

Faith Pulpit

The Tour of a Lifetime

The heart of an Israel tour is to observe the topography, geography, and culture which provide unparalleled insight into the Bible. When we are there, we do not use PowerPoint slides; we simply point and say, “That is where it took place.” Such “hands- and eyes-on” experience takes your knowledge of the Bible to a whole new level in just a few days. Every day seems like a Sunday worship service as we go from site to site and learn new truths about the Bible. Here are some reasons for investing in a study tour of Israel.

Social Conditions in Israel

A visit to Israel will enable you to gain a more objective understanding of the Middle Eastern situation. In spite of innuendo and negative statements about Israel in the media, you will be able to see the situation firsthand. You will discover the fact that Jewish, Muslim, and Christian people are all citizens with equal rights and voting privileges in Israel. You will be surprised to learn that Arabs/Muslims can serve in the Knesset, the governing body of Israel. Though Israel is criticized by many as an apartheid and oppressive state, you will witness the opposite. Israel is a multicultural society. Women are free to function as in the West, and minorities are not denied any privileges.

Social Interactions with Tour Members

On the tour you will strengthen your current friendships. By the end of the trip you will be saying things like, “Now I really know them.” “This is a great source of unity among diversity.” “Now I have a new prayer partner.” “I didn’t realize how much we have in common.” “This reveals what strong Christian friendship/fellowship looks like.” You also will establish Christian friends among people you never knew before. Within twenty-four hours you will be talking as if you have known them for years.

Spiritual Burden for Israelis

Not only will you establish lifelong new friends and deepen present friendships, but you will also develop a burden for people you encountered on the tour. Seeing the people of Israel will give you real-life exposure to both Jewish and Arab people who need the Lord. I like to remind tour participants that in light of the immanency of the Lord's return in the Rapture, we could be leaving a positive witness with some of the future 144,000!

Intense On-Site Class

A tour of Israel provides an intensive educational field trip. The Bible comes alive as you receive multiple perspectives. You will experience both visual and verbal instruction. The Israeli guide and the host Bible teacher will share information and instruction including the history of the site and archaeological discoveries and insights. You will take in cultural aspects of the world of the Old and New Testaments. With Bible in hand, you can read the passage and look up as you see the site or area where the passage took place. Your reading and study of the Bible will never be the same as you review your photos or mentally recall the Bible locations. This kind of teaching/learning atmosphere resulted in my wife saying, "I now read my Bible in 3-D."

Another benefit of a tour is the help you get in putting the Bible in context. You will not only view passages in light of the verses before and after (which is normally associated with context), but you will also see Bible passages in light of their topographical and geographical context. You will see the big picture of the text in a whole new dimension. Reading books about Israel is helpful, but supplementing your reading with seeing the sites pictured and described in the book gives you unequalled comprehension of the Bible.

Allow me to share an example of the insights you can glean from a visit. In [Matthew 16:13–20](#) Christ introduced the church. (My focus here is upon the background context, not the theological implications.) Christ spoke these words in Caesarea Philippi, which is a site in the northernmost part of Israel (not be confused with Caesarea Martima, ancient Israel's port on the Mediterranean Sea). Caesarea Philippi was a major center for false worship. In Old Testament times it was a center of Baal worship. In fact [Judges 3:3](#) and [I Chronicles 5:23](#) refer to the area as Baal Hermon, since it is at the southwestern foot of Mt. Hermon. One source asserts there may have been as many as 15 locations for Baal worship in the region.

As you approach the site where this passage took place, you are immediately impacted by the scene of an immense rock cliff and a cave to the left. In the cliff you note a number of niches in the rock wall. These niches formerly held idols, notably those of the god Pan. During the intertestamental period, this place was a center of Pan worship. As you progress east along the base of the cliff, you see some plaques identifying the location of several temples dedicated to various gods from the intertestamental period.

During Jesus' day worship of the Roman emperor was practiced here. Do you begin to get the impression this place has a history of religious falsehood? Remember, it was at this location that Jesus asked His disciples who people thought He was. After they responded with names of Bible characters, He asked, "who do you say that I am?" By supernatural revelation Peter responded. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." What a place to make such a statement! In the environs of false worship and gods, Jesus is declared to be the Son of the living God.

Jesus responded "on this rock, I will build My church." This declaration was in response to Peter's statement about who Jesus is, but the impact of that statement is vividly illustrated by the immense cliff of solid rock that is the northern background of Caesarea Philippi. That huge cliff illustrated the stability of the church's foundation in Christ ([I Cor. 3:11](#)). The disciples must have stared in awe if they associated the promise of Christ with the mass of rock before them. The Lord also confirmed the enduring nature of the church by stating, "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." What is even more interesting is that the early church historian, Eusebius, indicated there was demonic activity in one of the caves in the area. Read Christ's statement again in view of that fact!

I think you get the picture. Standing in the area where Peter and Christ made significant statements makes the passage live. While not all sites have as much natural background, each place contributes to the cumulative impact of realizing you are standing on holy ground.

Spiritual Impact

Reflecting on camp, evangelistic meetings, and Bible and missions conferences brings back memories of significant spiritual decisions and growth. A tour of Israel and the related teaching will have the same spiritual impact. Even individuals who are not emotional are at times almost on the verge of tears at specific sites. I recall seeing an individual spontaneously weep at Nazareth Village (a 14-acre replica of life in Jesus' day) as crushing the oil from olives was explained. It reminded the person of the pressure the Lord went through for him.

Emotional response is not the goal for this trip, but when "reality is made real" concerning Bible truth, one of the goals for the trip is accomplished. The consistent exposure to seeing the Bible come alive, coupled with Bible teaching and application, creates an atmosphere for spiritual challenge and change. It is not unusual for people to say, "I will never be the same" after a trip to Israel.

Being in Israel creates a thirst for Bible reading and study. Exposure to the land gives a whole new dimension to comprehending Scripture. Observing ancient sites and archaeological digs whets the appetite to do more research in Biblical backgrounds. Apart from a tour of Israel, you would probably not consider the importance of such vital Biblical research. I saw this clearly on my last visit to Israel. After a site visit, a deacon chairman shared with me his desire to study the Bible more in-depth when he went back home. What pastor would not want that to be true of his deacon chairman? The same

gentleman stated that the trip exceeded his expectations—and he had high expectations coming into the trip!

Apologetic Value

A tour of Israel provides moments that result in statements like, “so that is what it looked like,” or “now I understand.” Other people confirm the reality of what they have always believed. While we do not believe because of external evidence, it is a joy to see the reality of Bible assertions right before our eyes.

The term “spirituality” has become a catch-all for describing an individual’s religion. Frequently the term is used to describe one’s private mystical experiences. Individualistic therapeutic self-help practices and horoscopic hunches are given theological status. Subjectivity rules in much of what passes for spirituality. A visit to Israel brings you face-to-face with objective reality. Immediately you are impacted with the fact that God deals with mankind in time and space. This realization drives home the truth that Biblical Christianity is based on objective truth, not mysticism.

Archaeological sites confirm Bible statements and silence denials of Biblical truth. Visiting Qumran and the Shrine of the Book are great occasions to remind the tour group of the value of the Dead Sea Scrolls. You have probably heard the comment that over the years the Bible has been changed because of all the transmission or translations. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls gave opportunity to check the accuracy of that statement. Until the time of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest Old Testament manuscript we possessed dated to about A.D. 800–900. The Dead Sea Scrolls are dated to approximately 200–100 B.C. Thus, about 1,000 years of hand copying occurred between the two manuscripts. The Isaiah Scroll is a good manuscript to use for comparison since it is a major target for destructive criticism. When compared, the Isaiah Scroll and the earliest manuscript possessed before the discovery revealed excellent accuracy of transmission between the two. Even the difference between the alleged two authors of chapters 1–39 and 40–66 is indirectly refuted by noting the lack of a gap between the chapters in the scroll.

Some archaeologists dispute the Bible account of David’s existence and impact. Excavation at Dan in the early 1990s produced a partial stele in secondary usage that contained the words “house of David.” A plaque on a wall south of the gate of Ahab (at Dan) identifies the location of the discovery. Discoveries such as this one are not unique, but they are neglected in the secular anti-Biblical media. One hundred years ago such discoveries would have made headlines in national media, but bias and political correctness leave them in obscurity. A trip to Israel brings them into focus as one visits the sites where they were discovered. Such eyewitness exposure is not used to create faith in God’s Word, but it provides joyful confirmation of the facts of Scripture.

A trip to the Bible lands is not an expense but rather an investment. As you visit the locations where the Bible was written and where Bible people walked and talked, the impact and value you gain will be greater than any other investment. A trip with concentrated focus on Scripture and the Lord will provide a new Biblical perspective that will last the rest of your life.

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