For more information contact:**

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