

Twelve Days
to
Jerusalem

Each trip to Israel marks a journey of the body and of the spirit. My trip to Israel occurred by accident, but it became a pilgrimage guided by God to a land I call Home. This book shares my true story of God's unexpected touch in a strange land. Along this journey, the Bible and its message come alive.

Please, if you can make this pilgrimage to the Holy Land, do not delay. It is the home on earth that we all have in our hearts. Do not let war or the rumors of war stop you. If you cannot travel to the Holy Land, I pray that God will open the door for your pilgrimage through *Twelve Days to Jerusalem*.

As you read, may your journey of faith see the full revealing of God's work in and through His people. God bless you.



Twelve Days
to
Jerusalem
Mary



The Holy Spirit teaches all things and
brings all things to your remembrance.

The Holy Land is home to ancient
Christian reminders and to living stones.

The children of Galilee need your help.



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FIRST EDITION

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DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this book to my glorious mother, Talitha Reese Goodroe, who was so often my “soul” mate.



A special thanks to Father Elias Chacour and the children of Galilee who inspired this book through their needs. A percentage of the profits go to Father Chacour’s children at the Mar Elias Educational Institutions.

Thanks also to Steve and Deb Bollinger, who shared the four angel photographs that are at the heart of this book. They created these photographs during a project to help the blind. All of their profits from the angels go to the Center for the Visually Impaired in Atlanta, Georgia.

Most of all, I thank God for giving His Son for each of us. Thank you, Jesus, for paying a debt we are incapable of paying. And to the Voice who believed in me enough to offer me guidance in the Holy Land, thank you for filling my life.



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Expect a Miracle!

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On the Wings of Angels

Writing a book like this requires tremendous courage, especially when you are just an ordinary, hard working person. At least, I work hard at being ordinary. When my sister and I were growing up, she always wanted to be a nurse. There was never a doubt in her mind, and even today, she is still happy to be a nurse. I, on the other hand, wanted to be anything that would assure my ordinariness. Growing up devouring the reality shows of the 1950's—*Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, and the *Mickey Mouse Club*—birthed my dream to be a wholesome, ordinary, stay-at-home mom.

Life added a few challenges to my reality. I was a single mother with two children, no support, and no money for daycare. No matter how many times I examined my situation, I calculated the same answer. With a degree in communications and design, I opened the doors of our home to the advertising and marketing needs of Atlanta-based corporations. My first client, a renowned international orthopedic aid manufacturer, grew into fifty plus accounts that even the most prestigious agencies envied.

Although collapsing twice from exhaustion, I stayed the course. Each morning at 6:00, I exercised for forty-five minutes, then spent the next hour struggling with my difficult-to-wake son, which often led us all to breakfast in the car.

The kids safely delivered to school, I plowed into my work until time to pick them up. The hours from 3:00-8:30 p.m. filled with football and cheerleading practices, homework, my and my daughter's dance classes, and bath time. At 9:00, the kids' heads on their pillows, I returned to the stool at my wooden drawing board, often falling asleep on top of its parallel bar and triangles, where the alarm often awoke me to start all over again the next day.

We profited from this company until 1988, when Bill, my husband of six months, sustained a massive heart attack that destroyed 85% of his heart. After more heart attacks, his only chance of living meant undergoing a transplant. Together, we had five children, medical bills, and no insurance. One monthly medication cost \$6,000. The doctors called it liquid gold. I researched Atlanta employers and found Emory University to be one of two employers who covered pre-existing conditions.

Unfortunately, no jobs at Emory were open in my field. I agreed to use my Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) training for team building at the Emory Employee Assistance Program. When the Director of Publications visited the EEAP, he immediately set out to hire me as the Associate Director of Emory's Publication Department. After several years, the Vice Provost for Information Technology hired me as a technical writer and quickly promoted me to Director of Multimedia Communications for Emory. During this time, I worked with Senator Sam Nunn and two United States Presidents. I eventually ended up handling marketing for the libraries at the university.

Not only did I struggle with daily life, but I struggled with God's blessings. From the time I was three years old and marched into our living room in the Silvertown Mill Village and demanded "Take me to church," God has chosen to give me blessings with which I am not always comfortable. This book is about some of these unusual blessings.

In the summer of 1997, my mother asked me if I would like to go to Israel. "Israel?" I thought, "Yuk!" I had never considered going to Israel. I dreamed of traveling to the Greek Islands, the South of France, but never Israel!

"Isn't it dusty there? Why would you want to go to Israel?"

“My church is taking a tour group to the Holy Land in January next year,” she said, “and I want to go. I have to have a roommate before I can sign up. I thought if you would go with me and be my roommate, I could give you the trip as a Christmas present.” Mother was always giving my sister and me presents throughout the year and saying it was one of our Christmas presents. I shuddered at the thought of a tour bus, but told her I would think about it. She said she would have to know no later than the end of July.

I tried not to think about Mother’s request. Since I had recently accepted the library position at the university, my future again demanded that I spend many extra hours on the job. I did not have time to go to some dusty land and waste two weeks of my precious life. Another thing that kept going through my mind was my on-again, off-again relationship. Could I afford to leave it for two weeks? On the other hand, how could I let my mother down? She had always given me everything and I loved her dearly. Finally, I relented. I would go. Mother paid the \$4200 for the two of us to go to Israel for ten days. What I could have done with this much money! At least it paid for our plane tickets, all transportation, hotels, tips, special exhibits, and two meals a day.

I went to the Post Office and ordered my passport, then forgot about this nightmare until a new problem arose. On October 7, my sporadic boyfriend gave me an engagement ring for my birthday. This really put a kink in going to Israel with Mother. I did not dare leave my fiancé for two whole weeks for fear he might change his mind the way he had several times over the past four years. So, I talked him into going too. But I wanted to get married before we left.

My fiancé and I went to get his passport. We even went to the doctor for our blood test and applied for our marriage license, although he would not commit to a date. I was getting worried and desperate. Since my fiancé and I planned to be married before leaving, he and I would be roommates on the trip. In the meantime, Mother asked Thelma, her hairdresser and my longtime guardian angel, if she would go and be her roommate.

November passed, December passed, New Years passed, and still no wedding. I panicked. We were to leave on January 25. I could not go on a trip with a man, unmarried, with my mother and three busloads of ministers. I had to get married and do it now. Unfortunately, my fiancé didn’t agree. On Saturday morning, January 10, with hands shaking, he announced to me that he was going back to a former relationship.

At first, I was in shock. Throughout the weekend, I cried, I stormed, I begged, and I pleaded. Towards the end, I smiled and loved him as I always had. I loved him enough to let him go. I said goodbye forever.

All the next week my stomach felt upside down. I felt empty. Now what would I do? I had two fully paid, ten-day trips to Israel and an empty bed for a roommate. I asked each of my children to go. They weren’t interested. I called Mother to see if she had any ideas. She asked my cousin, but she couldn’t get off work. Finally, Mother asked my Aunt Jean. Although she didn’t seem too excited, she said she would go and be my roommate. She and I always enjoyed each other, laughed a lot, and stayed up all night talking and eating cookies.

As I prepared to go, I received a note at work from a former boss and friend. What a surprise! I couldn’t believe the note found me, as I have moved several times since he and I worked together in publications at the university. He wrote his email address on the card. I emailed him. I shared with him that my life had recently taken an unexpected, drastic turn, and I was sad. I also shared with him that I was scheduled to visit Israel in the next few weeks.

As the time neared for me to leave for Israel, I received another note from my friend. The email read, “Attached are some angel files I’ve been working on. I’m not quite finished with

them and of course the versions I'm sending are low-res, but select one and print it out small enough to fit in your pocket. Take it with you to the Holy Land. When the time seems right, write a wish on the back, fold it up and leave it somewhere secret. Have a good time traveling. Steve."

I thought this must be the neatest gift I have ever received. Thinking of possibilities ignited excitement in me. I decided my wish would be a prayer to God. Where better to offer up a prayer to God than the Holy Land? I did not yet know what my prayer would be, but I knew God would guide me to write it when the time was right. I did decide to put my angel with an angel, take a picture, and bring the picture back to Steve. The joy within me created the idea to share this gift with others.

I told my children about the gift and asked them if they would like me to take a prayer to God for them. My daughter wanted to know if I was going to read their prayers. I promised to put each prayer with one of the special angels that Steve had sent me and seal it up in an envelope without reading it. All I can tell you about my children's prayers is that Amber took a solid week to write hers and used a whole page of paper. She put a lot of thought into it. Cartney, my son, wrote his on the bottom right corner that he tore off a sheet of yellow, lined paper from a legal pad. His writing was very small and written at an angle. As promised, I did not read them. Once the prayers were completed and sealed, I packed them in my carry-on luggage.

Steve sent four angel photographs. I selected the one with the blue background that looked like it was looking down from heaven. Amber selected the one with the mother angel and little girl. Cartney chose the eagle angel holding the gold crown of glory. Three of Steve's four angels were claimed. Soon the fourth would also be claimed.

So, angels in hand and still reluctant, I took that trip. Little did I realize how that trip would change me and how I would forever be grateful that I had the opportunity to go.

God placed it in my heart that I should write a book about my experiences in the Holy Land to help Abuna Elias Chacour and the children of Galilee. My stomach tightened every time this crossed my mind. After all, I told myself, it takes a lot to write a book. I stalled.

I told my sister I was concerned about writing this book. I could visualize being featured in tabloids with headlines reading, "Suburb lady from Dunwoody talks to God in person." In another Atlanta suburb near my Dunwoody home, thousands flocked to see a lady who said she talked to the Virgin Mary. I laughingly called her the Lady of Conyers. In dread, I asked my sister, "What if they call me the Lady of Dunwoody and people camp out on our lawn? The neighbors will hate me." My sister innocently turned her head of flaming red hair and taunted, "Don't worry, Mary; I don't think Dunwoody is zoned for spirits." Maybe she has a point. I hope so!

About six months from the time the thought of writing a book first formed, my adult daughter and I decided to accept an opportunity to visit Washington, D.C. The person we were going with said we would spend the night at his friend Jim Brinson's in Charlotte, then Jim would ride with us as far as Richmond, Virginia to stay with relatives. On our return trip, we would pick Jim up, and he would drive us back part way. Little did I know God's hand was in our midst. I thought I was just going sight-seeing.

The trip seemed normal until Jim turned the car onto the highway to start home. My daughter climbed into the back seat and almost immediately fell fast asleep. We expected a four and a half-hour drive. Strangely enough, my daughter slept the entire time without waking. This was unusual behavior for her. But then, the whole drive back seemed like a flash in the dark. I can't remember much of the drive. I felt my eyes go out of focus and a white haze appear as

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something Jim said triggered my thoughts of my encounters with God. Before I knew it, I was spilling my guts to a guy I hardly knew. I told everything to this total stranger!

My eyes stayed out of focus the whole trip with a white fog covering my vision, except for twice, as I continued to tell Jim of my experiences. The first time the fog lifted as I looked back at Amber to check on her. Later, as I heard Jim's sobs my vision cleared again. As I shared my experiences, tears poured down the face of this man I did not even know. He sobbed, "Mary, I prayed to God for a better understanding and closer connection to Him. You brought this to me. You must take the answer to others. Mary, you have to tell these things to the world. You must share these blessings from God."

I was taken back. "Do you really think my experiences would matter to anyone?"

"Are you crazy?" Jim said. "You have to promise me; you will write that book. You have to."

"I can try," I said, still not certain that I could or would do it.

So, thanks to Jim and an unexpected hand from God, here I am, telling you my story. I am pretty sure it is by God's choice, but I have long since learned I cannot speak for God. I share these blessings with you in total innocence. No one could examine them more than I have and do. I accept them on faith. You will need to bring your own faith.

To God be the glory,
Mary

Note: The Bible text used in Twelve Days to Jerusalem is the Revised Standard Version. The songs "In Your Presence" in Chapter Two and "Remember Me" in Chapter Twelve were written and copyrighted by JoAnna Burns-Miller. Cartney C. M. DuBose wrote the essay "Transcendence to Shine" in Chapter Eleven.

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The four angels I carry to Israel

Friday, January 23, 1998

Tonight the gentleness of the rain brings a stillness that echoes the emptiness. The emptiness surrounds a night as quiet and shadowless as God's newly created earth.

Looking around the office, I feel like I'm in a place I've never been. Strange. I've spent more waking hours within these four walls than I have spent in my own home.

The office looks clean. Too clean. The plants are watered, the heaps of papers are filed away, and notes of what needs to be done on the university libraries' web projects when I return are stacked neatly. I check my email one last time.

Up pops, "You've got mail." John, an acquaintance from Oregon, says he is sending a prayer petitioning for his perfect mate, which he has described in detail. He wrote it during his years of being single. I promised to take his prayer to Israel but getting the five pages in an envelope is going to be a challenge. Now that's one fat envelope—five pages folded twice and one angel.

I reply to his email: "Well, it's time for me to close up shop here. It's rainy and dark outside so I think I'll go to a movie. I'm getting too nervous to be still. If I get real antsy before Sunday, I might log in from home. If I do not talk to you any more before I go, have a great time over the next twelve days—and thanks for the kind thoughts! PS - anytime you feel like you want to talk to someone, feel free to send me emails. I'll enjoy reading them when I get back :)."

I bundle up, dreading the cold and rain. I turn everything off and lock the door. The elevator comes quickly. An occasional student still studies here and there as I walk through the

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reference area of the library. I tell the guard goodnight and remind him I'll be out of the country for awhile. I walk briskly to my car in the parking deck.

Few cars are on the roads. I am in no hurry to get home and start my trip to Israel, so I take my time. I stop at the movie theatre and park my car near the side entrance of the shopping center. Sliding out of the car, I make sure I lock the doors. I shiver in the cold, run into the movie. I enjoy my regular popcorn and Coca-Cola, which is sometimes my treat on Friday nights just to make me leave work. I feel I especially need a transition from work tonight.

After the movie, I go home and take my bath to get warm. I remind myself that tomorrow will be my last day of preparation before we leave on Sunday. I call my sister, Arlene, and tell her happy birthday, then finish my last minute packing.

The sheets feel cool when I climb into bed. I lay on my back, looking up into the darkness. Tonight could have been different. This could have been my honeymoon. If I weren't so empty inside, I might dread this trip. As it is, I am beyond despair.



Saturday, January 24, 1998

The sunlight is bright. I wake to birds chirping. I sleep a little late, not really sleeping but just lying there looking out my two large old-fashioned windows. My eyes focus on the few leaves remaining on the tree. There's a birdfeeder in the backyard. I wonder if the two doves will sit on the windowsill of the bathroom again while I dress. The doves bring friendship to my mornings.

I stare out the window, look up at the sky, and think, "Something is about to change."

I stretch, then roll out of bed. I piddle around, brush my teeth, and mosey downstairs for a bowl of cereal. Eating the cereal at the dining room table, I remember telling my email pal that if I have time Saturday I might connect up, modem in, and send one last email. No promises, though.

The house seems empty. Maybe hooking up to email will help. I pull the extension telephone wire from the kitchen drawer. It is too complicated to hook the computer up in my room. I'll do it in Cartney's room with this long cord. I write one quick email and end it by saying, "Well, see you when I get back, have fun, be safe," and log off. I know this is the last email I will send for many days. Reflecting on this reminds me of life before the internet. Life was different then.

As I wander from room to room, feeling the emptiness that multiplied daily over the past weeks, a different presence begins to fill my body. A new insight presents itself to me: before a vessel can be filled, it must first be emptied.

I reach Cartney's room and sit down Indian style on the bare wooden floor. My gaze becomes fixed. The new presence washes me. The best way to describe this is to share my friend JoAnna's song.

"In your presence, I open my soul,
In your presence, you're making me whole,
In your presence, my heart's on the mend.
I'm born again, I'm new again, in your presence.

In your presence, I walk in your light,
In your presence, my eyes have new sight,
In your presence, my whole life is cleansed.
I'm born again, I'm new again, in your presence.

So blow through me Holy Spirit,
Heal my heart until it shines,
Blow through me Holy Spirit,

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Color me with love divine.

In your presence, my skies are turning blue,
In your presence, my dreams are coming true,
In your presence, I've found a true friend,
I'm born again, I'm new again, in your presence.

So blow through me, Holy Spirit,
Heal my heart until it shines,
Blow through me, Holy Spirit
Color me with love divine.

In your presence, I open my soul,
In your presence, you're making me whole,
In your presence, my heart's on the mend,
I'm born again, I'm new again, in your presence.
I'm born again, I'm new again, in your presence."

I close my eyes, breathe deeply, and turn my face towards heaven. I have always thought that the most Holy thing we do is breathe. After a while, I open my eyes, not sure how long I have been sitting here. Looks like the sun's going down. I'd better get a move on. Packing, here I come.

Okay, where is my file of this trip so I can check things off? I ramble through the stack of books by my bed. Here it is. I open the file and shuffle through the papers. Hmm...maybe I'd better read this letter again. My eyes picked out key points: *"Meet at Continental. Pat Jansen, Covenant Tours. Israeli economy revolves around the American Dollar. Take \$100 in one dollar bills, new are less cumbersome. Personal checks accepted at Three Arches and the Orient Bazaar. With Traveler's Checks you will be charged the exchange rate when using them, charged a check cashing fee, and receive your change in shekels.*

Be at the airport three hours before departure time. Be prepared to answer questions by Security Personnel. It is important to answer only the questions asked with as few words as possible. Keep your passport easily accessible. Make a copy and keep it in a separate place.

One carryon that fits under your seat is allowed in addition to a purse and camera bag. Keep prescriptions in the containers they are issued in and put them in your carryon. Take copies of the original prescriptions from your doctor in case they have to be replaced.

Ziploc bags are always good to have. Washcloths are not provided. We cut up old towels to use and throw them away when we are through with them. Adapters are necessary if you want to use electrical appliances like hair dryers. You will receive wake-up calls so travel alarms are unnecessary. Bring an umbrella. Israel gets approximately 12 inches of rain per year, primarily in January. When asked what the weather will be, we respond hot/cold, wet/dry.

Dress is casual. Layer clothing so that as the day progresses you can adjust to conditions. We recommend two comfortable pairs of shoes.

Passengers will be flying Continental to Newark and El Al from Newark to Tel Aviv. In Newark pick up your luggage and prepare to go through El Al security prior to boarding the international flight. Depart Jan. 25 2:00 PM, arrive in NY 4:10 PM. Depart NY 7:30 PM, arrive

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Tel Aviv 2:50 PM Jan 26. Tickets will be collected upon arrival in Tel Aviv and returned at the airport on departure dates.

Return flight departs Feb. 3 at 1:00 AM, arrives at JFK 5:45 AM. Departs EWK at 11:00 AM and arrives in Atlanta at 1:19 PM. Bus transportation will be provided between JFK and Newark.”

I stuff all the papers, tickets, and passport back into my carryon bag along with my umbrella. I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow. I hate flying in the rain.



Sunday, January 25, 1998 - depart for Israel

Nine o'clock Sunday morning, the radio alarm goes off. Old-time hymns drift from 94.9 FM. I take a deep breath and stretch. The phone rings. "Hello. *(pause)* Hi, Mother. Yep. I'm up. Yes, Amber is still bringing me to the airport. No, I'm not going to church this morning. I think I'd be cutting the time too close. Who's bringing you up? We'll just meet you at the baggage check-in. I'm sure we'll find you. Okay. See you in a little bit."

It's a beautiful, sunny day! Since my daughter is house-sitting while I'm gone, I think how glad I am the house is clean, the cabinets and refrigerator are packed with food, all the phone numbers and contacts for Israel are posted on the fridge. Being organized always makes my day feel sunnier. I don't think I'll eat until I take the rest of the luggage downstairs. I pull on the brown designer overalls I laid out last night for the flight to Israel. I put my money and passport in the white canvas pouch around my neck and under my shirt. These tennis shoes that I bought to wear at the Olympics will be a lifesaver on this tour. I brush my teeth, comb my hair, make the bed, and add a few last minute items to my carryon bag. I sling this bag, my purse, and the camera bag over my right shoulder and head downstairs. I hope Amber isn't late coming back to pick me up. I'll be a nervous wreck until I hear her car. I promised Mother we will meet her exactly at 12:00.

I drop the pile of bags on the sofa. I move the big black canvas suitcase on wheels, already downstairs, into the breakfast area by the back door. The suitcase bulges with layers of clothes to keep me warm during all the walking we plan to do on this tour. The tour company says we will walk most of the time, even if it rains. And this is the rainy season! They recommend we layer our clothes to stay warm. I'm glad the airlines limit the amount of luggage we can take. I always carry much more than I use.

I pick up the camera and carryon bags and set them with the big black suitcase. The carryon must weigh twenty pounds. I hope I don't get tired of carrying it. I wonder if I'll have enough to occupy me on the eleven-hour flight. I unzip the bag to check one last time—books on tape, snacks, a novel, two tourist books on Israel, tapes about Jerusalem, Walkman with earphones, paper, pens, address book, papers from the website for work, my file with all the papers and instructions related to this trip, a hat, gloves, and extra film that wouldn't fit in the camera bag. Shoot, I could conquer the world in eleven hours.

I pour a juice glass of skim milk as I drop the bread in the toaster. I reach in the fridge for the butter just as the toast pops up. I spread butter on the toast and stand in front of the window over the kitchen sink. I watch the birds as I eat my toast and drink the milk, then take the vitamins I placed in the clear dessert dish the night before.

I put my dishes in the dishwasher and go to sit on the sofa in the den to wait on Amber. I hope she is not late. All my bags are stacked by the back door. Sitting on the sofa with my long green coat in my lap, I cross my legs and start shaking my foot to release the nervous energy. If Amber is not here by 10:30, we might not be able to find Mother. I hope she's here by 10:15. It's 10:00 now.

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“Yes!” I hear a car coming up the drive. Thank you, God. I look at my watch. It’s 10:20. Amber hops out of her car and hurries in the door. I jump up. “Hey, Babe. I’m so glad you’re here. Thanks for being on time.”

Amber passes me. “I’ll just be a minute, Mom. I promise. I’ve got to go to the bathroom.”

“Okay. But hurry. If we don’t leave right now, we’ll miss Grandmother.”

I put my luggage in Amber’s dark blue Saturn. I tell our Siberian Husky, Kodi, goodbye and to watch over Amber. Amber locks the door and pulls it to. Luckily, there isn’t much traffic today. Thank goodness it’s Sunday. “Amber, all the emergency numbers are on the fridge. Also, the doctor’s...”

“Mom, you told me all of this before. I’m twenty-three years old.”

“Okay, okay, but...”

“Mom...”

I look around as we near the Atlanta Hartsfield Airport.

Amber drives into the short term parking area.

“Park near the Yellow Brick Road so you’ll be able to find the car easily when you come back out.”

I struggle to pull the big black suitcase from the back seat, slide the handle out, and lean the weight on the back wheels. Amber picks up my carryon. “What do you have in here?” I look at her and sigh. We follow the yellow-brick road to the terminal.

As soon as we open the glass doors, Mother spots us. Relief shows in her smile. Aunt Jean, Thelma, Janice, and others from Thomaston, where they all live and where I grew up, stand in line in front of her. Everyone is wearing their Covenant Tours nametag. Amber and I join them in line.

We check all our luggage. Nothing feels better than checking in heavy luggage. What a relief! Our group decides to walk towards the gate to eat lunch before the flight. What a joy to have Amber eat lunch with us. I am not too sure who is the more nervous, Amber or I. Neither of us mentions the flight I am about to take to a faraway land. The atmosphere at lunch feels like an in-between time when everything’s just a little bit dazed. We cover our excitement with everyday conversation, each thinking our own thoughts. We finish lunch and walk to the gate. Amber kisses her grandmother and me goodbye as we stand in line to board the plane for New York. Someone calls the roll as we board the plane. Very strange.

Our group of four scatter throughout the plane to find our assigned seats. The flight from Atlanta to New York passes in a blur. About the only thing I notice is some man in the aisle asking a question and handing something to people as they raise their hands. I turn back to the magazine I have been unconsciously flipping through.

Once we land in New York, a flood of confusion engulfs all of us in noise, people, disorientation. For the first time in my life, I am glad everyone on the tour wears a nametag. Where are we supposed to go? Should we find our luggage? I fear getting lost. When I was little, my grandparents and I were accidentally separated at the beach in a large crowd of people. The people looked so tall. I panicked as I tried to look up far enough to see faces. This same panic rises in my chest. I reach out to grab my mother’s hand, but withdrew my hand just before touching hers.

Somewhere in the universe of my mind, I hear echoes as if in a metal drum, “The luggage is here.” Someone else, “No we have to go downstairs to catch the bus to the other airport.” Someone else, “No, stay here, they’re bringing the luggage to us. Then we go downstairs to catch a train to the other airport.” I really want to scream, “Shut-up!” This is too much noise. I want to

put my fingers in my ears so I can think. I constantly glance to be sure Mother, Jean, and Thelma are right with me. We are all trying to stay calm and figure out where we were supposed to be. I think, "Welcome to New York City!" It is just like I always heard it was, that you would get swept away in the rush. Then, all the things I had heard registers as a reality check. They are saying we need to go to another airport! And take a bus! In New York City! My panic reaches such intensity I am sure I will pass out any second. I nudge closer to Mother.

Mother says, "Look for Janice's red hair. When we find her, we can stay close to her. She has done this before. After all, she is our tour host."

We spot Janice. We sigh with relief and walk over to her. Thelma, mother's travel partner, states, "Janice, we'll stay with you. Where you go, we'll go."

Nonchalantly, Janice replies, "Good." Then she turns to me and asks in a gravely voice, "Are you enjoyin' the trip so far?"

Calming down a little and trying to catch my breath, I squeeze out, "I guess."

When Mother gets excited or nervous, she just throws out the first thought that comes to her mind. She looks at me and blurts, "Janice has been real sick. They wanted to put her in the hospital."

Surprised a healthy person would choose to go through this trip, much less a sick person, I turn and ask, "What's wrong?"

Janice says, "Oh, it's just a bad sinus infection. I'll be all right." For no reason I can spot, Janice suddenly decides to start us moving again. My stomach turns upside down once more as Janice announces, "Okay, hurry, they're ready for us to get on the train."

True to our word, we stay close to Janice. In single file as close to each other and Janice as we can get, we touch one another's backs and move towards some destination that we assume will be the train. We reach an open door, to what I assume is the train, dragging our luggage on with us. We all push to go through the doors at the same time. What will we do if one of us is left behind?

All on the same train, we each grab a metal pole and brace ourselves for the long ride. I think, "I sure am glad my honey bought this new luggage on wheels with an extendable handle for me!" Remembering my fiancé's trip with me to Rich's Department Store to buy this suitcase brings tears to my eyes. But before I can dwell on this, to everyone's surprise, the train screeches to a stop. We are there already.

As the doors to the train open for us to get off, new noise and confusion greet us. The first thing we see is that some lady with "Pat" on her nametag is trying to talk over the crowd. "Please answer as I call your name." She yells out the names alphabetically.

I try to yell over the noise and answer, "Here."

When the last name is called, Pat instructs us, "Take your luggage with you. Go down these steps. Stay with the group. We must all check in at customs. Stay together. Hurry, hurry."

Once at customs, the hands of uniformed, dark-haired young ladies grab anyone near them. Questions fly right and left. Each of us has our own personal interrogator. They must think we are someone important. Does the airport think we might help them identify someone trying to sneak in the country? Is there a problem? Just like a James Bond movie. Are these interrogators with the CIA?

My mind returns to the airport, the noise, and the realization that the lady has asked me the same question three times: "Did anyone come on this trip with you?"

"Ma'am?"

"Did anyone board the plane with you?"

I reply, “Just my mother, my aunt, and my mother’s hairdresser.”

The interrogator’s eyes light up. Did I say something important? She grabs another uniformed young lady and says something in Hebrew to her. They both turn to me. “Where are these people? Can you show them to us?”

I look around, pull my aunt into the roped off area where we are standing. I find my mother and pull her inside the ropes. Mother grabs Thelma. Now the four of us are standing inside the roped off area. A different young lady takes each of us. The questions start flying again. The young women gather again and compare notes. The four of us congregate together, not quite sure what just happened. The women powwow briefly, then turn to us saying, “You are free to go.” What? Free to go? What does that mean? But before we have time to figure this out, we are pushed forward through the crowd.

Within minutes, we are birthed from noise and confusion into quietness and boredom. I glance around the gate at all the people wearing Covenant Tours name tags. I even wear mine now. We all look exhausted and dazed. We wait and wait and wait. Eventually, people start moving around and talking to each other. I hear the preacher I call “Indiana Jones” remark, “Just like the army. Hurry up and wait.”

Finally, it’s time to board El Al. I gather up my camera bag, my purse, and the carryon bag just like our instruction letter said we could. In front of me, Thelma starts down the ramp to the airplane. A young guy appears from the shadows just as Thelma is about to reach the airplane door. She only has her purse and her carryon bag with items for the eleven-hour trip. In broken English, the man exclaims, “Only one bag take on the plane.”

Thelma responds, “I do only have one bag. This is my purse.”

“No, you are not allowed.”

“But you don’t understand. I only have one bag. This is my purse.”

“You must check the other bag in.”

Reluctantly, Thelma releases her carryon bag to the guy. Quickly, I stop in the middle of the ramp and stuff my camera bag and my purse into my carryon bag, jump up, and proceed forward. My shoulders drop in relief when I pass this guy without being stopped. Poor Thelma. What will she do for eleven hours on this plane?

The four of us are still scattered around this plane, except this time the plane is huge with a large middle section and two side sections. I find my seat. I am on the right side as you face the front. Aunt Jean sits in the middle section by some lady who is singing hymns. Jean doesn’t look too pleased. Thelma and Mother are in my section a few seats up. I look at my watch. 7:30 in the evening. That means it’s 2:30 in the morning in Israel. This might get confusing. I separate all my bags again and try to think what I want to do first. I decide to just sit for awhile. As it grows dark, I doze off. I must be more tired than I realize.

When I wake, I stand up and check on Mother and Thelma. My aunt looks like she’s trying to sleep. My mind wanders to the prayers I promised to take to God. Suddenly, the weight of this responsibility weighs heavily on me. What have I created? Taking prayers to God is not something one does without preparation. I better think about what I should do with these prayers. I do not know one thing about Israel. I know God and love Jesus. At times, I read the Bible a lot, but knowing history and names of places has never been my greatest talent. I think most of the time. I am good at figuring things out, but I don’t know bunches of facts. I’d better look for my tourist book and see what I can figure out for these prayers. Where should I put these angels when I get to the Holy Land? I’ll plan everything before we land so I can sit back and not worry on the tour. I can put Cartney’s prayer at the Wailing Wall. That’s a perfect place for Cartney.

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He's sometimes disgruntled, so I guess you could call that wailing. Another one might work at the Nativity. I always picture the Mount of Olives as pretty, besides, I love olives. I don't really know much about other places. These are the only places I feel I know. At least I know where my angel is going. Before we left, I decided that I'm going to find me an angel in Israel and leave my angel with her. Won't that be great! I can't wait to take a picture of this back to Steve. I sigh with relief. I feel good about my choices.

I decide to walk around on the plane. Energized again, I tell Mother and Thelma about my little angels. I blurt out, "Would ya'll like an angel? I brought a few extras. I thought I'd share them."

In unison, they respond, "Yes! That sounds great."

I reach in the pocket of my overalls and pull out a pile of miniature angels. "Here, pick what you want." Each picks three or four and puts them in her purse. I wander back to my seat, finally at peace.

I watch the electronic map attached to the seat in front of me. Seeing that we are in the middle of the ocean, I select another picture for my electronic pad but it doesn't relieve my anxiety. When I think about being over the ocean for any length of time, I start to panic. I must put this out of my mind. I am too distracted to use items from my carryon bag. I close my eyes and doze on and off, trying not to focus on the endless dark water beneath us. I tell God that if I have to die, please don't let it be in deep, cold water



Monday, January 26, 1998 - Arrive in Tel Aviv about 3:00 in afternoon

The sun shows through the east window early the next morning. The atmosphere seems crisp and clean. There's a sound that is a little like someone softly chanting. I stand up to stretch and twist around to see a group of people standing up and facing the window where the sun is shining through. I recognize the gentlemen with the long black coats, long beards, and black hats that I saw get on in New York. They intrigued me then, but I am even more intrigued now. The gentleman in the seat behind me sees me looking at the group. "They are praying. They pray at certain times of the day and turn towards the east."

"How wonderful." Then I thought to myself, "I wish I lived that dedicated to God. How wonderful to have one's life sewn together with continual prayers to God. Jews are so dedicated and disciplined!"

Mother wakes up and turns around to see if I am awake. People begin to stir and search for coffee. The airline hostesses deliver breakfast. All the food on El Al is kosher. I like kosher food. Kosher food makes me feel close to something in my past that I don't recognize. Kosher food comforts me. I enjoy my breakfast; I am famished. The day feels fresh like the air smells after a spring rain. I turn on the electronic pad in front of me. At least the blinking light on the screen is nearer land now. I give up trying to figure out what time it is. I'll just pretend I'm a rooster without a clock. If the sun comes up, it's time for me to wake up and greet the day.

Little do I know that the roosters in Israel can't tell time. The roosters crow all hours of the night while hordes of dogs bark.

As we near the end of the eleven hours of flight, my foot shakes with the nervous energy that's bottled up inside me. I do love being exposed to the different cultures and being on a plane with people who speak different languages. You know, the only good fences are those made by holding hands. It seems most of us have God in our hearts. That is really special. I feel like I am on a plane bound for Heaven.

Finally, the pilot announces that we are preparing to land. Hebrew music and people singing fills the cabin. I am reminded of the brochure that I read weeks ago. It said that the people break out in song as they come into Israeli air space. I have looked forward to this. After this song, I decide to put on my headphones to listen to one of the Israeli stations.

A lively Hebrew song from the radio station fills my ears. The sound fills my heart with relief, excitement, and uncertainty.

Haleluya laolam,
Haleluya yashiru kulam
Bemila achat bodeda,
Halev male bahamon toda
Veholem gam hu eize olam nifla.

Haleluya im hashir

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Haleluya alyom shemeir
Haleluya al ma shehaya, ya
Uma sheod lo haya, Haleluya.

The plane bumps slightly as the wheels touch the pavement. It is 2:50 in the afternoon on Monday. We gather up our belongings and head for the door of the plane. When we get to the door, we realize that we are not at the terminal, but that a bus waits for us. There are no seats on the bus. Everyone grabs a leather strap hanging from the ceiling or loops his or her arm around the silver poles. We are all rather frazzled. It feels great to stretch our legs.

Although customs is not as hectic as it was in New York, it takes us a few tries before we figure out how to manipulate the pathway and system. Having gone through customs in the United States and not having gone through customs in Israel yet, feels like not being on the earth. You aren't in any country at all until you go through customs. I feel hypnotized. Finally, we're on the other side. Thank you, God!

The airport looks clean and simple, much less complicated than any others we have been through. I do not know if it is the eleven-hour flight or just the excitement, but our group appears out of control. We are scattered and running back and forth trying to see what to do. Finally, one person grabs a metal luggage carrier. Like robots, we all beeline it to the carts. Then we pile as close to the luggage dispenser as we can to watch for our luggage. We are stacked about ten thick around the same type of luggage dispenser the Atlanta airport uses. Someone hits me in the back of my legs with a metal cart. I wince. As I rub my leg, he apologizes.

There is so much chatter from our group that I can hardly hear the strange language coming from the loud speaker. The voice sounds calm so I assume this is just normal airport information being dispersed over the intercom. I glance around the airport. It looks sparse. I turn back to the luggage turnstile. I stretch on my tiptoes to watch the luggage passing in front of me.

I am distracted as I hear a man's voice from our group say, "Folks, we are going to call roll. Please answer when we call out your name." One by one, each person answers to his name yet again.

Most of us are still stuck watching for our luggage. The lady with the huge bag spots her luggage. How could she miss it? Someone says she has it filled with shoes. That has to be the biggest suitcase I have ever seen. Well, except for the one my mother took on her cruise. My aunt sat next to this lady on the plane. She said the lady sang the entire eleven hours! She also said the lady has been to the Holy Land five times. I can't imagine going anywhere twice, much less five times. I don't even like to go to a restaurant twice.

I continue to look for my luggage. Every other suitcase looks exactly like mine – black and plain. I can't believe I didn't consider this earlier. Most people put a large red yarn ball or something to help them recognize their suitcase. I guess I could wait and take what's left over. Then I spot mine just as it passes me. Mother sees this and steps closer to the rail. "I'll grab it this time, Mother. You don't need to be up here."

Once we find all of our luggage, I notice the airport is modern and rather small. The brown, black and white-speckled linoleum floor sparkles. We push our luggage cart outside. The sign says, "Welcome to Israel." I start taking pictures, the first of more than one thousand

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About 3:00 PM at the Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv

photographs. We follow the others to the curb near the large parked buses. The same man that called roll earlier directs, “All the Hope people over here at this bus. Bring your luggage. We’ll put it on the bus you are going to ride on.” I don’t know who that man is, but he sure seems to know what’s going on.

I turn to Mother. “How do we know which bus we are on?”

“All the Hope people have a heart on their name tag.”

“I don’t have a heart, but you do.”

Mother chases the man giving the directions who seems to know everything. Curtly, he tells her, yes, I am on the Hope bus with her. Then he says, “I gave everyone on the Hope bus a heart when we were on the plane from Atlanta to New York.” As I hear this, I recognize the man as the one in the aisle on the Atlanta plane. I remember seeing him ask a question and people raising their hands. I check his nametag and see the heart there and “John” by it. So his name is John. He seems to know everything so I’ll just call him Dr. John. So, who is Dr. John, I wonder?

Dr. John hands Mother a heart to put on my nametag. Mother and I watch our luggage, anxious to be sure our luggage goes with us. Chaos surrounds us again. People are confused. As we guard our suitcases, I notice what a gorgeous day it is. It’s a little later in the afternoon now, but the sun looks as it does at 3:00 on a sunny summer day in Atlanta.

Dr. John points to our guide and our driver. He tells us they will be with us the whole trip. I think it’s nice of them to meet us at the airport, that this must be something special. It doesn’t dawn on me that they are just doing their job. I keep looking at the guide, trying to figure out why he feels familiar. His name is David. He is a nice looking man, kind of Greek looking. He has lived in Israel all of his life, but his grandfather came from Russia. His dialect seems different from the other Hebrew-speaking people we meet. I am not sure how many languages he speaks beyond Hebrew, Arabic, and English. The little bit of stockiness he gained with maturity adds to his solidity. I guess he must be between forty and fifty years old. His graying-brown, Greek beard and slightly balding head add to his casual intelligence.

Many times when I meet someone, I crawl inside his or her body with my conscious mind to see what it feels like to be him or her or to see how I might look from behind his or her eyes. Over the years, boyfriends have told me that my soul gets inside their every cell, never to leave. Something holds me back from crawling into David’s psyche, but I do feel an urge to sit down with him and have a long conversation. Isn’t this strange? Being around him seems so comfortable and safe. He is just standing in front of me, not requesting anything of me, and offering me comfort on an angelic level. This is the first time I feel comfort and safety since I walked out my kitchen door to go to the airport. I feel my face beginning to relax.

Another man in our group instructs us to leave our luggage in the road by the bus and to board the bus. He says there are some housekeeping things we need to take care of. We step up

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on the bus and find a seat. This man holds a list, calls roll, then announces, “I need to send this sheet around. Take your passport out and write your passport number by your name. This must be done before we leave the airport. Go ahead and get it out, get it ready.”

Dr. John steps onto the bus and explains that we will rotate seats first thing each morning as we enter the bus. Jean and I sit down on a seat together on the right side of the bus. Mother and Thelma sit in the seat behind us.

Our guide steps onto the bus. “Folks, folks, it is such a beautiful day in Israel, and we are ahead of schedule. We have a treat for you. We are gonna have a little side trip today on our way to the hotel. We arranged for you to visit the old city of Jaffa.”

We settle in, still a little nervous that our luggage might not be on our bus. The bus driver turns on the engine and backs the bus up. Then the bus moves forward and turns onto the road.

I take a deep breath and lean back in my seat. Where in the world am I? What am I doing here? Who are all of these people on these buses? I cannot believe I am on a tour bus with my mother, my aunt, my mother’s hairdresser, the bishop, and all these preachers!

I turn and look out the window. The sky grabs my attention and I start studying everything from the clouds to the rocks and dirt. Images whiz by. I have no idea how long I have been gazing, but I sit up and find myself looking more intensely now. I hungrily scan the landscape. There is a comfort in this landscape, in each tree, each cloud, each rock. A knowing, like I experienced seeing our guide, washes over me. I begin to feel like I am in a time warp, some world I have known before. As crazy as it sounds, every pore in my body echoes, “I have come Home.”

I feel lightheaded as I continue to watch clouds come and go. The sun continues to shine brightly. We pass other scenes. I am glad. I see a baker working in the shop on the other side of a plate glass window. The trees on the side of the road are older. I see a church or something with a wooden cross on it. A young soldier and his girlfriend run to cross the street. They both wear army uniforms and backpacks, the man with a gun slung over his shoulders. They hold hands as they scoot across the street. How interesting.



*On Hebron Road between
Bethlehem and Jerusalem.*

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Donut bakery in Jaffa



Israeli soldiers; at age eighteen, boys serve three years and girls two



Old Jaffa, which means “beautiful”



St. Peter's Church; backside is the Vatican Embassy

We arrive at Jaffa and empty off the bus. I listen closely as the guide tells us this is where the region of Galilee starts. As we walk between the close, old walls of Jaffa, I hear the guide say, “Watch the steps, folks.” So this is Galilee. This is Jaffa, the oldest city. Wow!

I hear pieces of sentences as my mind soars through the amazement. The guide continues, “Archeologists supervised the rebuilding of the city to keep the character as much as possible with what the city looked like. What you are going to see, folks, is typical.”

The Mediterranean Sea embraces Jaffa. The water is blue and deep. Jaffa means “beautiful” in Hebrew. The Bible tells us that it was from here that Jonah, prophet and son of Ami'tai, boarded a ship to Tarshish while trying to flee God's command to give warning to the evil city of Nin'veh. When God made a great storm on the sea, the crew threw Jonah into the sea to try to calm it. A large fish swallowed Jonah, and he stayed in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.¹ (Jonah 1:1-17)

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Islamic Minaret, tower climbed to call Islamic people to prayer, at the Mediterranean Sea



We see Tel Aviv across the way. We walk down the terraced, cobblestone steps. We pass a jewelry store, an antique store. All the doors look warm and welcoming. People smile at us through the open door.

As we walk, I hear parts of what the guide is saying. “Israel established relations with the Vatican only five years ago. And this is where the Embassy of the Vatican of Israel is. You can go out and take some pictures. Remember the washrooms are over there, and remember to use those washrooms.”

I am conscious of traffic now. A horn blows. Then another. Somewhere in the background I hear Janice talking. “You get a good shot ’cause I’m gonna buy yur video.”

The videographer from Good News Television, who is filming the whole tour, answers, “Mm-hmmm.”

Folks use the restrooms and wander back to the bus. The bus driver puts the bus in gear and turns the wheels towards the highway.

On the bus, the guide explains, “We have a struggle of languages over here, like you guys had a struggle of languages in your history. In Tel Aviv the first schools taught in Hebrew.” The scenery out the window grabs my thoughts again, and the guide’s voice fades.

We drive towards Tiberias; the sky darkens. The sunset melts into soft pink, orange, blue, white, and black. We pass a weird apartment building. It does not seem typical of the area, too modern.

It is almost completely dark when we pull up to the Sheraton Four Points Paradise Hotel in Tiberias. We stand and bound down the steps. We wait nervously to see if our luggage made the trip with us. Dr. John tells us to meet him in the lobby to receive our room key. I lean over to Mother and ask, “Who is this John guy? He is always telling us to do things.”

“He is the head of the tour company. He put this whole trip together.”

I shrink with embarrassment. “I didn’t know.”

“I forgot you couldn’t go to the information session. You were too busy.”

In the lobby, Dr. John gives us our keys and the hotel clerk gives us complicated directions to get to our room. We are not sure we understand them but go anyway. We follow others past the curved wall with the linoleum floor with orange cones placed to warn of water on the floor. From there, we trod farther back to the first set of elevators and press the down button. We get off these elevators, go around the corner, and get on a second set of elevators. We press the up button. Luckily, we spot our room numbers the minute the elevator doors open.

Jean and I tell Mother and Thelma we will meet them back here to go to dinner and to give us a call when they are ready to go. We go into our room. What a relief! Jean and I are both tired but decide to unpack before we sit down. The room is nice, simple, and clean. We have sliding glass doors that open. We each enjoy a warm, relaxing bath, then sit on the sofa and talk as we unwind.

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*Aunt Jean in our hotel room
our first night in Tiberias.*

In an hour, the phone rings. It is Mother saying they will meet us outside our room to go to dinner. We manage to find our way back through the elevator maze. In the dining room, we are amazed at all the food. The food is served cafeteria style with two to three choices of meat, side dishes, and many desserts. The dessert table looks like a party is expected.

We mingle with the rest of the people, choose our food, and sit down at one of the round tables with white tablecloths near the windows. Floor to ceiling glass surrounds the dining area. It is dark outside, but we see the slight shimmer of light on black water. Someone says this is the Sea of Galilee. I imagine what the water that Jesus walked on might look like. Tiredness keeps my mind from wondering further. At the end of the meal, a waiter comes around and pours us a tiny cup of strong, sweet coffee. My aunt and I head for the dessert table.

After dinner, we find our way back to our rooms and collapse into bed. I call room service to request a wake-up call at 6:00 a.m. I wonder if this will wake me up. In college, I had to put a Big Ben alarm clock in a metal pan and put the pan in a metal drawer. I still slept through the alarm. I locked my dorm room so no one else on the hall could come in and turn it off. The girls on my floor would get furious when I slept through the alarm, and they couldn't get in to turn it off. On top of all this, I am exhausted. I hope I wake up in the morning.



*Bless the Lord, you angels of the Lord,
sing praise to him and highly exalt him
for ever.* Azariah (Apocrypha) 1:37

Tuesday, January 27, 1998

Darkness peeks through the curtains of the sliding glass doors in our room. I am surprised to discover I slept soundly and am awake early. I almost feel normal today, but not quite. As I lie in bed and glance at the curtain, I begin to realize the Sea of Galilee is on the other side of this curtain. At 5:30 a.m., the tickle in my heart from thinking about the Sea of Galilee and its history grows beyond my containment. I tiptoe out of bed and pull back the corner of the drape. I must see the Sea of Galilee, the same Sea of Galilee where Jesus Himself walked on water. The sun looks like diamonds glistening on the sea. This triggers my memory of hearing that diamond cutting is the number two industry in Israel. It seems paradoxical that diamond cutting would be a leading industry in the Holy Land. I remember that tourism is the number one industry. This seems more natural. Anyway, the sea is expansive and quiet this morning. As I look out over the water, I notice a single car turning the curve on the road that separates me from the sea. I have a longing I can't explain.

The phone rings. It is our wakeup call. Aunt Jean rolls over and asks how long I have been up. I tell her not long. It is 6:00 a.m. I better get dressed. We told Mother and Thelma we would be ready to go down to breakfast at 7:00. We have to be on the bus and ready to leave by 8:00 each morning.

At 6:55, there's a knock on our door. Jean grabs her purse and I grab my purse, camera bag, and shoulder bag where I've stuffed things I might need or want while we are touring. We



View north of Four Points Hotel, in Tiberias of Mt. Arbel; Sea of Galilee Valley called Valley of Doves where Jesus would have walked from Nazareth to Capernaum

grab our nametags and shut the door behind us. We are to wear these every day of the tour. Three tour buses of people wearing nametags. Yuk! We find our way to the dining room.

In the dining room, I watch as the others take glimpses of the Sea of Galilee as they arrive. I notice that the sky is pink and blue and white now. I remember the jingle, “Red sky at night, sailor’s delight. Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning.” I wonder if this means it’s going to rain today. Will there be a storm like there was when Jesus walked on the water? Looking at the Sea of Galilee mesmerizes me again and my breath catches in my throat.

Mother reminds us to eat and get to the bus. She and Thelma tell the servers which items they want on their plates. There are many

choices. Jean wanders towards the cereal dispensers. I don’t want to waste my experience with food I can have at home. I want something that I can only get here. When I was growing up, Mother let me try one new food of my selection each Saturday when we went to the Big Apple grocery store. Here, I have the opportunity to try the exotic foods in a real foreign country. I am not going to miss this chance for adventure.

I peer around the room to see what all the choices are. I see scrambled eggs, potatoes, the normal things, until my eyes bump into a huge table of salads. I have never seen so many salads. And for breakfast? I walk over to the tables of hundreds of salads to see what all they might be. I can’t distinguish between some. I put small spoons of several on my plate. When I reach the olives, a warm feeling melts over me. I have a sensation like an egg filled with warm snowflakes being cracked on my head, and the particles slowly, smoothly travel down my body, covering it with delight. I put all the different kinds of olives on my plate. Then, I remember, I also want to try the fruits, especially the dates. I just heard someone say that dates are the only perfect food. In this atmosphere, the fruits should be delicious.

Mother, Jean, Thelma, and I all have our plates and look for a table. We don’t see anyone we know, so we sit at an empty table. I hear chirping, and a bird flies near the ceiling of the restaurant. Normally, people would be trying to get a bird out of a food place. At first, I think someone will surely lure the bird outside. No one does. I watch it for a while. We all do. But the manager and the cooks don’t seem to notice. I realize that there are several birds, and all during breakfast, we hear little chirps, and then one of them takes flight again. I see the Sea of Galilee in the view with their movements. The freedom of the birds seems to echo the calling of the sea. At that moment, something changes inside me. My spirit joins the flight of the birds.

Looking out at the Sea of Galilee one last time before leaving for the day, tears come to my eyes. I can almost see Jesus walking across the water with his right hand outstretched to me. To even be near a place where Jesus Himself walked is overwhelming. I will the tears to recede. We head outside to find the bus.



Breakfast in dining room at Four Points Hotel in Tiberias, overlooking the Sea of Galilee, first morning in Israel. Left to right: Aunt Jean, me, Mother, Thelma.

Janice comes over to ask, “How ya’ll doin’ today? Everything okay? How’d ya sleep?” I laugh and say I don’t remember. I was so exhausted that the last thing I remember was reaching up to turn off the light. I know the time here is seven hours ahead of Atlanta time, but last night I felt like I was seven days behind.

We all wear layered clothes. It is winter in the Middle East. The temperature is about the same as in Atlanta this time of year. Israel gets about twelve inches of rain a year and most of it falls in January. The Galilee is in northern Israel, so it is cooler here than other places we will visit. We wear layered clothing in case the sun gets hotter during the peak hours without the effect of shade trees like we have back home.

The sun looms in the sky and colorful flowers line the pathway to the buses. All three of the bus engines purr in the background. Our layered clothing is almost too much for such a bright, sunny day. In addition, Thelma wears her tan all-weather coat, and I carry my long green wool coat.

All of the people who have a red heart on their nametag travel on the bus named “Hope.” We look at the front of the buses to find the one with the Hope sign in the window. We climb up the steps, then count the seats to figure out which seat we are supposed to rotate to this morning. I mostly see a sea of Covenant Tours’ nametags with red hearts. People sure are religious about wearing these nametags. We say good morning to the people already in their seats as we pass. They give warm smiles back.

I cannot believe I am on a tour bus. You should never say you absolutely won’t do something, because you will sure enough find yourself doing it before you turn around. I always swore I would never, ever take a trip with a group of people on tour and especially not on a stupid bus. I swore, if I ever had money to travel, I would take an intelligent, sophisticated trip. Nothing could be intelligent about being on a tour bus in a foreign land. That I am sitting here strikes me as just reward, and I start chuckling. God’s sense of humor becomes down right hilarious. He amazes me.

I watch as others board the bus. I realize I’ve been looking forward to seeing the people on my bus again today. I guess people are people. Everybody has his or her story to tell, even people on a tour bus. We laughed a lot on our bus yesterday on the way to Tiberias. I love to laugh. I smile up at each one as he or she passes me.

I must admit that I am starting to feel excited about seeing new areas of the world. Grudgingly, I will have to admit that I’m even excited to have a guide to show me. Being so independent, I never thought I would like some boring, stupid guide talking all day. But David is not boring. He is so knowledgeable, in fact, an expert. The Department of Antiquities regulates

the tourism industry and yesterday, a minister on our bus told me that guides in Israel are required to have a college degree before becoming licensed. The degree covers intellectual areas like archeology, history, religions, and languages. Israel takes tourism seriously, but then, it is their largest industry. David is a Christian Jew and one of the most respected guides in Israel. He was even called in on the archeological dig at Masada. I can't shake the feeling that I know him. Why does he seem so familiar?

I feel faint. I know why I have such a strong urge to talk to him. He is the spitting image of Bill, my deceased husband. Not just his looks, but his captivating expressions, the knowing way he stands, the friendly yet mindful way he walks. And he smokes a pipe that smells just like Bill's. He uses his pipe to punctuate his sentences and to pause at just the right moment, allowing his audience to realize the importance of what he is about to say. He seems to have the same understanding of God.

When David stands up in the aisle to see how many seats are still empty, Aunt Jean leans over to me. "Your mother and I were talking about how much David reminds us of Bill."

"Really?" I reply. "I thought it was just me." I miss my long talks with Bill and the comfort of his arm around my shoulder. I used to ask him so many questions about things you couldn't even imagine. He said he never said "I don't know" until he met me. I thought he knew everything.

Both the presence of Bill and the absence of Bill confuses me. I feel both at home and homesick. It feels the same way it did when Bill used to hypnotize me. Bill was a gifted counselor and trained in hypnosis therapy by Dr. John Grinder, the founder of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). When Bill was waiting for a transplant and too sick to travel, I had to fly in his place to Missouri to study and qualify to administer and interpret the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a self-report instrument based on Carl Jung's theory of psychological type, so we would not lose marketing contracts that had been based on this research. Having dyslexia makes me a slow reader and horrified of tests. Two days earlier, I had also been released from the hospital. I had lost a baby and required a D and C. You might say my learning abilities were not at their best. So every night, I called Bill to hypnotize me, enabling me to keep up with the class. I passed, and it wasn't even my area of expertise! The process Bill used for hypnosis, once you were relaxed, was to have you picture the warmth of the sun outside, then feel the sun inside your chest, and with words continue outside to inside, inside to outside. Very quickly, hypnosis sets in.

I study David, but I do not talk to him. I am afraid to get too close to him, but I listen intently.

Dr. John boards the bus with his wife, Pat, his son, his son's pregnant wife, and grandchild Amelia. They sit in the front seats. We quickly learn that the back of the bus is the roughest and no place for a pregnant woman. The back wiggles and sways. If you have a nervous stomach like I do, the back of the bus makes you want to throw up. I dread when it is my turn to sit on the very back seat. When I was five years old, my parents took me to the Smokey Mountains. Boy, was that a mistake. The curves and turns made me throw up all over the back seat.

Dr. John and his family serve as our group representatives. The Bishop and his wife serve as the representatives of one of the other buses. Janice and her husband, who works in a Thomaston funeral home, serve as sub-representatives. Once everyone is settled, Dr. John stands up. "When I call your name, please answer 'here.' But don't answer if you're not here." We smile.

Dr. John calls the roll. Everyone is seated or, at least, on the bus. David sits on a special folding seat above the steps, our bus driver sits in his seat with his left jaw propped on his left hand and his right hand propped on his right hip. Dr. John stands in the aisle so he can see everyone and we can hear him. He asks, "Does anyone have any news from home?"

Lyda (what I call her), one of the other tour members, answers, "My daughter's having a baby. She hasn't had it yet."

We laugh.

Dr. John continues, "Does anyone have prayer needs they would like for us to offer up to God? Any concerns? Any good things to share?" Here and there, people speak up. Then Dr. John says, "Let us bow our heads in prayer."

Dr. John prays for Lyda's unborn grandchild and our other loved ones left at home. He prays for our safe travel as we discover the places Jesus walked. He prays for understanding and insights from God's word as they intertwine with our path today. We end our pray in chorus, "Amen." As we lift our eyes from prayer within, the outside world pulls our attention as David stands up, asking, "Anybody want to buy bottled water? This is cheaper than what you will find today." I feel the hypnosis again as I pull my thoughts up from the depths of my soul to the ice cold water offered for sale. The contrast and hypnotic effect make my mind feel as if it is hanging some place over the top of my head. It is a strange sensation. Each morning I buy bottled water from David. Each morning the water is ice cold. Each morning I feel a deeper hypnosis.

Housekeeping things taken care of, the driver changes gears and the bus heads for the road. As we begin to sing, "This Is the Day the Lord Hath Made," I remember Bill and the kids and me singing this song on long trips or as he woke the kids up on Sunday mornings. Joyous singing from forty-two voices fills the bus.

"This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made,
that the Lord has made.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
This is the day that the Lord has made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made."

One by one, Faith, Hope, and Charity buses join the road in search for Jesus' life on earth. The buses spread the stops apart so we will not have long waits in each place. The Hope bus pulls up at the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee at the Tabgha Valley. The name Tabgha comes from the Greek word Heptapegon which means the Seven Springs. This is the place mentioned in Matthew 14: 13-21 where Jesus fed 5000 people by multiplying five loaves and two fish. The church here is known by several names: the Church of the Multiplication, the Church of Heptapegon, the Church of the First Feeding of the Multitudes, and the Church of the Seven Springs.

We get off the bus and stand outside the church in the stone courtyard. I look around, amazed at how many colorful flowers bloom here in January. My hearing fades in and out, here and there catching some of David's words. "This church was destroyed in the seventh century

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Above: Our guide, David Kidron, at the Church of Multiplication or Church of Heptapegon



Below: The rock shown at the back of the mosaic is part of the foundation of the Fourth Century church. The mosaic dates to the Byzantine church of the Sixth Century.



mind wanders. Can't you picture Jesus trying to avoid the crowds that have followed Him? They grab His heart, and He walks among the people teaching them many things. The spontaneous event multiplies, and the day grows late. The disciples express concern that there is no food for the crowd. Jesus tells the disciples to give them something to eat—all of them! This confuses the disciples because there are places the crowd can go to eat that are not too far. Why should they feed this crowd? Jesus ignores their questions and tells them to go see how many loaves of bread they have. They bring just five loaves and two fish. Jesus places these on the very rock beneath the altar in front of me today. Here He gives thanks. As He breaks the loaves, I wonder if you can see a light coming from the center of the loaves. He divides the two fish among them and has

and restored to its Byzantine form in the 1980s. You'll be able to walk around and see the floor, but the most important thing is this famous mosaic that many of you might have seen in guide books or video tapes or any of those presentations - the two fishes, the basket in between them, and the five loaves of bread are just next to the altar in front of the church as you go in."

David directs us into the church. I look around at the narrow concrete archways and their shadows. Candles sit in black wrought iron candelabras hanging from the ceiling. The church looks Medieval or Old English. It is stony, dark, and cool. It looks holy but ancient.

At first, as I tiptoe around clicking pictures, I am not sure the pictures will take in this darkness. My eyes and the camera adjust to the darkness, and I scan the room through the lens. I look at the gold pictures. The camera lens passes by the fishes and loaves basket mosaic on the floor ahead. I swing back and bring these into focus. After staring at this piece for a long time, my eyes hyper-focus, and the mosaic pieces mesh. My



I light a candle for Daddy here

the disciples feed all five thousand people present. There are twelve baskets of fish and loaves left over.

Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the multitudes right here. Refocusing on the rock before me, I realize I have a strong taste for fish. I remember the little silver fish I collected one summer during Bible School at the Silvertown Mill Village church. We received a silver fish for each person we brought to Vacation Bible School. I received a bunch and wore them on a chain around my neck. We were called fishers of men for Jesus. I accept Jesus as my Savior because this is what God tells me to do. I may be acquainted with Jesus, but do I really know Him? Do I really know how He became my Savior? I realize I have been looking through my camera lens for a long time. My arms have grown tired from holding the camera in the air. I lower my arms and glance around the room.

The gold Byzantine picture of the Madonna and Child and the flames of the candles, lit in front of it for prayers, capture my attention. As I walk towards the Madonna, I think

I hear a faint male voice. I strain my ears, sure I will hear nothing, but the air is soft with a voice. It seems to be coming out of the air, not really from any direction. I still wonder if it is my imagination as the Voice whispers, “You might want to light a candle to your father here.”

I hesitate, then find myself whispering back, “Which one? My earthly father?” I’m still not sure what I hear is real.

The Voice repeats, “You might want to light a candle to your father here.”

My breath catches in my throat, but I quickly give in to my instincts and decide this means my daddy. “Well, that’ll be good. I’ll light one for Daddy.” What can it hurt? As I light the candle and remember my gentle, firm, loving daddy, my heart sparks and tears fill my eyes. Looking at the Madonna and Child behind the candles, I think, “Maybe one day I will paint a painting like this in honor of this moment.” I look away to fight back tears and rush out the door and out into the sunshine.

Along the walkway from the church, I come to the gift shop on my right. My instincts tell me to go in. I hesitate because I need to be careful to take care of my money. Little do I realize how serious Israel takes their tourism industry, or how good they are at selling Jesus and Christianity. This is only the first of many purchasing opportunities. I tug with my instincts. The Voice decides it. “There’s someone who would love something from here.” Puzzled, I open the door to the gift shop and wander over to the table with bowls and trivets made with the fishes and loaves mosaic. I pick up one of the bowls. In my hands, the little bowl transforms from a ploy to get tourists’ money into a piece of Jesus’ miracle. I decide I want more than one piece of Jesus’ miracle, and I stand in line to buy a trivet and a bowl. Later I will regret that my frugal spending prevented me from buying more. It will not be until my third trip to the Holy Land that I finally buy a fishes and loaves mosaic for myself. As it turned out, I will later be astounded at my friend Bonnie’s excitement at receiving my gift to her from the Holy Land. That is, until she tells me this is her favorite story in the Bible and a place she has always wanted to go.

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Left: Interior view of the Church of the Multiplication

Right: Exterior Church of the Multiplication



Courtyard of Church of the Multiplication with Sixth Century baptistery

Thelma waits in line to pay for her postcards. Time is running out. Someone says the bus is about to leave. I pay and hurry to the bus. I miss seeing the Church of Peter's Primacy, a few hundred yards from the Church of Multiplication.

Settled back on the bus, we head for the Mount of Beatitudes. Once there, we go to a gathering spot under leafy trees near the Church of the Blessed. This church commemorates the first eight verses of the Sermon on the Mount. Many people have open Bibles in their hands. It never occurred to me to bring my Bible.

I hear some of what David is saying. "In the tradition of the local people, this hill is always pointed out to be the site of . . . Remember that until 1964 . . ."



Church of Beatitudes, place of Sermon on the Mount



Left: Reading scripture outside Church of Beatitudes, Mother on left, Aunt Jean on right, David in foreground.

Right: Inside church

The spirit of Jesus and His disciples dance among the people gathered underneath the rich, green tree limbs. Then I hear someone reading, “And after sundown the disciples came to Him to speak and talk and sing.”

Birds chirp as someone else continues to read. I concentrate. “Matthew 5: 1-12: Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.’”

It was here that Jesus chose his apostles.² (Luke 6:13-19) In the midst of sunlight, a soft breeze, and a gentle touch, we sing.

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long;
this is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long.

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
angels descending bring from above

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echoes of mercy, whispers of love.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long;
this is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long.

Perfect submission, all is at rest;
I in my Savior am happy and blest,
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long;
this is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long.”



*View from porch of Church of
Beatitudes, overlooking
the Sea of Galilee*

The Church of the Beatitudes is down the steps. We go down the steps and then up into the church. Inside, I feel a little strange. Nothing touches me. I do not feel anything as I look around. I feel distant from the whole universe. I feel like I am in someone else's world. I keep looking around wondering what is going on. I go out to the porch and walk around and look out over the water, the Sea of Galilee. Could this be the same Sea of Galilee that beckoned me this morning? I feel like the people around me are characters in a book, and I am watching us walk around. The place is pleasant enough, but I am somewhat bothered by this feeling. I am discouraged. I thought I was finally on a path to truly knowing Jesus. Now, I am separated from everything.

Back on the bus, we drive towards Caesarea Philippi. We gaze on our first real view of fields of rocks, stones everywhere! Watching the stones and hills as we pass, I try to listen to David tell us about the area here. “Caesarea Philippi is in the southern foothills of Mt. Hermon. Jesus' Transfiguration occurred at the base of this mountain. Until 1948 and the War of Independence, Christians were restricted from coming here because it was under Syrian control. After the war, there was more access to the region. In 1967, Israel occupied this region, and it became part of the modern state of Israel. However, gaining the land is only the tip of the iceberg. There is a lot to do in the area we are passing, but first, all the mines must be cleared.” In 1967, when Israel took the Golan Heights from Syria, the Israeli army put land mines in the

border area between Israel and Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan to keep Arab forces from crossing the area at the Golan Heights.

We arrive at a huge parking lot. Few other cars are parked here. We walk over near the land. David tells us that the water comes from Mt. Hermon from the Dan River and is the beginning of the Jordan River.

I look around at the different colors of dirt showing in the cut bedrock. It reminds me of the painted desert. I hear pieces of what David is saying. “The water does not come down the mountain because earthquakes and other geological changes sealed off the layers, and the water simply began coming out from the ground under the cave. These are the waters you see over here and which actually form the Jordan River. In the third century BC, this country was overrun by the armies of Alexander the Great. The Greeks established a religious center here that was dedicated to Pan, a god of fertility. You will be able to see worship grottos carved out of the bedrock, and note the place where the statue was stationed. In other words, the place where the statue to Pan was placed.

“Now you know in the Arabic language there is no letter like the letter ‘P.’” I didn’t. “An Arab cannot pronounce a ‘P.’ It will kill him. He will never say ‘P.’ ‘Politics,’ he says ‘bolitics.’” Our chuckling bounces across the rocks. “Therefore, since ‘Pan’ was called Pania in Greek, it became known as Baniyas in the modern era. Caesarea Philippi was a pagan city with a very strong pagan influence in it.”

I think about the Romans taking over this place from the Greeks. Dr. John must have read my mind because he starts telling us more about the Greeks.

Dr. John continues, “The Greeks worshipped in a place called Delphi, set in the mountains. This area, then, is the most pagan place Jesus could come to. And it’s in this pagan spot of the world that Jesus said, ‘Who do men say that I am?’ And it’s in this setting that all the other suggestions are made about who He might be. But it is in this setting that the Holy Spirit reveals to Peter who Jesus is as he confesses, ‘You are the Christ.’ There isn’t any more important place to be for you and me than to know that in the history of our pagan lives, Jesus said, ‘Who do you, personally, say that I am?’ Not collectively, but each of you individually.”

The truth of these thoughts are solidified as we read Matthew 16:13-20 aloud. “Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do men say that the Son of man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.”

We all wander around separately. The black, white, and red striped stone contrasts the soft yellow flowers and trees. We spot animals that look like little ponies on one of the ridges. Many ruins lay around on the ground like spilled life that will be picked up any minute. I sense older spirits from another time and feel the energy of an active city. This is a small area. I bump into Mother wandering around. As she is prone to do, without prefacing her remark, she blurts at me, “I think many people were healed here.”

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Left: Me posing in arch of hill

*Below left: Roman funerary niches
in mountain side at Cessarea
Philippi/Banias*

*Below right: A piece of a column at
Cessarea Philippi*



Thinking her remark is strange, I question, “Okay?” But she doesn’t clarify my questioning look, turns her back to me, and heads towards one of the large column pieces on the ground behind us.

I watch as Mother places the little angel I gave her on the plane ride over, under a broken column. She closes her eyes briefly and pauses for a moment. Mother walks back to where I am standing. She picks up our conversation as if it were never interrupted and somewhat answers the puzzling look still on my face: “I dedicated my angel to Arlene here.” That is all she says. As usual, she expects me to put her two statements and every thought in-between together for an answer that cannot be spoken. I think on this as we walk around looking at other old pieces of columns. Okay, let’s see. My sister is a nurse; her job is healing. But, I know this is only the surface wish. Mother breathes a much deeper wish for Arlene’s healing, a deeper life healing, one my mother knows she cannot heal. I believe Mother’s deepest desire is for my sister to truly know God, not with good deeds and hard work but with her surrender. Since my mother carried Arlene into my grandmother’s living room right after her birth, I have prayed the same prayer. My sister would say I am acting holier than thou, but my repetitive nightmares about the end of



Jordan means descending from Dan; this shows the flow of the Baniyas that flows into the Dan River and the Hasbani to form the Jordan River.

time and my sister getting left behind does nothing to douse my fear. We walk around to look at the old pieces of columns and pose for pictures in the stone archway where an idol used to stand.

The time allotted here passes quickly. The guide yells for those who climbed up to the ledge to come down. He reminds us to go to the bathroom. The bathroom isn't near the site. We run down to the small square building where the restrooms stand. We run back to the bus. On the bus, David is singing, "Knowing where I'm bound. No one can change my mind because mama tried. Yahoo!" We laugh at David as we take the bus steps two at a time.

Some people stand in the aisle talking. Some lean over the seat to talk. It sounds like everyone in the bus is talking. David tries to talk over all of us. Added to all this noise, our driver revs the bus's engine, and sound comes from the CD player. The cacophony of sounds brings back the overwhelming part noises must have played in the pagan city that existed here in history. I am glad we are pulling away from here. I look forward to being back in a worshipping atmosphere. Thank goodness Jesus overcame this pagan-ness, and we, too, can choose our path.

Our driver heads for the kibbutz where we are to eat lunch before our boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. The kibbutz atmosphere is everything that the last place was not. We sit at long tables; the walls are paneled with wood. Dishes clank. We walk on linoleum floors. Soup bowls and pitchers of ice water sit on the table. The noise of everyone talking echoes in the room, noises of warmth and kindness and sharing. The food is served boarding house style. We each eat soup and bread. Waiters go up and down the rows of tables, cleaning off as each of us finish. I feel cleaned.

From here, we travel to the Sea of Galilee, where we step onto a boat. One of the docked boats is named Mary and is built with the most incredibly beautiful wood. The entire boat is wood. I interpret this as a hello to me. It feels good.

Dr. John leads us to the boat next to the Mary. He reserved the boat and its crew to take us out on the sea. The metal steps are slippery. We check our footing as we board.

To our surprise, the rear of the boat flies an American flag on the left corner and a Jewish flag at the right back corner. The wind blows and there are light sprinkles as we begin our journey on the sea. The water is deep blue and choppy, just as it might have been the time Jesus calmed this very sea.

People sit inside and outside the covering of the boat. The sun goes behind the clouds. The sky darkens like night. The top of the water turns silver then gold as the mood of the sea shifts, then changes back again. A city gleams on the hillside. We pass a fishing boat. The church



Boats at the Sea of Galilee operated by Kibbutz Ein Gev; the brown wooden boat is named "Mary"

(Beatitudes) minds its own business and stands on a hill above the distant shore. Most of these Church of Blessings things Jesus would have also seen. The wind brings His memory to me.

The captain talks over the loudspeaker about our surroundings. The only thing I clearly hear him say is, “. . . and a storm came to the sea.” His voice fades. A few more raindrops fall on the water. I wonder if we will see a storm on the Sea of Galilee today.

The captain’s voice clarifies our view. “As we sail like this across the sea from the east to the west, watching the Sea of Galilee, the Lake of Tiberias, straight ahead of us, is the City of Tiberias. You see the water tower of the City of Tiberias with the city itself in two different locations. If you read the Bible, you’ll see where it says, ‘a storm came to the sea, a storm came to the Lake of Galilee.’ Looking around today you’ll see there might be a storm. You get the winds here, eastern winds, shanook winds, and western winds too. And I had an experience once when I had a big group and a storm came up and we were out here and I said, ‘Oh God,

please help us.’ Sailing north to west on the way to Capernaum.”

The wind whips so strongly that Mother, Thelma, Jean, and I decide to go below to sit and look out the open windows for awhile. I can almost touch the sea from my seat at the window. In addition to the four angels with the prayers, I have a few miniature ones in my coat pocket. I take one out and place it in the palm of my hand. I jump in surprise when the angel flies out of my hand onto the Sea of Galilee. That it just sits on top of the water tickles me, and I laugh. How funny. Mother notices it and laughs too. Finally, our gaze lifts, and we see open land, green with a few clumps of trees here and there. We can see a road with a few cars moving. We see another small boat in the distance. For a while, I am sure it will storm. Then, I think it is going to be pretty. Eventually, it turns cold and windy. On the Sea of Galilee, you can never be sure.

The Bishop now speaks over the loudspeaker. I decide to listen more closely. “It’s great to be out here on the Sea of Tiberias, or the Lake of Gennesaret or all the other names that this particular body of water is called. So we’ll ask Kevin to come and lead us in a couple of songs as we begin our sharing this afternoon.”

“Let’s all sing,
I serve a risen Savior, He’s in the world today;
I know that He is living, whatever men may say;
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer
And just the time I need Him He’s always near.
He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.”

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In breathtaking wonderment, we sing,
“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, there’s just something about that name!
Master, Savior, Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain;
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, let all Heaven and Earth proclaim:
Kings and kingdoms may all pass away,
But there’s something about that name!”
In grateful peace, we sing,
“Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place;
I can feel His mighty power and His grace.
I can hear the brush of angels’ wings,
I see glory on each face;
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.”



The shore of the Sea of Galilee

The Bishop stands at the stern of the boat. “And every time I’m here I feel the presence of the Lord in this place. As we travel throughout the Holy Land, from time-to-time we will be in places, and we’ll say, well, Jesus was here, maybe a little to the right or a little to the left. Maybe not quite in this spot. We can’t say for sure, but we can say in this general area; this was where Jesus was for this particular event or another. But whenever I’m here at the Sea of Galilee, I always know for certain that this was a central place in the life of Jesus. During the time of Jesus, this area was actually more populated than it is now. This was a central place and so much of Jesus’ ministry happened in and around this body of water. As we went north this morning and went up to Mt. Hermon, we realized that all the springs and the snowmelt, and the streams that come from that area feed into this lake down to the Jordan River. And so, Jesus kept coming back over and over again to this area. And as we go to Capernaum this afternoon, we’ll see the place that really was the central location for the life and ministry of Jesus in those years that have meant so much to us in our lives. I’ve asked three from our group to come and read selected passages of scripture. We can read more than three, obviously, but we’ve just picked three to read while we’re out here on the lake today. Doug is going to come. Doug, are you downstairs?”

“I’m right here,” Doug says.

“Oh, you’re over there. I didn’t recognize you with your hat.” We laugh. “Doug’s going to come and read for us and then Kathleen and then Jackie.”

Doug says, “Reading from the gospel of Matthew, fourth chapter, verses 18-22. Hear the word of the Lord:

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“As He walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’

“Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zeb’edee and John his brother, in the boat with Zeb’edee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.” Doug steps down.

It was here on the Sea of Galilee that Jesus calmed the sea during a storm. The disciples with Him wondered who this man was that even the wind and sea obeyed Him.³ (Mark 4:35-41)

Kathleen stands, “I’ll be reading from Matthew 14: 22-33.” The wind really picks up. Kathleen continues: “Then he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was many furlongs distant from the land, beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, ‘it is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear.

“But immediately he spoke to them, saying, ‘Take heart, it is I; have no fear.’

“And Peter answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water.’

“He said, ‘Come.’

“So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, (as Kathleen reads this part, a strong wind whips across the boat to the point that you can hardly hear her voice over the microphone over the sound of the wind) he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me.’

“Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘O man of little faith, why did you doubt?’

“And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”

As the wind continues, Kathleen sits and Jackie stands. “I’ll be reading the gospel of St. John, twenty-first chapter, the first fourteen verses,” Jackie says. A strong gust of wind whips across the microphone as she continues, “After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tibe’ri-as; and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathan’a-el of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zeb’edee, and two others of his disciples were together.

“Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’

“They said to him, ‘We will go with you.’ They went out and got into the boat; but that night they caught nothing.

“Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, ‘Children, have you any fish?’

“They answered him, ‘No.’

“He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’

“So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish.

“That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from

the land, but about a hundred yards off. When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’

“Now none of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.”

Here Jesus asked Simon Peter if he loved Him more than these. When he said he did, Jesus told him to feed His lambs. Jesus asked him again if he loved Him. When he answered yes, Jesus told him to tend His sheep. When Jesus asked him the third time if he loved Him and Simon Peter said yes yet again, Jesus told him to feed His sheep. He then told Simon Peter to follow Him.⁴ (John 21:15-25)

“I asked John Calvin to come share a prayer with us,” the Bishop says.

The Bishop braces John against the wind as John says, “May we pray? God, our Father, as we set out on the Sea of Galilee where so much of the activity of our Savior took place, we are reminded that we have been called not to fish in these waters but to be fishers of men, women. We pray, dear Father, that our commitment to this will be greater than ever before. As we realize and think about the storms that come upon this sea, let us think about the storms that are taking place within the lives of so many. Back home in the lives of our family and our churches. Help us, dear God, that we may be Christ to them. Help us that we may share His love, that we may, in a small way, still the storms in their life and be committed to our Father as we seek to pull them in; as we bring them to you. Continue to bless us in our pilgrimage; continue to help us with our eyes and our ears and our emotions to take it all in, that we may feel closer to Thee than we’ve ever felt because of this Holy place. With eyes and ears to hear the scriptures, help us to receive it gladly. In the name of the Savior who walked these waters, we pray in His name. Amen.”

The captain takes the microphone back from the gentleman who prayed. Commercialism calls out to us, and we are reminded that tourism means these guys must try to sell us things. The captain further explains, “The people here make-up these little broaches. They’re made out of fresh-water shells from the Sea of Galilee. They’re handcrafted in this area. They come in the shape of a cross, or as one of those things you put in your hair, if you have hair. What are those things called? Barrettes. They have a variety of these. They’re \$3 a piece. If you’re interested in a souvenir that represents the Sea of Galilee, this is probably a pretty good thing. And they’ll have them here in limited quantities, but I’m sure they have more.”

As I hear the sales pitch, I reflect, “I need to watch my money. I don’t think I should buy anything now, even though they’ve been made by the people here.” I later regret not buying any of these barrettes, and during my second and third trips to the Holy Land, I buy several.

Worshipping on the Sea of Galilee today brings Jesus’ laughter to my heart. The rain cleanses my heart as if tears washed it. The sun breaks through the clouds, sending warmth to cloak me like a coat warmed at the fireplace on a wet, winter day.

The boat sounds kind of tinny. It isn’t like the beautiful wooden boat named Mary, but it’s nice. It is wonderful to sit here thinking that Jesus walked on this water, that the apostles were here, that this is the Sea of Galilee. How awesome! I picture what it must feel like to walk on this water. I almost want to go out there and walk on it myself.

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We reach the shore as our sailing excursion ends. We climb off the boat onto a planked bridge that extends from the boat to the shore. It bounces and clanks as we walk on it. The wind quiets down. The air is still chilly. Wow, we went on the Sea of Galilee!

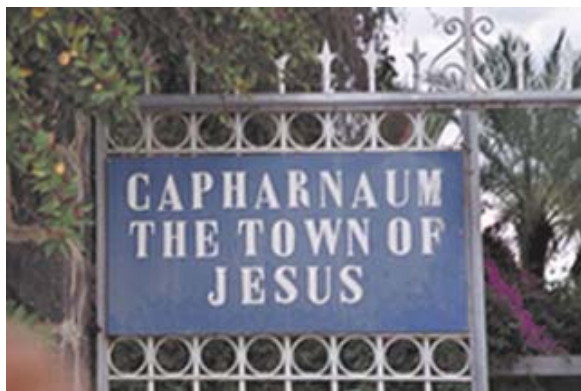
We get back on the bus and head to Capernaum. We pass fields of crops with plastic over them to keep them moist and warm.

Capernaum, the town of Jesus. I keep looking at this sign on the gate as we drive up to it. I question, "Jesus had a town? I didn't even know it." I stare at the sign, "The town of Jesus." The town of Jesus! I wonder what this is like.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus heard John the Baptist had been arrested, He withdrew and went to Capernaum. Here, Jesus began to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand and all should repent.⁵ (Matthew 4:12-17)

We get off the bus. We walk in and stop in a garden. What a magical garden! We sit on concrete benches under ancient olive trees. A statue of St. Francis reaches his arms to the sky. I think Dr. John is talking, or David, or both. I am entranced. I feel the innocence of this garden. This is the most peaceful place I have ever been. I have never experienced this kind of peace. If the world could come here and breathe this, there would never be war. Could living in God's presence be like this?

Someone in the group starts reading aloud, "And he went down to Caper'na-um, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the sabbath; and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word was with authority. And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon; and he cried out with a loud voice, 'Ah! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.'



Gate entering Capernaum or Kafar Nahum, which means Village of Nahum, the adopted hometown of Jesus

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Left: Statue of St. Francis, in the garden outside the Synagogue of Jesus, with uplifted arms; this is a Franciscan site

Right: Sign on the Synagogue of Jesus; dark stone below the bottom stone shown here would have been part of the Synagogue of Jesus

“But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm.

“And they were all amazed and said to one another, ‘What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.’ And reports of him went out into every place in the surrounding region.” We sit in silence.

David wears a worn brown leather jacket today. He has a slight cough and uses his left hand in a fist to cover his mouth. He continues, “All, with the exception of the miracles in Cana, all of the very first miracles of Jesus were performed here in Capernaum. The place where Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law. I once heard Robert Schuller say this is why Peter denied Him three times.” We laugh.

“This is the place where Jesus healed the man who was brought to the house through the roof. All of those miracles were performed by Jesus in this Capernaum. And yet, at the very end of His ministry, Jesus is actually cursing Capernaum to be destroyed. Jesus compares Capernaum to the City of Sodom. You remember, Jesus said, ‘And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths.’ If it weren’t for that curse, this town would be in existence today. He also curses two other cities to be destroyed: the cities of Bethsaida and Korazin. The mostly well-to-do, very prosperous, three Galilean towns that in a way rejected the teachings of Jesus and are uninhabited to this day.

“You have to remember the message from Jesus was the message to the poor. You really can’t expect a Galilean teacher who walked around the streets of Jerusalem on the hills of the Galilee and who said things like, ‘It’s easier for a camel to make it through the eye of the needle than a rich man to make it through the gates of Heaven,’ to be accepted by the rich. Actually, what you say is that the rich don’t stand a chance. And actually, in this respect, Jesus would have found a much more open ear to listen to Him, and an open heart to take in, and an open mind to absorb His message in the area of the needy than in the worlds of prosperity. The wealthy fear the message of Jesus not so much because of its religious meaning but for its social meaning. His teachings were actually a threat to the wealth and prosperity they were so accustomed to.

“Folks, its human nature. Who is normally the one who seeks a change? The one who doesn’t have it? Why should they who have good seek for a change? Okay? Jesus would have

found most of his followers among those poor fishermen or the poor farmers who could hardly make a decent living in the area.

“Capernaum was destroyed just as Jesus predicted and what you see over here are mostly the remains of this town. Let me just say that the synagogue which you see here today is the synagogue which has been built over the remains of earlier synagogues. In other words, the foundation of this building is the foundation of the synagogue which was built during the time of Jesus. The floor of this synagogue is the floor of the synagogue where Jesus taught and preached and performed some of His miracles. The skeleton, the structure itself goes back to the synagogue of the fifth century AD, which replaced the old synagogue that was destroyed during the Jewish revolt against the Romans in the Galilee area somewhere between 67 and 68 AD.

“When you are going to go in, folks, you are going to see a typical Galilean style synagogue. You are going to find three classic entrance gates. Two lower gates at each end and one higher gate in the center. The gates were not only a way to go in or out of the synagogue, but were also an indication of the direction of prayer. You walked into the synagogue, you turned around to about ninety degrees, and you faced the gates. And by facing the gates, you faced towards Jerusalem.”

While David is talking, my mind wanders back to the garden where we sit. I could stay here forever. There is no strife here. It is like you think of home when there is nothing bad that can or does happen. It is full of peace and love. I wonder if Jesus enjoyed this peace, these olive trees, this sunshine, this earth.

When David finishes talking, he tells us to go and look in the synagogue where Jesus taught. I think, “Oh, wow! Way cool!”

From nowhere, the Voice I heard in the Church of the Multiplication speaks and tells me to take out Amber’s prayer. This time the voice is not faint. The voice is stronger now. It is definitely a male voice. It is not the voice of God, at least, not as I have known it in the past. Where does it come from? Is it evil? Good? Why is it talking to me? Our interaction at the church definitely touched my heart. I will see what it wants this time, but it will not boss me around!

I answer, “Excuse me?”

The Voice tells me again to get out my daughter’s prayer.

“Wait a minute.” Because I do not recognize this voice, I am not going to just listen to what it tells me to do and blindly obey.

Again, the Voice stresses that I should get out Amber’s prayer.

I answer, “Noooo, this is not where I want to put Amber’s prayer because this is outside. I am not going to put my daughter’s prayer outside. It might get wet and soggy. I don’t want to do that.”

The Voice tells me to just get it out.

Since I do not know who this voice is, I argue with it. I want to discuss this. Finally, I say, “I’ll get it out, but I’m not leaving it here.”

The Voice instructs me to go into the synagogue.

Our group walks over to the synagogue. Another guide is speaking, “. . . ninety degrees to read scripture, then walk up to the front, near columns, to teach. The second floor was where women prayed in the balcony. Men and women prayed separately. Then Jesus would have gone up onto the stage area to teach.”

I look around at the big stones, remembering this is not the original synagogue, but it is one that was built in the late fourth century. It is called the White Synagogue, I think, built upon

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the remains of the Synagogue of Jesus. Big huge blocks. Lord knows how they got those blocks and stacked them up.

I stand in the back of the synagogue.

The Voice speaks again, telling me to go over to where Jesus would stand to teach, and He will show me something.

I warn, “I’m going over there, but I am not leaving my daughter’s prayer out here. You can just forget it. I am not leaving it here. I have places picked out, and this is not one of them. I didn’t even know about this place.”

The Voice asks me to please quit arguing with Him and go over to where Jesus stood to teach. I walk to the platform area. The Voice instructs me to look down, and to my left, come up to the second row, third row over of stones, and there’s a special place for my daughter’s prayer.

I bend down. I slip in the envelope. It fits perfectly between the two stones. The Voice confirms that, now, my daughter’s prayer is safe forever here. It will not get damaged; nothing will happen to it. I take a picture. I leave my daughter’s prayer here.

The voice is even stranger now that it is louder and no longer a whisper. I cannot write this off as my imagination. This seems to be a good voice. The Voice gave me two gifts—a



Above: Amber’s prayer at the reconstructed Fourth Century Synagogue above the Synagogue of Jesus

Left: Inside the Synagogue; Jesus would have stood near the columns to teach

Below: Inside the Synagogue; Jesus would have stood near the columns to teach



wonderful tribute to my daddy and now protection for my daughter. How does this voice know me so well? What is His purpose? I wonder if He will come back again. I walk around, trying to figure out what happened here in Jesus' hometown. You know, this is so much like my little girl. It is so friendly, so peaceful, so innocent, so before all the evil. It has people-spirit interaction, friends, home, good cooking smells, a social atmosphere. It's her. Tears fill my eyes with reverence, thankful that God chose to give me such a kind, gentle, loving daughter. I stop where I am and say a prayer to God, "Thank you, God, for bringing me to such a special place for the prayer of my special little angel. And thank you for caring for us. And thank you for letting us experience Jesus' hometown. I pray that whoever this voice is, that He is in Your will. We love you."

We leave the synagogue and walk by the foundation of Peter's mother-in-law's house. The gatekeeper warns that he needs to lock the gate in five minutes.

Someone speaks as we walk: "This is a street. Each room was a house. St. Peter's house."

Walking by Peter's house, I realize I have a glimpse of the way God might see His creation in my daughter. Perhaps the interaction with the Voice brought this to me or perhaps it is this place. Here, Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law,⁶ (Matthew 8:14-17) many possessed with demons, and all who were sick. Amber's spirit is the same as the spirit here. She heals.

We hurry out the gate. We rush straight to the bus since the bathrooms are not working here. We head to the Jordan River. I put my head back on the seat and close my eyes to rest. I am suddenly very tired. It is nearly dark when we reach the Jordan River. We walk through the building that houses the bathhouse. Those who are to be immersed in the river—which doesn't include me—stop to change clothes. We walk through a garden area of tall palm trees and flowers, red roses. As we walk through the entrance to the river, someone sings, "I love Jesus, none but the righteous!"

The evening air gets even cooler. We huddle on the tiered, stone steps by the river, waiting for the others. The evening air grabs the Spirit stirred inside of me and weaves it among those sitting beside me, those organizing the reaffirmation, and those standing in the water waiting. The cold stone steps remind me how cold they are to sit on. The pragmatic and the spiritual stand side-by-side.

It was here at the Jordan River where John the Baptist baptized Jesus of Nazareth. This event marked the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.⁷ (Matthew 3:1-17)

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Franciscan church above home of St. Peter, across from the Synagogue of Jesus



Walking from the Synagogue and St. Peter's, on the wall, Fourth Century rendition of the Ark of the Covenant

The young preacher from Decatur, whom I call “Decatur Preacher,” stands on the bank of the Jordan River and says, “What an awesome and humbling opportunity we have together by this historic river in this Holy Land, to remember what Christ Jesus has done for us. In the sacrament of Holy baptism, we are clearly understanding that in holy baptism it is not so much what we are doing for Christ in accepting His love for us, but in responding to the love of Christ which has been shown to us on the cross of Calvary from which His cleansing blood flows for you and for me. Here at this riverside, we remember in this service of baptismal reaffirmation what He has done. We come here to remember that we love because He first loved us. As we prepare to share in this wonderful time, I’ve asked Ida Jones to sing a spiritual. It calls us to this time of remembering what He has done.”

With all of us feeling a committed act of great magnitude, Ida sings:

“Take me to the water,
take me to the water,
take me to the water, to be baptized.

Non but the righteous,
none but the righteous,
non but the righteous, shall see God.

I love Jesus,
I love Jesus,
I love Jesus, yes I do.”

Decatur Preacher rises on his toes, bringing his spirit to us, and says, “In every church I’ve served I’ve always had folks say to me, ‘I want to be rebaptized.’ And I’ve said, ‘Why?’ and, they’ve said, ‘Because I don’t remember it. And it can’t be valid unless I remember it.’ You know, in my theological opinion, what’s important is that Christ Jesus has claimed us. And whether we were children or infants or whether we were young adults, that’s the operative mode. That He is reaching out to touch us and cleanse us. Today we come to say, ‘Thank you, Lord, for what You have done and for what you are doing. We commit ourselves again to live in Christ’s

way. Brother and sister in Christ through the sacrament of baptism we are initiated in Christ's Holy church. We are incorporated in God's mighty acts of salvation and given new birth through water and the spirit. All of this is God's gift to us offered without price. On behalf of the whole church, I ask you, 'Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sins? Do you?'

All of our tour group respond, "I do."

"Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil in justice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? Do you?"

We answer, "I do."

"Do you confess Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, put your whole trust in His grace, and promise to serve Him as your Lord in union with His church, which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races? Do you?"

We answer, "I do."

"According to the grace given you, will you remain faithful members of Christ's holy church and serve Christ as His representatives in the world? Will you?"

We answer, "I will."

"Then together let us affirm our faith using the historic words of the apostle's creed, the baptismal creed of the church."

Together, we all state, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontious Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. The third day he rose from the dead, He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

"The Lord be with you," the preacher says.

"And with you," we respond. The river grows black and dark.

"Let us pray," the preacher says. "Eternal Father, when nothing existed but chaos, you swept across the dark waters and brought forth light. In the days of Noah you saved those in the ark through water, and after the floods you set in the clouds a rainbow. When you saw your people as slaves in Egypt, you led them to freedom through the sea. Their children you brought through the Jordan to the land which you promised. In the fullness of time you sent Jesus, nurtured in the water of a womb. He was baptized by John and anointed by Your Spirit. He called His disciples to share in the baptism of His death and resurrection and to make disciples of all nations. Pour out Your Holy Spirit and by this gift of water call to our remembrance the grace declared to us in our baptism. For you have washed away our sins, and you have clothed us with righteousness throughout our lives. And dying and rising with Christ, we may share in His final victory. My dear friends in Christ, remember your baptism and be thankful. And may the Holy Spirit work within you, that having been born through water and the spirit, you may live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

"In a moment, we'll sing together a great hymn of grace, reminding us that He is reaching out just now, to us. And we come to respond. Following one stanza of that great hymn, the ministers here will gather at the riverside, and you come. As they mark you with the sign of the cross, I invite you to reach out and touch the water of the Jordan River yourself. When the minister say, 'Remember your baptism and be thankful,' respond with a heartfelt, 'Amen! And, amen!' Now, Ida come and lead us in that great hymn, *Amazing Grace*."

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Ida and all of us sing,

“Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.”

The ministers go to the water’s edge. Decatur Preacher says, “As they are here, I invite you to come to any of us who are gathered and kneel here at the waterside to allow us to share with you in this time of baptismal reaffirmation.”

The ministers say to each of us, as we kneel beside them at the water’s edge, “Remember your baptism and be thankful.”



Baptism at the Jordan River

I reply, “Amen.” The former Thomaston minister blesses me. In the background to left at the water’s edge, a minister standing in the water immerses a blond girl and a guy. All three wear white robes.

When we finish at the edge of the water, the Decatur Preacher says, “We belong to Christ. We can live with a heightened level of joy and purpose, so would you rise as His redeemed, chosen, and forgiven people and sing with me with hearty voices, the great Fanny Crosby hymn of the church, ‘Blessed Assurance Jesus is Mine.’ Let us sing together,

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine:
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.”

Preacher then says, “Now may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up His countenance, His

approving smile upon you and give you peace, perfect peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.”

And we say, “Amen.”

Tired and giddy, we ride the bus back to the hotel. At the hotel, we rest a little before supper. At supper, we have St. Peter’s fish. Peter’s fish, also called Tilapias, is a tropical fish found in the Sea of Galilee. The male fish keeps the baby fish in his mouth while the babies are maturing. During the off seasons, the male fish often picks up rocks and other things to hold in his mouth. Legend has it that Peter caught this fish when Jesus told him to. The mouth of this fish held one shekel that was used to pay the Temple taxes for Peter and Jesus.

After supper, we go to a store in the lobby. I buy an inexpensive ring, sunglasses, and postcards. The ring is enameled metal. I try it on each finger and decide to leave it on the middle finger of my right hand. Looking at the ring, the Sea of Galilee fills my heart. I decide I will always wear this Galilee ring and lovingly remember Jesus. Funny, a \$3.95 ring can do all this. These rings last about two years each, and in the years to come, I will return to this Holy Land and buy enough of these rings to last my lifetime.

We buy stamps, since the ones we bought in the States will not work in Israel. Can you believe it? Americans are unbeatable in their self-centeredness, thinking their stamps should work anywhere in the world. It never dawned on me that other countries would have their own postal system. I request my change in shekels for souvenirs. Thelma buys more postcards.

After this, we go to the wholesale jewelry store. Diamond cutting is Israel’s second largest industry. We walk around and look at the jewelry but do not buy anything. Janice buys a tennis bracelet. We are ready to go to bed. Finally, we return to the hotel. Jean and I say good night to Mother and Thelma.

Tiredly, we crawl into the bed and pull the covers up. I am too tired to go to sleep right away. I think about the Voice. I have not told anyone about the Voice. I turn over in my mind who the Voice might be. I think to myself, I know the voice of God. I have heard that, three times.

I start doubting myself and wonder if I really heard a voice at all today. Maybe the heat got to me. Most times, I respond with self-doubt to the odd things that happen to me. I do all I can to discount abnormality. My goal in life has always been to be normal. Where do weird things belong in normalcy?

My mind wanders to my last visit to Ray’s, my counselor. I remember sitting in his office after my fiancée left me. I had never been left. I was devastated.

Ray’s office is always so comfortable with the big overstuffed leather chairs and ottomans, and it’s safe. Although I was there to talk about my breakup, we never did that day. Perhaps it was the sun reflecting on the building outside the window and the dancing shadows. For whatever reason, we were led by some unknown force into parts of my life that I work hard to minimize.

I told Ray about the light. For the longest time, I had thought I was seeing things. I did not tell a soul. One night, my daughter and I were sitting on the sofa together watching TV. Suddenly, there was a bright self-contained light to our right. We both jumped and asked if the other saw it. My daughter said she had been seeing it all over the house for a long time. So had I.

The first time I saw the light was the night my son, Paul Daniel, died in my womb. The pure white light was about the size of a softball. It hovered at the top of the stairs for several minutes before vanishing.

One day when I was riding to a funeral with my sister and brother-in-law, I told them about the light and asked them what they thought. I was a little braver now that I knew my daughter had seen it too. My brother-in-law is sure it is St. Elmo's fire. He wants me to call in a bunch of scientists to let them figure it out. Can you imagine this on the front cover of a tabloid? My biggest nightmare!

My husband has since seen it too, except that time the pure white light filled the entire dining room. I am so afraid God is going to send an angel to see me that I beg Him constantly not to. Isn't this silly? I think I would die of a heart attack if an angel appeared to me. I told Ray about other strange things that happen to me. The first time I heard God's voice was in a dream. I heard it as we hear voices. The world was dark and war was rampant. God's voice thundered in the pitch-blackness. His voice came from behind white columns that jutted from the broad steps and the darkness. The darkness was empty and scary. I was glad God's voice was there with me. As loud and thunderous as it was, it comforted me.

The second time I heard God's voice was not in a dream. I heard it in an experience that was similar to the way others describe a near death experience. But I was not dying; I was very much alive.

In high school, we moved into a new house on Griffin Avenue. I guess I'd been reading the scripture about not being caught sleeping when the Master returns because I tried to stay awake at night to watch for Jesus out my window. A couple of times I heard the newspaper guy or the milkman and thought it was Jesus coming. I jumped up with excitement to look out the window. Disappointed, I climbed back in bed and listened again.

During this time I was questioning God, "Why did you pick Jesus to die for You? You know I would do anything for You. I feel bad that I am jealous that You chose Jesus and not me. I know I could do whatever You want me to do. I love You that much." The more I thought about this the more it bothered me. I had no idea then how much Jesus did for me, that He gave His life for me.

I remember being in my room at home in the afternoon. I remember seeing my body lying on my bed. My body was asleep, but it was looking at the ceiling.

Suddenly, I was going down this long, long tunnel. I could definitely see a light at the end. I heard this huge, huge voice say that he was going to help me understand. I knew the voice was someone like the angel Michael. He was taking me somewhere, and it was okay. We moved through the tunnel incredibly fast! Faster than a supersonic jet. It was like nothing I could imagine.

When we got to the light, it was like "spueeee." It felt like going from moving very fast to not moving at all, or going into another dimension where nothing moves. This seemed normal here. My husband kids me about being the original *Contact* movie.

My companion disappeared. I realized I was standing in the midst of the air, which was similar to the sky but white light. I mean pure white light.

Suddenly a voice, and this was a voice you never forget, ever, ever, ever—the biggest voice you can imagine. It was like being in the middle of thunder, the loudest thunder that ever existed. Your ears fill up beyond capacity with sound with this voice. You do not distinguish the words of the sound, but you know what they meant. The magic was, that with all the loudness of the sound, this thunderous voice, this big huge voice, was the most peaceful sound you can ever imagine. It fills you up with peace and goodness. It purifies every particle in your body. The voice is wonderful. And the voice told me that He brought me here so I would not be in any more pain from feeling He did not love me enough or that I was not enough for Him. He said He

wanted me to meet Jesus so that I could understand that His love for me was not more or less. It was just different.

God said something to the effect, “and now I present Jesus to you.” A man walked down the steps to my right. Everything here was made out of light. The steps looked like steps, but they were light particles. This man had a body, hair, clothes, but they were all made out of light particles. I remember the white robe that Christ had on. It was the purest white I have ever seen. The light fell into folds like cloth. It was so soft looking, but it definitely had shape to it. I remember looking down at Christ’s feet, wrapped in gold gauze. It looked like someone had ripped strips of material, but they were pure gold. It seemed to be to comfort from the nail holes—so sad. The ends of the strips were loose and flew in the wind like angel wings.

He did not talk to me in a voice like we talk on earth. It is what I call the other dimension. It is as if our thoughts would talk back and forth. It seemed He had taken a vow of silence from the time He ascended from the earth until a set time. In the other dimension, He held out His hand and said, “Come, go with me. I want to show you Heaven.”

We walked up the steps. Jesus took me to a room to the left. Oh my goodness! The voices of angels were incredible! Surround sound would not even begin to identify the sound. It was in voices like we hear, auditory. It was as if there were millions of angels singing in perfect harmony. There were no instruments, but their voices sounded every instrument rolled into one. Incredible! I cannot even describe the sound!

Then Jesus said, “I want you to come to the next room here.” Remember, everything I saw was made of light. We went to the room to the right. Here was incredible grass made out of light. Sitting on the grass was my grandfather. The same grandfather I spent hours at church praying for when he died. I asked God to please forgive him for his sins and take him to heaven.

Sitting on the grass with my grandfather was my father. My biological father died when I was a year old. He was sitting here with my grandfather. My grandfather wore his hat. Both men were younger. They were enjoying a picnic on the grass. The grass did not itch. This dimension told me things. The grass was solid, but built of light. Everything was energizing, peaceful, and happy. Not syrupy happy. Not the absence of sadness that would make the happiness go away. It was just continually peaceful.

Jesus showed me another room, but I cannot remember anything about this room. In this room, He said, “Now it’s time for you to go back.”

And I was going, “No! No, I don’t want to go back! I want to stay here with You. I want to stay here with God. I do not want to leave. I am not going back. No!”

He said, “I’m sorry you can’t stay here now. It’s not time.”

I was crying and said, “Please let me stay.”

And He said, “No, you have more work to do.”

I remembered that I told God I would do, I could do, what Jesus did, and here I was, I did not even want to leave. I was crying to stay. So what kind of thing was that for me to do? Shamefully, I agreed. “I’ll go back.” He took me back to the steps and turned His left hand outward, back toward where I had come.

I do not remember who took me back. I remember flying back through that dark tunnel. I remember lying on my bed as if I were dead, trying to get my body to work. I felt strange being in that body. It seemed like it took hours and hours for me to make that body work. I thought, “Oh, my mother can’t come in here and find this body not working. She’ll be too upset.” I kept talking to the body and saying, “You have to work. You have to work. Come on!” Finally, I got

it to stand up in front of the mirror and talk to itself. I kept trying to convince it that it had to work. It could not disobey.

I do not remember a lot about the next couple of months because it was really hard to come back into this dimension, to get back into the sync of this life. I do not know how things got done. I just remember concentrating. I know that for two months it was a struggle to make my body work.

I paused as I started my journey back to Ray's office. I shared with him that the one other time I heard God's voice was in a dream a few years ago. It was an incredible, sequential dream over several weeks. God let me experience the creation of the earth and be a part of the waters before the waters were divided, before darkness was introduced. It was so peaceful. I enjoyed this experience tremendously. I was honored.

Ray and I sat quiet for awhile. I was finished spilling my secrets for the day. I thought surely these made me anything but normal. My eyes filled with tears as I glued my view to the ceiling. I wondered what Ray would think. Could I really trust him this much?

Ray never says much during the counseling sessions. I guess this is what makes his words so powerful. He contemplated for a moment, then turned to look at me through the golden lamplight from the side table. "Mary, maybe these are gifts."

What? What was Ray saying? Doesn't he know how weird these things are? After another pause, Ray matter-of-factly said, "Once you accept these gifts, you may discover more."

Stunned, I replied, "You really think these things are okay? I am normal?"

He smiled. "Well, let's not go that far."

Ray looked down at his watch. I knew this meant my time was up. We stood up. Ray gave me a very needed hug. I walked out of the office and out into the sun. I reflected. He certainly gave me something to mull over. In the next week and a half, I grew more comfortable with myself. My secrets were out.

And now, today in Galilee, what do I think of the voice? Okay, yes, I did hear a voice today. I definitely did. It was a good voice. It was a gift just as Ray said. I say a little prayer, "Thank you, God, for Ray. Thank you for letting him guide me to the extended faith that washes me with the courage to accept the talents and experiences of God's blessings. In his quietness, he gave me the faith to discover. In Your quietness and through this Voice, You give me the grace to discover."

I know the Voice talking to me in the Holy Land is not God or Jesus. I do not know who the Voice is. I know it is of God but not God. It is not a voice I recognize. It is definitely a male voice. It is a different kind of voice, a regular voice. It is an authoritative voice. It is not a voice I recognize.

I think back to today in Galilee. An old hymn comes to mind. I doze off to sleep, wondering who the Voice is and singing:

"I walked today where Jesus walked in days of long ago.
I wandered down each path He knew with reverent step and slow.
The little names they have not changed, a sweet peace fills the air.
I walked today where Jesus walked and felt His presence there.
My pathway led to Bethlehem, of memories ever sweet;
The little hills of Galilee that knew those childish feet;
The Mount of Olives, hallowed scenes that Jesus knew before.
I saw the mighty Jordan roll as in the days of yore.

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I knelt today where Jesus knelt, where all alone He prayed;
The Garden of Gethsemane, my heart felt unafraid.
I picked my heavy burden up,
and with Him by my side, I climbed the hill of Calvary,
I climbed the hill of Calvary,
I climbed the hill of Calvary where on the cross He died.
I walked today where Jesus walked and felt Him close to me.



Wednesday, January 28 1998

The sun and my energy are scarce this morning. My head fogs. My boring sightseeing tour reeks of lines from the latest science fiction or one of those mysteries my mother loves to watch. I favor neither. I can't dwell on the voice today. Maybe familiar activities will soothe me. I thirst for a swallow of rest. I am grumpy.

After breakfast, we climb the bus steps and greet others, many by name. We reach our seats just as the clouds move away and the sun breaks through.

Ali and David wait for us on the bus. Ali, our Arab bus driver, gives me the feeling that he knows more than he says with his quiet, polite demeanor and understanding, calm look. David, our guide, portrays anything but quiet. His eyes sparkle with the hint of a Greek dance as his Russian mouth harp, waiting to speak of its culture, rests on his leg. Others expressed their surprise at having an Arab bus driver and a Jewish guide together. I am more surprised that they are both Christians. I thought all Arabs were Moslems and have never heard of a Jew being a Christian. I guess Jesus was the first Christian Jew. I discovered that ninety-five percent of all Christians in the Holy Land are Palestinians, who are all Arabs. Never having paid attention to current events, it will be years later before I realize the significance of our cast of characters. Since 1947, the ruling power in Israel is Jewish which means Christian populations are discouraged and there are tensions between Jews and Christians. The Palestinians are descendents of the Canaanites and have lived on this land for at least 10,000 years. The Jews argue that the land belongs to them; the Palestinians argue that the land belongs to them. So to have a Palestinian bus driver and a Messianic Jew as our guide brings many viewpoints together.

We call roll, share news from home, and pray together. I begin to relax into the seat to catch my second wind as Ali pulls onto the road. The rest of our group sounds full of energy as forty-two voices fill the bus with song.

“This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made,
that the Lord has made.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
This is the day that the Lord has made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made.”

I notice that the guys in the front keep getting out of their seats to talk to each other. The cell phone Dr. John carries rings again. He gets up and talks to David, then sits back down and leans over to his wife Pat. As we ride along, the activity increases. I wonder if something is wrong. Could there be problems ahead? This country is volatile.

We watched the news last night for a minute. Although mostly in Hebrew, it seemed like war might break out any minute. The Middle East has been a hotbed for war since the beginning

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of time, but during my lifetime, tensions have mostly been between the Jews and the Arabs. Jewish immigration to the Holy Land increased dramatically after World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust. The influx of Jewish immigrants resulted in increasing tension with the local Arab population, a development that led the United Kingdom to renege its mandate and place Palestine under United Nations supervision on October 6, 1947 (the day before I was born). Arabs and Jews failed to reach any agreement on how—or whether—to divide Palestine, and skirmishes soon broke out between the two sides. During the chaotic period of conflict, Jewish Agency President David Ben-Gurion declared the foundation of the State of Israel on May 15, 1948. The neighboring Arab countries of Trans-Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria mobilized against the state and intermittent fighting persisted.⁸ (footnote: <http://www.time.com/time/europe/timetrails/israel/>) War and peace have jostled for the people every since. Most recently on January 10 of this year—just a few days ago—an Israeli border policeman was struck by a rock and seven Palestinian protesters were injured during a demonstration by Palestinians over the stalled Mideast peace process. The two sides fought off and on for several hours.⁹ (footnote: <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/10/israel.palestinians/>)

Last night, Dr. John assured us that the televised Iraqi threat to attack Israel was only saber rattling. Anxiously, I occupy my thoughts by looking out the window. Rocks cover the ground. I lean over to Aunt Jean, “I think they cultivate rocks here.”

She replies, “Un-huh, it sure looks like it.”

Dr. John stands up in the aisle and holds onto the seat to steady himself as the bus jiggles along. “Folks, we have a surprise for you.” Realizing this is good, relief sweeps my tensed face. “We have been on the phone this morning with the office of Mar Elias College. We are going to be able to visit Father Elias Chacour at his school first thing this morning. Would you like to do I work in higher education. I guess going to a school could be interesting. Or, it could be really boring. A college would definitely be something I know. If I get bored, I can always rest.

We vote to visit the school. Who is this Rev. Dr. Elias Chacour anyway? Why would we want to listen to what he has to say? I did not know then that Father Chacour’s friends call him Abuna, which means Father. I did not know that Father Chacour is a Christian, Melkite priest, a Palestinian, and a citizen of Israel, or how unusual this is. I did not know that in April of 1975, Father Chacour visited Beirut and the PLO kidnapped him and held him in the Shatilla Refugee Camp. I did not know that Father Chacour founded the school for Christian, Jews, Moslems, and Druze that we would visit. I did not know that the school started with eighty children and now serves over 4,000. I did not know Father Chacour received his Ph.D. in Ecumenical Theology at the University of Geneva and that he was the first Palestinian to attend Hebrew University. I did that?”

*Rocks on the way to
Mar Elias College*



not know of all the honorary doctorates bestowed on Father Chacour. I did not know Father Chacour was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize and Israel would twice honor him as Man of the Year. I did not know the President of France would award Father Chacour the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur. I did not know he would receive the Marcel Rudloff Peace and Tolerance Award at Strasbourg or be awarded the Buddhist highest peace award, the Niwano Peace Award. I did not know his book *Blood Brothers* had been translated into 28 languages. I did not know this man would change the course of my life forever!

I grip my seat as the three buses round the curves on the two-lane, bumpy roads. The buses climb through the hillside packed with houses. We park in a large parking lot beside a concrete building, step off the buses, and pile into the new gymnasium of Mar Elias. Metal chairs line the floor at a podium in front of large windows. The gym echoes the noise of the crowd as metal chairs scrape the floor. Aunt Jean and I sit together at the end of a row, about five rows from the front. Thelma sits a few rows in front of us. Mother is somewhere in the crowd. I settle back in my chair and look around this large, airy gathering place. At least someone with talent painted interesting artwork on the walls. The metal chair feels cold against my back. I pull the hood of my top over my head and around my face and my coat tight around my shoulders. I wonder how long we are going to be sitting here. I really do not like to be so cold. I am so sleepy that I will probably nod off if we have to sit here long.

Dr. John's introduction of Father Chacour is the usual boring jabber until I hear that this stocky, graying man with the strange beard just returned from an early morning breakfast with King Hussein of Jordan. I do not know much about King Hussein of Jordan except that most people think he is nice and that he married an American, Queen Noor. Wonder what it is like to eat breakfast with a king? What would you talk about?

Curiously, I watch the little man toggle to the podium. He wears a cassock, a black robe-type garment, with a pen in the left pocket. Glasses adorn his face, and a second pair dangles from around his neck. His steps dance but emit a character of one who does not boast of his accomplishments. Father Chacour adjusts the microphone and turns to address his audience: "Over the political situation, we need some sign of hope—a little smile." We smile. Father Chacour continues to tell us that he is a Palestinian-Arab-Christian and a citizen of Israel. He goes on to tell us he was not born a Christian but as a baby "created in the image of the likeness of God Himself." He says we became Christians, Jews, Moslems, lord and slave, Jew and Gentile, and conflicts developed because we forgot our original birth certificate. He says we are all children of an Iraqi citizen by the name of Abraham of Mesopotamia. Then he tells us that God is not Christian either!

Father Chacour says that for a long time the world needed someone who spoke with authority. The one who came was a man from Galilee—Jesus. He says that the people here in Galilee still smell His presence under the trees and that the rocks speak about Him, the risen Lord.

Father Chacour was born in the Galilee in the village Biram. When he was eight years old, the Israelis destroyed his village during the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians over land. Although no one lives in Biram, the villagers have never been allowed to return to their homes. The Palestinians have been homeless in their homeland for fifty years and are treated as second class citizens. There are 130,000 Palestinian-Arabs who are citizens of Israel.

As a village priest in 1982, Father Chacour noticed that for the 8,000 Christian and Moslem villagers, there was no high school. Seventy-five percent of people in Arab communities

at the time were under twenty-eight years old and fifty percent were under fourteen years old. Father Chacour decided to build a high school for these children.

In the village, there was no gas, regular water, electricity, or telephone. He lived in his Volkswagon Beetle for six months and applied for a building permit to build a school. Since the land he had bought was not listed for Arab use, the government would not give him the permit. He decided the government needed the permit and he needed the building. He started building. In 1982, eighty-two fourteen year-olds lined up at the unfinished building to start school. Mar Elias students now number over 4,000 and are still growing in numbers.

In 1986, when Father Chacour could not get a building permit to build a gymnasium, he flew to the home of former Secretary of State James Baker. The Bakers and Father Chacour became prayer partners and friends. Through the Bakers' help, the Israeli government became more cooperative and have recently accredited the Mar Elias University where Christians, Moslems, Jews, and Druze will teach and study together.

Father Chacour tells us the children of Galilee need our help and invites us to work with them to prepare for the common future they want for their children.

We applaud Father Chacour with a standing ovation. The Bishop joins Father Chacour at the podium. Mesmerized, we sit down.

The Bishop addresses Father Chacour, "Father, we are honored to be in your presence and in your school, and we're so thankful for your ministry here and for your words of grace, peace, and reconciliation for all people and for all nations. Some of you may not know that our church honored Father Chacour by presenting him with the World Methodist Peace Prize."

"If you would like to visit the literature table and purchase a book, please do," Dr. John says. "Father Chacour is willing to sign them. We have to be timely."

I walk over to the table where a young woman stands with the books. She smiles. Our eyes meet, and I nod back. I pick one of the books up and thumb through the pages, not really looking at it, and place it back on the table.

Having been lost in a fog, a quick panic nudges me to remind me that I need to go to the bathroom before I get back on the bus. I follow the directions the girl at the table gives me. The bathrooms are stark but clean. I wash my hands and head outside to find the others. Everyone stands in the parking lot near the buses. The sun is bright now and the sky blue.

Thelma still wears her raincoat. The morning is brisk but not cold. The wind is still. Birds chirp. The hillside, where the school is, overlooks the houses scattered everywhere. The houses are made of concrete type material but look friendly. A few trees dot the landscape, but none are tall enough to cast shadows. Cars meander along the twisting road.

The school building is also made of concrete. By it stands a retainer wall with a large white dove and *peace* painted on it. The parking lot is large like all the others. We seem to be the only people who use the Israeli parking lots; they look empty. The emptiness fills as my eyes spot Abuna and his assistant. They wave to us as the bus turns onto the road that brought us here.

When we pass a little boy on the side of the road, I imagine Jesus' little feet walking here in Galilee. My heart breaks to think that the children who walk in His steps suffer. Tears swell in my eyes and I know I cannot let this be. I remember Father Chacour saying that he welcomes anyone's help. He mentioned technology. I know I could help him with that. And I could help him with marketing and raising money. Maybe I have finally found someone who will let me help. Through the years I tried to help the children's home and the organization for the blind, but they both said they did not need any help.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

Father Chacour's thirst for peace and reconciliation and respect for life makes me think of my lifelong hero, Albert Schweitzer. I chuckle, remembering how I would rise each morning and ask Dr. Schweitzer how I might assist him this day. I would imagine what we would do and how I might help. As the years passed, studying the spirit of Dr. Schweitzer grew into a recognition of the United Nations. I vowed to work for peace in the world. How incredible! I could help people and work for peace with Father Chacour—Abuna, as his friends call him. I could stay here and start work immediately!

The emotions tire me. The colorful fruit at the market along the road soothes my vision. We pass women shaking rugs out the back door of an upstairs apartment house. Someone mentions it is a special day and people put rugs out to air. The normalcy of daily tasks offers a respite from the wave of inspiration and the new.



Fruit stands we pass during the bus ride.

David points out the Mount of Precipitation on our way to Nazareth. This is where the people of Jesus' original hometown drove him out and up to the brow of the hill. They wanted to throw him off the cliff, but Jesus passed through them and disappeared in the midst of them.¹⁰ (Luke 4:29-30)

David tells us that to be a guide in Israel, you must first earn a degree. His professor told his class that if they were questioned about a place and did not know the answer, they should just make one up. One of the first tours David guided were rabbis. The older rabbi and leader of the group sat dozing at the front of the bus. One of the younger rabbis pointed to the Mount of Precipitation and asked David the name of it. David thought and thought, but could not remember the name of the hill. Following his instructor's orders, David replied, "Mount of Jumpfication." The old, sleeping rabbi, jumped up out of his seat, shaking his finger in David's face. "What are you saying? There is no Mount of Jumpfication!"

We all laugh. I welcome a funny story, and the tourist element provides a needed contrast to the inspiring morning.

Nazareth is the town of Mary, the Virgin Mother of Jesus, and the place where Jesus grew up. Here, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she would be the mother of Jesus, the Savior.¹¹ (Luke 1:26-38)

We arrive in Nazareth and stop at the Church of the Annunciation, said to be built over the place where Gabriel appeared to Mary. The elements in this church are congruent. Tan and white striped materials adorn the outside to emphasize the building's design. The tan and brown mosaic floor drinks the light seeping through the stained glass windows. I focus on a pit in the center of the church. A priest stands behind a communion table covered in white linen. People

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Left: Close-up of statue on top of church

Below: Church of the Annunciation, built in 1964 with donations from Roman Catholic communities all over the world to commemorate Mary; the church represents the largest active Christian community in Israel



Left: First floor looking into the grotto of the Holy Family at the Church of the Annunciation

Below: Second floor of church.

Below left: "Shook Foil," Madonna from USA

Below middle: Madonna from Japan made with common seed pearls and gold

Below right: Architecture here takes you from the earth and God's creation to the triumphal church of God's kingdom





Synagogue of Nazareth

rim the pit and recite from a book. From here, we see another room. In this room, many imaginations of Madonna and Child grace the walls. The one that captures my attention is the one from Japan. The cape of the Madonna touts thousands of tiny white pearls. The Church of the Annunciation cost eighteen million dollars.

The Synagogue of Nazareth is said to be the original synagogue of Jesus. History records Jesus teaching in this synagogue. Warm yellow light bathes the white stone walls. A sign reads *Synagogue*. Curved archways lead us into the main area.

A person in our group begins, “Luke 4: 14-30, And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day.

“And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’

“And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

“And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’”

“And he said to them, ‘Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself; what we have heard you did at Caper’na-um, do here also in your own country.’ And he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Eli’jah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and Eli’jah was sent to none of them but only to Zar’ephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Eli’sha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Na’aman the Syrian.’

“When they heard this, all in the synagogues were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But passing through the midst of them he went away.”

We pray a silent prayer, then sing, “Hallelujah, Hallelujah.”

Below: Scene from the bus in Nazareth

Right: Arab gentleman wearing a Palestinian Keffiyeh. in Nazareth



Outside, guys yell, “Ten postcards, one American dolla! Twenty bookmarks, one American dolla!” Thelma buys more postcards.

I follow the group without paying much attention. We stop briefly at Mt. Carmel where Ahab calls Eli’jah a troubler of Israel. Eli’jah says Ahab has forsaken the commandment of the Lord and followed the Ba’als. The confrontation is here at Mt.Carmel.¹² (I Kings 18:16-19)

We read, “I Kings 18: 20-39. So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel, and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Eli’jah came near to all the people, and said, ‘How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Ba’al, then follow him.’ And the people did not answer him a word.

“Then Eli’jah said to the people, ‘I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD; but Ba’al’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men.

“‘Let two bulls be given to us; and let them choose one bull for themselves, and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; and I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, and put no fire to it. And you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, he is God.’

“And all the people answered, ‘It is well spoken.’

“Then Eli’jah said to the prophets of Ba’al, ‘Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire to it.’

“And they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Ba’al from morning until noon, saying, ‘O Ba’al, answer us!’ But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped about the altar which they had made.

“And at noon Eli’jah mocked them, saying, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.’ And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out over them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice; no one answered, no one heeded.

“Then Eli’jah said to all the people, ‘Come near to me;’ and all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down; Eli’jah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the

LORD came, saying, 'Israel shall be your name;' and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, 'Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the burnt offering, and on the wood.' And he said, 'Do it a second time;' and they did it a second time. And he said, 'Do it a third time;' and they did it a third time. And the water ran round about the altar, and filled the trench also with water.

"And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Eli'jah the prophet came near and said, 'O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.'

"Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O LORD, art God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back.'

"Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

"And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.'"

Someone asks, "Will you join me as we pray? Father, like Elijah long ago, like Joshua long ago, this day we must choose who will be our God. You or the gods of the world. Oh, God, I pray that we will choose You to be our God. That we might see ourselves as Your servants, that we may seek to do all that You command. In the name of the One who came first in love of us."

Our singing fills the air:

"What a mighty God we serve,
what a mighty God we serve,
angels stop before him,
heaven and earth adore him.
What a mighty God we serve."

Our next stop is Cana of Galilee. A gentleman at a store here demonstrates how ancient wine bottles functioned. He pours water from the side holes. Some buy a wine jug. David reminds us that Jesus performed His first miracle here when He changed water to wine at the wedding in Cana.¹³ (John 2:1-11)

We stop for lunch at a gourmet grocery store with a café. I study all the products, buy a small jar of olive oil, and crackers and a soft drink for lunch. Most places sell Coke, but here, people are drinking Pepsi.

Mother, Aunt Jean, Thelma, and I sit down at a long table adorned with a red tablecloth. Everyone quietly eats. In the quietness, I start thinking about Abuna and the children of Galilee. A smile crosses my face as my heart sparkles with the excitement of finding someone that needs my help. I sense that Mother knows something is going on, but she hides it well.

Finally, I think I will burst if I do not tell someone about my discovery. I must phrase what I say exactly right so Mother will support my decision. Since Mother and Daddy have thoroughly enjoyed my security at the university, I decide to frame my news under the guise of working at a school.

I start, "I keep thinking about that school. Wasn't the priest great? Isn't it funny that we visited a school in the Holy Land?"

Thelma says, "Father Chacour is really a nice man."

Leave it to Thelma for the perfect segue. I take a deep breath. “You know, I could help his school with technology. Wouldn’t it be great for Jews and Palestinians to hold classes over the internet with Emory? I could even move here and work at the school. I could just stay here and not go back home.”

Mother jerks her head up, sets her drink on the table, and says, “You will go home!” Then, deciding to convince me with reason, she adds, “Remember the book, *Not Without My Daughter*, you gave me to read? Men do not respect women in this part of the world. You would be in danger.”

Thelma and Jean try to convince me I can do more for these children in the States. I am not convinced. Noticing that I am quickly digging my heels in, Mother decides to put an end to the discussion. “I brought you here, and I will take you home. I will carry you and put you on that plane if I have to, but you are going home. Do you understand, young lady?”

I look down at the soft drink can I have been rubbing with my hand, pain stabbing my heart. I will the tears back with sheer determination. With the same determination, I vow to myself, “I will help this man!”

Outside, the bus chugs and my stomach churns as we stand in line to go to our seats. David’s announcement takes my mind off of our lunch discussion. “Folks, we have CDs and tapes of folk music, a video of Israel, and a beautiful book with color photographs for sale for any of you who want to buy them.”

David loves country music, especially Willie Nelson. He turns the tape player on and pops in a tape. Willie Nelson bellows, “Georgia, Georgia, the whole day through; just an old sweet song keeps Georgia on my mind; Georgia, Georgia, a song of you; comes sweet and clear as moonlight through the pines...”

I can hardly believe my ears. Even Willie Nelson sings about Georgia. Okay, okay. I will go back home to Georgia, but I am going to help this man and these children, and I mean it!

At the next stop, the sign reads, “Megiddo is one of the most ancient cities in the land of Israel, first settled about six thousand years ago. Commanding the strategic highway from Egypt to the North, it was the scene of numerous battles throughout history, from the conquest in 1479 B.C. by Thut-Mose III, King of Egypt, to its capture by Israeli forces in May 1948. General Allenby, Commander in Chief of the British Army, in the first World War passed through Megiddo in pursuit of the Turkish Army, 1918. It was fortified by King Solomon, together with the cities of Gezer and Hazor, and turned into a chariot centre by King Ahab. Its strategic character finds expression in Christian tradition, for Megiddo is the Armageddon in which the final battle will be fought at the ‘End of the Days.’ Archaeological excavation revealed more than twenty strata of settlement; ruins of fortifications, altars, palaces, as well as stables of King Solomon. The underground water system, hewn by Ahab to withstand siege, is well preserved, and is one of the most interesting of its kind.”

Drizzle begins to fall as we start up the seventy-three steps at Megiddo. The stairs took nine and a half years to carve. We reach the top. At the top, we see a manger from 820 B.C. The manger Jesus laid in would be similar to this manger, unlike the wooden ones we usually imagine. This is where Mother’s back started the first signs of the cancer of the spine we would later discover. Mother did not tackle these steps.

As the wind whips, we read scripture: “Zachariah 12:11, On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadadrim’mon in the plain of Megid’do.

“Revelation 16: 14-21, for they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

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(‘Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!’) And they assembled them at the place which is called in Hebrew Armaged’don.”

A shiver runs down my spine as the wind whistles. This place looks like death waiting to reclaim breath from life.

We stop to see the City Water System built by Ahab. We walk down the long bridge that leads into a dark, cave-like tunnel. It appears that we are walking directly into the center of the mountain. Once inside, we encounter lots of metal steps.



A manger, like Jesus would have slept in, at top of Meggido where horses and chariots would have been kept



Meggido—

Left: Notch in the center shows the different levels of cities; there are twenty-three cities on top of one another

Right: Grain silo from Solomon's City

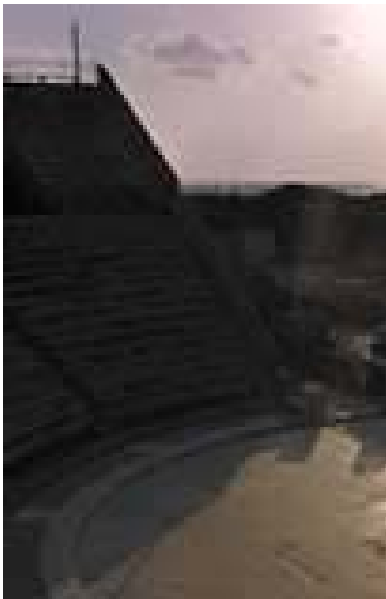
Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Left: Water tunnel that brings water outside Meggido inside the city walls, believed to be built during reign of Ahab

Right: Empty tomb by the side of the road

Below: Roman amphitheater at Caesarea by the Sea



The sign at our next site reads “The Roman Theatre Casarea.” Here there are lots of ruins and some Byzantine graves. The area that grabs most of our imagination is the big stone theatre with terraced seats in a semi-circle style. The original capacity was eight thousand people. Some of the theatre was destroyed in the earthquake of 749 A.D. A couple of different groups decide to test the acoustics of the theatre and break into song, “The Sweetest Name I’ve ever heard . . .” Several guys sing, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, there’s something about that name . . .”

The overcast sky casts a chill over the theatre. We wander around and head back to the bus within fifteen minutes of stopping. As we drive towards Caesarea by the Sea, we travel on a strip of road lined with thorn trees, the kind used to form the crown placed on Christ’s head at the crucifixion.

Ali pulls the bus along the side of golden arches—no, not McDonald’s. The original arches of Caesarea By the Sea. David informs us, “You have ten minutes here, folks.” Mother decides to stay on the bus again. Now, I worry that I have upset her by my talk about staying here. I hurry and jump out to make pictures and walk on the top of the ancient Roman aqueduct.

The sun, coming from the other side, washes the huge stone arches in glimmering gold. The arches start at infinity behind us and lead to the Sea. The sea lapses to a shore of sand. The sun quickly fades and a beach wind blows up. We explore this beach alone. Pat and Amelia walk to the water’s edge. The sun silhouette’s them against the Sea.

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Right: Roman Aqueduct at Caesarea by the Sea

Left Bottom: Opposite side of the Roman Aqueduct at Caesarea by the Sea, bathed by the sun

Right Bottom: Pat Jansen and granddaughter Amelia looking out over the Mediterranean



Herod the Great named this place Caesarea for Augustus, the Roman Emperor. Here, Simon Peter witnessed to Cornelius, a Roman head soldier who became one of the first Gentile converts.¹⁴ (Acts 10:24-48) We also find an inscription with reference to Pontius Pilate.

We read Acts 25: 13-27, about Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea. "Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Berni'ce arrived at Caesar'a to welcome Festus. And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, 'There is a man left prisoner by Felix; and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews gave information about him, asking for sentence against him. I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up any one before the accused met the accusers face to face, and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. When therefore they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought in. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed; but they had certain points of dispute with him about their own superstition and about one Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wished to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I commanded him to be held until I could send him to Caesar.'

"And Agrippa said to Festus, 'I should like to hear the man myself.'

"'Tomorrow,' said he, 'you shall hear him.'

"So on the morrow Agrippa and Berni'ce came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then by command of

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Festus, Paul was brought in. And Festus said, 'King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death; and as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him.'

The cool wind drives us to return to the bus. We ride to Tiberias exhausted. When the bus arrives at the hotel, Dr. John tells us to have our luggage out at the bus by 7:30 in the morning. We will spend the following night in Jerusalem. In my naiveté, I have no idea what Jerusalem holds in store.

Tonight jet lag hits us. After supper, we go straight to our rooms. Jean and I both pack and lay out our clothes for tomorrow.

A tremendous storm rolls across the Sea of Galilee during the night. Heaven met earth today in the little village Ibillin. Is the storm the answer to Mother's summons of God? Many people lay awake, frightened. I vaguely hear something but am too tired to wake up. The voice slips through my mind. I realize he did not speak to me today. Is this a good sign or bad?



Cartney's Angel

And then He will send out the angels, and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Mark 13:27

Thursday, January 29, 1998

The flowers proudly display moisture from the night's storm. The air smells sweet. As we walk towards the bus to drop off our luggage, the rich brown dirt by the sidewalk catches my eye. Without thinking, I bend down and scoop some of the soil into my palm, pummeling it to feel the coolness. Galilee, you found me. I cannot stay now, but I will carry you in my heart where you will grow and I will discover. I reach my hand into my camera bag and find an empty film container. I pile the soil into the container and tuck it safely in my purse. This soil will bring me back.

We leave our luggage with that already waiting beside the bus and return to the dining room to eat breakfast. We hurry through breakfast with renewed nervousness. We are leaving Tiberias and the Galilee today and will spend the night in Jerusalem. Jerusalem!

On the bus, after we offer prayers, David surprises us by playing "Amazing Grace" on the mouth harp he inherited from his Russian grandfather. The song reminds me of the coolness of the dirt. I am happy that Jesus would have been comforted by this same coolness before His trip up to Jerusalem, before His amazing grace.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Left: Close-up view of Beit Shean from the bus

Below: The green hill is Beit Shean, the lower part shown in the picture is Scythopolis



Our first stop of the morning is Beth She'an. It is located at the entrance to the Jezreel Valley on the south to north road that runs from the Galilee to the Dead Sea. Beth She'an is a major archeological site with columns and more columns and heavy equipment. It was once a major city. We wander around looking at the different areas of the archeological dig. I pass an area at the amphitheater and notice a sign, "The Eastern Bathhouse." Someone remarks, "If water were in it, it'd be totally functional."

I walk around the site and wander away from the group. I look down into an area that looks like it was once the base of a large building. Rows of round concrete-like pedestals fill the enclosure. I see something pink on the other side of the structure. I screw my telephoto lens on the camera and focus to see what is pink. To my surprise, a crusty old man eats his breakfast as he sits on a small raised area and leans against the wall. I notice the steam escaping from his coffee mug. The pink plastic basket filled with his personal supplies sits at his right foot. I look at him for a long time. I study him through my camera lens. It's the funniest exchange. Without ever acknowledging my presence or missing a sip of his morning coffee, the old man looks straight through the lens and into my eyes. It is difficult to decide if he belongs to this world or another. He is now and yesterday. I finally decide he is a bridge between the worlds. We have long conversations without speaking a word. His insights allow me to unconsciously discover secrets of the land.

A lot of life passed through this land. During the Hellenistic Period, 323-31 B.C., Beth-She'an was renamed Scythopolis. The city sparkled during the prosperous Roman-Byzantine periods, 135-638 AD. Archeologists uncovered twenty settlements on the tel, a hill resulting from one settlement after the other being built on top of the ruins of the former one. It is chilling to remember that it was here that Saul and his sons' headless bodies were hung from the ancient wall after they were killed at Mt. Gilboa.¹⁵ (I Samuel 31:1-13) With that thought I am ready to leave.

On the bus, David says, "We are on the road known as the Road of the Patriots which is one of the key roads I mentioned to you yesterday before arriving at Meggido. But you have to

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Above left: Israeli man in the distance at the dig



Above center: Close-up of Israeli man having his breakfast at the dig



Above right: Close-up of dig

Belowleft: Theatre at Scythopolis

Below right: Cardo of Roman City at Beth Shean, capitol city of the Decaoplis cities



Twelve Days to Jerusalem



*Samaria, view from the bus
on the way to Jacob's Well*

remember that in Jesus' day, most of the traffic consisted of caravans. The pilgrims, the merchants, would have used the roads. Look at those tents. The ones in Jesus' day wouldn't have looked much different from these with one exception. They wouldn't have had the TV antenna on the tent. So tonight he's gonna sit in his tent, and he's gonna watch *Seinfeld*."

Why would you keep living in tents but buy televisions? Here I am again bracketed between the beginning and now. What a strange phenomena!

I try to comprehend the background David shares as we ride along. I hear pieces of what he says, "When the Jews are returning to the land from Babylon, they are being given permission by Cyrus, the Persian King, to begin rebuilding the temple that was destroyed by the Babylonians. And then the Samaritans come over to the Jews and ask if they could participate in the building of the temple, and the Jews turn down their offer. Because the Jews know that if they're gonna allow the Samaritans to participate in the building of the temple, they would be exposed to the situation of marrying first cousins which caused terrible diseases among Samaritans."



Samaria, on our way to Jacob's Well

Left: Bedouin lady

Middle and Below: Bedouin tents





Soldier at a pay phone by the side of the road as we go to Jacob's Well

Samaritans are an offshoot of Judaism. And like Jews, Samaritans do not believe their people should marry outside their beliefs. Since the Samaritans have been in only one region for a long time and many converted to other faiths, their population did not grow like the Jews and they have had to marry first cousins to stay within their own people. We now know that marrying first cousins causes birth defects.

“Three hundred Samaritans still live in Shechem, another three hundred live in Israel. The most famous (Samaritan) family is Sedaka. You have a singer in America called Neil Sedaka, who is from Samaria. In Roman days, Samaritans numbered around three million people. They are today just a handful of people. Many of the Samaritans accepted the Christian faith during the Byzantine period. Many of them were forced into Christianity later on by the Crusaders. Slowly, slowly, they lost their roots ‘til the numbers came down to almost nothing.”

David places a tape in the tape player at the front of the bus. Tammy Wynett’s voice drifts to us, “Just a closer walk with thee . . .”

David begins talking again: “You will see Mt. Gerizim ahead of you. Mt. Ebal is to your right. On top of Mt. Gerizim are the remains of an ancient temple which was built by the Samaritans.”

Tammy’s voice picks up again, “Cheer up my brother . . .”

Dr. John tells us that for the first time in ten years, general tourists will be allowed to visit Jacob’s Well, our next stop. Why are we allowed when others have been turned back for so long?

Jacob’s Well is located in Nablus, an old Arab town in the northern part of the West Bank with about 240,000 people. Nablus sits between the Gerizim and Ebal Mountains. The ancient Canaanite city Shechem lies in the eastern part of the modern Nablus. Nablus is about thirty-two miles north of Jerusalem and a major commercial hub and trading center for Palestinians.

The area’s first trace of history appeared in 2000 B.C. Around 700 B.C., the Samaritans took over the town. During 200 B.C., the Maccabean ruler destroyed the town. A Roman emperor established a new town around 72 A.D. Arab Moslems captured it in 636 A.D., and the Crusaders captured it in 1099 A.D. Nablus returned to Moslem control in 1187 A.D. It became a part of Jordan in 1949, then under Israeli control in 1967. Palestinians took control in 1995 and remain so today. Nablus still makes history with tension in the area stemming from checkpoints at the many Israeli settlements around Nablus.

Nablus, focusing on that area referred to as Shechem in the Bible, holds an equally active Biblical history. Abraham offered his first sacrifice to God here, and the patriarch Joseph is buried here. Jacob lived here. On Jacob’s land was a well, the one we call Jacob’s Well. Here, Jesus revealed Himself as the Messiah to a Samaritan woman when He stopped to ask her for a drink of water. In those days, rabbis were forbidden to speak to a woman in public, and Jews considered Samaritans to be unclean. Christians, Jews, Moslems, and Samaritans all agree, that the well we are about to visit, is the very well Jesus stopped at to get a drink of water. Here He

encountered the Samaritan woman and taught her the meaning of spiritual water. During the Byzantine period, a church was built over the well, and the Crusaders built one over that one. The Russian Orthodox Church started a church that was not completed. The Greek Orthodox take care of Jacob's Well. The underground spring that feeds the well keeps the water fresh and cool.

Ali parks the bus on the side of the street. The clouds, which have gradually grown gray during the morning, release a fine mist as we step outside. Umbrellas rise higher as people dodge puddles. The falling rain refreshes my face. All three of our buses have come to Jacob's Well at the same time. I do not know if it is safer with all three together, or if we are hurrying before they rebuke our invitation.

The tourists on the Bishop's bus descend the steps into the room with the well. Our busload searches for a place to wait out of the rain. We huddle under a stone shelter, waiting to go down to Jacob's Well. I notice a scaffold stands around the building facing us. This place looks deserted, like the Rapture came, leaving work in progress.

David wears a toboggan, sweatshirt, his worn brown leather jacket, and sunglasses. He holds his pipe between his teeth. His tobacco smells like Captain Black, just like Bill's. "The well is probably one of the deepest ancient wells. And you know, sometimes I'm using the term maybe and sometimes I'm using the term traditional."

When it is possible that something in history happened at a location, guides use the word "maybe." They use the word "traditional" when it is very probable that history happened at a location, and that history is celebrated at the traditional spot. Traditional places often become authentic locations when archeologists and historians agree they are precisely those referenced in the Bible and history.

"Most Bible scholars strongly believe that this is the well the Bible talks about. It's a typical first century A.D. sort of well. Although, remember it was already in the Old Testament when the well was serving some of the farmers and shepherds in the area. It is known as Jacob's Well because Jacob dug this well. Jacob had a vision of a ladder to heaven. When he woke up he named it Bethel or House of God. Jacob dug this well when he returned to this region. You remember the story about Rachel, the woman that Jacob married? Don't forget that he had to pay fourteen years of labor for this woman." With a chuckle David adds, "It wasn't that cheap."

A gentleman from crowd says, "It never is." We all laugh. "But it's worth everything."

As we continue to wait in the rain, we are lighthearted. People crack jokes. The guy that I nicknamed Indiana Jones when we were in the New York airport still wears his Indiana Jones hat and coat. He's a cool and funny minister. He says, "Well, here we are waiting for Rachel to show up again. She's late, late again."

Someone answers, "She's down at the mall."

Indiana replies, "Somebody page her."

Another says, "Do you know her number?"

Finally, it is time for our group to go down to the well. Going through the little white arched doors makes us look like we disappear into the ground. It reminds me of a doghouse. The narrow stairway is cold, dark, and damp, and descends into the small room with the well. We pack tightly. Above the chatter, the predominant sound is the clanking and squeaking as David draws water from Jacob's Well. The rope is long. "Okay, we are filling it up now." Light rains soft turquoise and pale peach and gray.

As David cranks the rope up, the noise increases and the crowd chants, “David, David, David.” Then people start the Atlanta Braves Indian Chant with the Tomahawk Chop. Ironically, the taste of reality heightens my thirst for the holiness of the water.

A gentleman from the crowd says, “Just think, in Jesus’ time this was women’s work.”

David replies, “And we intend in this country to live with women doing the work. It’s just a demonstration right now.” The group smiles as David turns the handle.

David finally catches the bucket and pulls it, full of water, to sit on the side of the well. “Water, ice cold, folks. Excellent to drink from. They say it’s good enough for queens.” We laugh.

Dr. John says, “You want to get some idea how deep the well is? Everybody be real quiet. Water falls at 9.8 meters per second. It’s about thirty meters.” We quietly listen as a cup of water falls back into the well, then finally meets the larger body with a faint tinkle.

Dr. John continues, “Leanne is going to do the reading here. Do you have the Bible? For the setup of the reading, imagine instead of this being a cold and rainy day coming here, that it is a day much the same as what we had the day before yesterday at around noon. That it’s in the brightness of the day. Women’s work was to draw the water in the morning and in the evening. But here, we have this encounter between Jesus and this woman in the noon day sun.”

I stand a little to the side and look around. I see a glass cabinet that is full of icons and prayers. I would not want to put prayers with others or where everybody can look at them.

David draws water out of the well. The thought that I am about to drink water from the same well as Jesus overwhelms me. I look around, seeking something to grasp to calm me.

Secrets of the earth pour forth as tributaries that have cooled this soil for hundreds of thousands of years. Just as I am immersed in the sound of the water, the Voice breaks in. “Get Cartney’s prayer out.” I jump before realizing he is bringing another mission.

At this point, I feel somewhat like one of Charlie’s Angels who gets her assignments from a voice over the phone. Or, maybe that recorded voice that self-destructs in thirty seconds, “This is your mission, if you choose to accept it.” Cartney would find this amusing. One of his favorite movies is *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. He loved reading *The Chronicles of Nania* and *The Lorax*. When he was three, he could recite entire Dr. Seuss books. In 1993, he made me a picture of the Lorax that hangs in our study. Now that I think of it, this place echoes Cartney from the plain, unsuspecting entry to its mysterious depths. And yet, there’s almost a giddiness from the promise of living water offered by Jesus to a woman most thought unworthy.

I hesitate, then object as respectfully as possible. “Well, I don’t really want to put Cartney’s prayer with all those other prayers. People might throw them away.”

The Voice replies, “I have a special place for your son’s prayer. If you will look to your left, there is a picture on the wall of the Madonna and Child. I want you to put Cartney’s prayer behind it.”

I am puzzled. “What? Put a prayer behind a picture on a wall? How would you do that?” I wonder if he understands the properties of gravity. I would not want to just stick it back there. If the picture moves, then the prayer will fall. “I don’t want to do that.”

Perplexed and realizing everyone is drinking from the well, absently I think out loud, “I really want to go get my water. I don’t want to miss my water.”

“You need to trust me. I want you to put Cartney’s prayer behind the picture of the Madonna and Child to your left.”

“This is not going to work.”

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

The Voice shows a slight annoyance. “Mary, will you please quit arguing with me and do what I’m telling you to do? I know what I’m doing.”

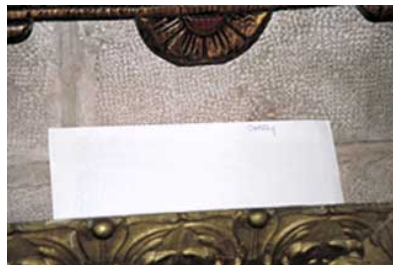
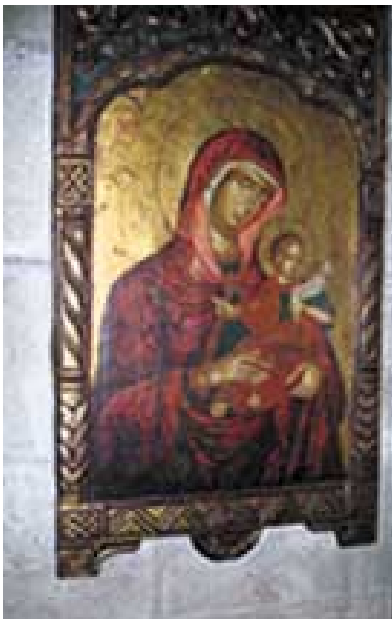
“I’m going to go over there, but these people are going to think I’m stupid, looking behind a picture on the wall. I should be getting my water, not listening to nonsense!” With Cartney’s prayer in my hand, I walk over to the picture and look behind it. On the back of the frame, I guess maybe five inches up from the bottom, is a ledge on which the envelope with Cartney’s prayer fits perfectly.

Embarrassed by my doubting, I say “If this is where you want to put his prayer, it should be safe.” Behind the Madonna and Child, does this have meaning? The only thing I can think of in the midst of the whirlwind is that my name is Mary, and when Cartney was born, we lived in part of a stable that had somewhat been converted into a living area.

I take a picture that shows Cartney’s name on the envelope, then put it on the ledge and take another picture. Afterwards, I slide it all the way in. I am in awe.

I refocus on getting my water as I glimpse an older gentleman with a long, gray beard sitting on the opposite side of the room. He melts wax from a candle to seal small blue and white vessels. The light from the candle warms his face. He reminds me of Cartney.

The well creaks. Water is drawn. Many activities happen simultaneously in this small space. From the outside, no one would ever guess this is here. How judgmental we are as human beings! If we knew where the treasure hides, would we enjoy the journey? I stop in mid-thought. “Thank you, God. What an incredibly special gift! Even Jesus talking to the woman at the well, it is so Cartney. So incredibly Cartney that I know something special just happened. I have been given an incredible gift, an incredible gift. When I placed that prayer behind the Madonna and Child, I knew my son was given a blessing, a protection for some reason, the living water for which we all thirst.”



Left: Madonna and Infant Jesus in this Greek Orthodox church built around Jacob’s Well; Cartney’s prayer sits on a block behind this picture

Top: Cartney’s prayer leaning on top of frame beneath the Madonna picture



Left: Madonna picture to left of icon screen; according to the Greek Orthodox, in order for a place to become a church it must have icons; this becomes the iconic screen

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Left: Dr. John, his wife Pat to the far left, Amelia in middle, and Amelia's mother and father in the rear

Middle: Jacob's Well

Right: The hole of Jacob's Well



It is as if God is saying, "Mary, I understand, know, and love this child as much if not more than you do. This is how I am telling you. I am helping you. I am showing you. I'm sharing with you the love of My Son."

My attention comes back to the group as I hear LeAnne's voice. "I'll be reading John chapter 4, verses 3-26. He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. He had to pass through Samar'ia. So he came to a city of Samar'ia, called Sy'char, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samar'ia to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

"The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samar'ia?' For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

"Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.'

"The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?'

"Jesus said to her, 'Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

"The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.'

"Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.'

"The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.'

"Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, 'I have no husband;' for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly.'

"The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.'

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Priest of church that also prepares little ceramic water vessels for tourists to take water from Jacob's Well with them

“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’

“The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things.’

“Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am he.’”

Dr. John says, “Jacob’s Well, where Jesus tells us of the living water He offers, is not an easy place to get to physically or spiritually. We are fortunate to be allowed to come here today. We know that Jesus did not have to come this way to go to Jerusalem, but He did have to come this way to encounter a person who the world said was of no worth. Jews thought Samaritans unclean and avoided them. Jesus offered the woman at the well and us water that we might drink forever and be proclaimed worthy of God’s grace. This is a special place.”

I drink my water from Jacob’s Well, just as Jesus did. As I drink the water, I wonder how I can be sure Jesus shares His living water with me. The living water reminds me of the living stones—the children of the Holy Land—those Abuna talked about. “Jesus, please be sure I have Your blessing of the living water. I need it to help Abuna and those children. Please promise to help me.” A country song pops into my mind. It is about a little child calling his daddy to tell him he misses him and he wants him to come home. The daddy answers, “I’m already there.” My body relaxes.

I decide to buy a vessel of water to give to Cartney when I tell him about his prayer. I feel like I am watching a movie of myself as I continue to click one picture after another. During the entire trip, I intuitively document everything with photographs.

We climb the steps and head for the bus. The air clears, leaving some clouds. On our drive to lunch, we follow the old road to Jericho. Across the Jordan Valley from Jordan to Israel stretches a perfect rainbow in full glory. The rocks glisten from the rain and reflect the golden light of the sun.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Descent from Shiloh to the Jordan Valley. Rainbow extends from the Hills of Samaria (Israel) to the Hills of Gilead (Jordan)

In an effort to talk the driver into stopping for us to take a picture, we chant, “Ali, Ali.” It works. Sunlight intensifies the brilliance of the rainbow through the lens.

On our drive, we weave over, around, and through this rainbow. God promised the rainbow would symbolize His commitment to never flood the earth again after Noah’s Ark. People often compare my life to Job’s. Believe it or not, this comforts me because that means there is redemption at the end of the tears. I imagine walking across the rainbow that stretches to the other side. Before I know it, I reach the other side. Right in the middle of my old life, my new life begins.

With their own thoughts, Thelma and Mother follow the rainbow. Thelma turns from the window to Mother and says, “People are drawn to Mary, aren’t they?” The raindrops mesmerize me as they slide down the window.

The old Jericho Road stretches in front of us. David tells us Jericho is the oldest city in history and the city at the lowest elevation on the face of the earth. I should be impressed or at least moved to pay attention, but I sit like a zombie. Thoughts about my decision to help Abuna and the children of Galilee hold my heart and my attention. My new life has begun, and it’s only noon!

“Folks listen,” David says. “We still have to visit Jericho, and we still have to go to Qumran today so we’ll have to do lunch in an hour. At two o’clock we’re gonna meet by the bus and walk up onto the Old City of Jericho tel. You can eat lunch, then ride a camel in the parking lot here at the Temptation Shopping Center (named for the Mount of Temptation), but be ready at two o’clock.”

I decide to skip lunch to shop. Afterwards, we notice the sun shining and decide to wait in the parking lot. Ironically, years later, the Abu Raed family named Abdul Razick who own this restaurant and shopping complex become good friends and even donate land in Jericho for the Mar Elias schools. We meet the family in Atlanta, Georgia where they also have a home and business.

A guy walks around the parking lot with a camel, giving rides. He likes one of the ladies riding and starts walking off with her. What a hoot! He wears tennis shoes with white socks, a skirt, a white Arab keffiyeh, and a suit coat with a tie. He speaks little English. Several ride. I decide not to. As Indiana Jones rides, he asks, “Does this come with the Parsonage?” Indiana Jones puts his hat on the camel and the camel bows.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Above left and right: At Jericho, in the parking lot where we stopped for lunch and camel rides

Left: Thelma Mallory, left, and my mother, Talitha Goodroe, right, just before walking to the Wall of Jericho

David gathers us to walk to the Wall of Jericho. The Wall looks as if someone dug down in the ground several stories. Stacked rocks line the hole. How could they have stacked all of these rocks? Excavations of the tel show inhabitants dating back as far as ten thousand years.

Rain comes down steadily, but we continue our exploration. I sing as we walk, “Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho. Oh, Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down.”

Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land. After an angel with a sword appeared to Joshua, seven priests with seven trumpets marched with the soldiers around the city each day for six days. On the seventh day, they marched around it again. The seven priests blew their trumpets, and at Joshua’s order, the people shouted, and the walls came tumbling down.¹⁶ (Joshua 6:1-27)

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Both: The Wall of Jericho; Jericho is the most ancient excavated city in the world.

Jericho is also where Zacchaeus met Jesus. Zacchaeus was a rich tax collector who needed to share Jesus' table of confession and forgiveness. When he accepted Jesus as his Savior, he said he would give half of everything he owned to the poor and repay fourfold anyone he had defrauded.¹⁷ (Luke 19:1-10) I change my song: "Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in the Sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see. And as the Savior passed that way, He looked up in the tree and said, 'Zacchaeus, you come down for I'm going to your house today. For I'm going to your house to stay.'"

We make our way back to the bus and head to Qumran. The area inspires David to tell us about the Essenes. "The Essenes believed in the last days a great war will break out between the Power of Light, themselves, and the Power of Darkness, the rest of the world, which will be the bloodiest of the wars to ever be fought. And as a result of this war, there is going to be a great victory of the Power of Light over the Power of Darkness which will prepare the world for the arrival of what those people call the Teacher of Righteousness. These people believe in order to purify one's soul, one has to purify his body. In order to do so, they took their followers down to the Jordan River and baptized them in a source of running water at the very same place where John the Baptist baptized Jesus. At Qumran, some additional chapters of the book of Psalms that we didn't even know about before this were discovered. Psalms written by David as a very young man, mostly dealing with the life of a shepherd boy of the House of Jesse in the City of Bethlehem. These are part of what is known as the Dead Sea Scrolls."

We stop and step down from the bus. We climb the wooden stairs to the place that overlooks part of the settlement of Qumran. The National Parks' sign at the site reads:

"The Dead Sea scrolls, the most dramatic discovery in the history of the Jewish people, were found in 1947 (*my birthday*) in the caves on this site known as Khirbet Qumran.

Excavations showed that the buildings at Khirbet Qumran housed the spiritual and administrative centre of a mystical Jewish sect - apparently the Essenes. The scrolls formed a part of their literary heritage and many of them were composed by the members of the sect.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

Scholars are divided in opinion as to the identity and date of this sect. The excavations at Masada provide a partial answer to these questions. Among the many scroll fragments found there, a sectarian scroll fragment pertaining to the Qumran community, came to light. It appears that in the final phases of the revolt, members of the Qumran sect joined Zealots, the defenders of Masada, in their desperate struggle against the Romans. The discovery of the scroll at Masada provides definite proof that the Dead Sea scrolls antedate the destruction of the Second Temple.

The scroll's sect lived a fully communal life. This fact reflected in the buildings uncovered. The sect's main principle of faith was a strict adherence to Mosaic law and belief in predestination, according to them all creatures were divided into the sons of light and the sons of darkness, destined to struggle at the end of days, in heaven and on earth, until the sons of light should prevail. The members of the sect rejected the temple priesthood, established their own solar calendar and set forth stringent laws of purity and impurity. In order to carry out all their religious precepts, they established in the desert, founding a community based on their beliefs, in preparation for the end of days.

Fate decreed that the defenders of Masada and the Qumran community should find a common end. They were obliterated in the great revolt against Romans."

The settlement Qumran is at the Dead Sea, the lowest point on the face of the earth at 1290 feet below sea level. The glistening clear blue water challenges me to declare it dead or alive. I can do neither. The Dead Sea hides the past and shelters the future, paused somewhere between the ticks of the clock. We see nothing alive here, and yet it still exists. The salt gives the illusion of snow along the water's edge. We spot some of the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. A Bedouin shepherd, looking for stray goats, tossed a rock into the cave. The rock struck something making a clanking noise. He went in and found jars containing the Dead Sea Scrolls.

From the bus, I see the opening in the cave looks like a keyhole. Through my camera lens, I can see inside. I turn my camera back off and watch out my window. The two-lane roads are curvy. We pull off the side of the road and hop off the bus. Dr. John says, "If you go straight across the sea over here, you wind up in Moab. If you go back just this way to where we're going now, you go to Jerusalem.

"Two cousins meet out here when they're thirty years of age. One is John, who is somewhat associated with this community of Qumran, if that is the Essene community. He comes out here talking about repentance, talking about disciplined life, talking about a new way. And they ask him if he's the messiah. He says no. There's one who will follow after him.

"Just a few miles north where the Jordan runs into the top of this Dead Sea, John was busy about the business of baptizing. And Jesus comes here. While he is here, where nothing can live or sustain itself, God opens the Heavens and reveals to the world a new purpose. Jesus asks his cousin John the Baptizer, to baptize him. John says he is not worthy to baptize Jesus. And Jesus says, 'We must do this to fulfill all righteousness.'

"It amazes me how God chooses to pick the time and place to touch humanity. You would think that He would have been cleverer than to pick John from a village with only forty people. You would think that He would have decided to raise this person to some stature in the capital city of the country. But, instead, He decides to do it out here in the desert, out here where

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Here and above: Qumran and caves where Dead Sea Scrolls were found and home of the Essene Community

Left: Close-up of entry to cave where the scrolls were found

a wild-haired, strangely dressed guy calls people to repentance. Jesus comes here to fulfill all righteous. And He is still doing this today.

“There’s a hymn I’d like you to sing along with us. It’s ‘When Jesus Came to Jordan to Be Baptized by John.’”

Feeling like a traveler on a dusty road on the way to somewhere, the group sings,

“When Jesus came to Jordan to be baptized by John,

He did not come for pardon but as the sinless one.

He came to share repentance for all who mourn their sins

and seek the vital sentence with which good news begins.”

Dr. John says, “As the people of the desert, go and encounter the Christ who offers you the forgiveness of your sins.”

On the bus, the Old Roman Road reaches up and pulls me down to ride its treacherous curves. A lifetime has passed since the freshness of the morning rain winked from the flowers’ petals. Night prowls around the corner. Patchy shadows fall over the valley with threats of unexposed hazards. Ali wrenches the bus to the side of the road near the Monastery of St. George, built into a hillside. The Valley of the Shadow of Death mocks our arrival—like death, our last barrier on the journey up to Jerusalem, the Holy City.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Left: Treacherous road on the way to the Valley of the Shadow of Death



Right: St. George's Monastery at the Valley of the Shadow of Death and the place of the story of the Good Samaritan; the valley below is the Wadi Kelt Valley



Left: Shepherd and his sheep crossing in the Wadi Qelt Valley



Right: Road to Jerusalem

My heart lightens as I discover a shepherd crossing the hills with his sheep. The light silhouettes a cross on the hill. A rainbow crowns the cross. Light snow begins to fall as the sky turns darker, stormy, and windy. A chill runs down my spine. I shudder.

In the darkness, hope breathes through my body as the sky clears long enough for us to see the tower on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is sixteen miles from Jericho, up four thousand feet.

My eyes blur as I sense the turmoil that is always present in Jerusalem, there in the distance. I wonder what we will find there? Someone reads: “Luke 10: 29-37, but he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’

“Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii

and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?'

"He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.'

"And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'"

Reverently, looking out over the valley of sheep led by their shepherd, we whisper together the 23rd Psalm. "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

We silently board the bus. The sunset turns an unrealistic, bright blue-black. What rainbow did I cross over? What will the days ahead bring when I begin working with Abuna and the children of Galilee? What is God preparing me for? I am excited, and I am petrified. We travel to Jerusalem. I hum to myself a song I hear coming from somewhere,

"Hevenu shalom alechem,
Hevenu shalom alechem,
Hevenu shalom alechem,
Hevenu shalom shalom shalom alechem.
Hevenu shalom alechem,
Hevenu shalom alechem,
Hevenu shalom alechem,
Hevenu shalom shalom shalom alechem.

We arrive in Jerusalem. The bus stops at the front door of the hotel. How ironic, Jerusalem looks more modern than any place we have visited. Barely able to move, we check in, go to our room, and freshen up for dinner.

Unbelievably, at dinner, Dr. John tells us there will be buses to take any of us, who want to go, shopping in the Old City. I do not know if my body, mind, or soul can take any more stimuli today. But afraid we might miss something important, Mother, Thelma, Jean, and I decide to throw caution to the wind and go to the Old City. We grab our purses and coats and get on one of the small buses waiting at the front door.

Rain drizzles into the cold night air. We arrive and swiftly follow the others through uneven stone walkways in the mysterious, ancient archways covering the Old City. Darkness reflects from the rain-covered stones. We struggle to keep pace with the others. Some warn of the danger of muggers and thieves. Our fear of the unknown and unfamiliar echoes in each step.

Finally, we arrive at the Dajani's Orient Express, the store of Jamal Dajani and his family. Jamal is opening the store just for us to have this special time to shop. Once inside, we relax, feeling safe. The prices are very reasonable, and he gives us an additional discount. We buy more here than we have at any other place. Mother and I even buy several pieces of jewelry. We purchase Jerusalem crosses, which I wear from this day forward. I buy my niece, Wendy, a white prayer shawl for her birthday. Thelma buys more postcards.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

Several hours later, someone tells us it is time to leave and meet the vans to go back to the hotel. The group leaves the shop together but the pace increases and some have difficulty keeping up. I try to stay close enough to the people in front of me to know where to go. I do my best to go slow enough to keep an eye on Mother and Thelma behind us. When Jean and I arrive at the corner where the van is to pick us up, Mother and Thelma are not there. I have no idea if they have already been taken back to the hotel or are still walking. Panic engulfs me. Hoping they might already be on a van, Jean and I get on the next one. When we go into the hotel lobby, Mother and Thelma are nowhere in sight. Jean and I sit down to wait on them. Fifteen minutes later Mother and Thelma push through the lobby doors. I want to hug their necks, then I want to yell at them and tell them not to ever be away from me again! Back in the Old City, Mother had slowed down to wait on Thelma. By the time they reached the spot the van was to pick us up, no one was there. When the next van arrived, they rode back to the hotel.

Breathing easier, we take the elevators to our rooms. Maybe God took me shopping because the day was beginning to overwhelm me. Except for losing Mother, the shopping did bring my head out of the clouds. I do not know if I can ever get over today. I do not know if I want to get over it. In bed, I remember the three rainbows that led us to Jerusalem today; two were double rainbows. There is always rain before a rainbow can appear. Should I fear Jerusalem? Could God possibly turn my world upside down any more than He has? Surely not!



The Third Angel

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.
1 Timothy 3:16

Friday, January 30, 1998

A bell rings once, twice, three times into the darkness. Many people talk in Hebrew. In between sleep and wakefulness, I struggle with languages, Hebrew, English. My mind moves to wake me up. I realize I have been dreaming in Hebrew all night. I spoke to Jesus in His language. I wish I could tell you these dreams, but I can't. I don't speak Hebrew. I realize that I participated in the dreams and knew what was said but cannot translate them. I remember that during my high school days a language teacher said that when you really learn a language you dream in it. I studied four years of Spanish in high school and exempted six courses in college, but I never experienced this.

This morning Dr. Albright, a famous archeologist, is scheduled to give an hour lecture to us at 7:00 a.m. Not wanting to miss anything, my group decides to get up earlier than normal to eat and hear the lecture. We rush through breakfast, then rush down to the lower level.

Dr. John introduces Dr. Albright. Dr. Albright's list of credentials sounds endless. He looks about forty years old, with short brown hair. He wears dark blue jeans and a brown and

navy plaid shirt. Talking with a slight accent, he walks towards the slide projector to turn it on. From this point forward, I am lost. Dr. Albright spouts name after name and date after date and unheard of place after place. A queasy remembrance of history class fills my stomach. As he paces back and forth pointing to the lighted picture on the wall, he pulls up his pants by placing an index finger from each hand in belt loops on the back of his jeans. Watching him, I picture him as Walter Cronkite, two thousand years ago. I snicker to myself. I wonder if it would be easier to listen to him on tape. I wish I could comprehend the history he shares, something about the First Temple Period, Second Temple Period. Beats me.

My mind wanders away from the darkness in which we sit. I start anticipating the day with excitement. I lecture myself, okay, Mary, quit being so uptight about these prayers. So you don't know who this Voice is. You trust God, right? Relax. This is the Holy Land. Miracles happen. Realizing the Voice placed Amber and Cartney's prayers already, I think maybe mine will be next. Where are we going today? Surely, the Voice will direct my prayer to a special place. My right foot begins to shake up and down on the floor in anticipation. Please, Mr. Lecturer, hurry. I cannot wait to see where my prayer lives. This is Jerusalem!

Finally, the lecture ends. Our Hope group meets in the lobby and heads out into Jerusalem. As we walk by a church along the way, someone in the group begins singing, "Praise God, Praise God, Praise God," to the tune of *Amazing Grace*.

Under overcast skies, we go outside city gates and the Armenian Quarter, past the Dormitian Church, and arrive at Mt. Zion, David's Tomb, and the Upper Room, which are all together. The building is made of massive old beige stones with wide concrete fills holding them together. Hearing voices as we start to enter the room, we wait just inside the doorway.

The tourist group in front of us moves out. Dr. John and David briskly walk to the front of the room. David walks up a few of the steps and leans on the wrought iron railing as he talks. People crowd into the room.

I stop spellbound near the entry door. The Upper Room is larger than I expected. I always imagined an intimate dining room. This is more like an ancient ballroom. Large stones cover the floor and walls. The dark arched ceiling looks Greek but actually comes from the Crusader period. The arches leap from pillar to pillar with upwardly directed golden light, but the stone radiates a coldness.

Preoccupied, I notice a single, delicate, turquoise-blue, stained glass window that seems out of place.

I vaguely hear Dr. John, "...two people born in Bethlehem, King David and Jesus. The Upper Room focuses on both kings—one of Israel, one the King of Kings."

The lady who brought the big suitcase to Israel yells, "Glory to God, Glory to God."

There are many people in here and the stone floor and walls echo the noise. Dr. John and another minister stand on the steps in the back of the room.

Someone reads, "Matthew 26: 17-30. Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?'"

"He said, 'Go into the city to a certain one, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'"

"And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. When it was evening, he sat at the table with the twelve disciples; and as they were eating, he said, 'Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.'

"And they were very sorrowful, and began to say to him one after another, 'Is it I, Lord?'"

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

“He answered, ‘He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me, will betray me. The Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.’

“Judas, who betrayed him, said, ‘Is it I, Master?’

“He said to him, ‘You have said so.’

“Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’

“And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’

“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

Glued just inside the entry door, I glance from the people to the ancient room. The Voice again speaks into my left ear and summons me back to reality. “Get the envelope out with your friend’s prayer and start rolling it up.” By this time, I have decided I am the only one who can hear the Voice. This place is so noisy no one could hear it anyway.

Puzzled and somewhat stunned, I snap, “What? You want me to put that prayer here?” Remembering Jacob’s Well, I confirm that there is nothing on the walls. “It’s just a big empty room.”

Instinctively, I turn to my right as if following a moving target. “Why do you want me to roll it up? I didn’t roll up any of the other prayers. That is strange. Oh, and let me remind you, please. In case you have forgotten, his prayer happens to be five pages long! It is folded twice so that would be the equivalent of fifteen pages with an angel and an envelope. And you want me to roll up this prayer? That is too weird!”

The Voice calmly replies, “Please get the prayer out and begin rolling it up.” I hesitate. With a slight edge, the Voice says, “Just get it out and start rolling it up, and we’ll get through this. Okay?” Do not misunderstand me; the Voice is really nice. He just seems to want to say, “Come on, on with it. I’ve got a job to do here.”

Below: Door entering the traditional site of the Upper Room on Mt. Zion



Right: David talking to us at the Upper Room



Twelve Days to Jerusalem

I reply, "I'm going to try to roll it up, but remember I have arthritis. The thickness will make it difficult. This is so strange."

As I pull the envelope from my bag, the crowd sings,

"Let us break bread together on our knees,
let us break bread together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun, O Lord,
have mercy on me."

Everyone sings louder,

"Let us praise God together on our knees,
let us praise God together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun, O Lord,
have mercy on me."

The room is so dark that I am not sure a picture will take. I turn towards the door, lean the envelope against the wall outside the door. I snap a picture, then start working to roll it up.

The Voice hurries me. "Now, I want you to walk across the room."

With the echo of the last note, someone reads, "Acts 2: 1-4. When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them."

Indignantly, I argue that it would be rude to walk across noisy stone while scripture is read. The paper sounds too noisy already. The Voice disagrees, and I knew that his way was the way it was going to be.

I jump as a lady yells, "Hallelujah!"

Finally, I reach the wall at the other side. The Voice guides me. "Look for the hole near the stained glass window. There is a place in the corner."

Skeptically, I look, and find, the slanted hole that seems made for a rolled-up prayer. I take a picture of the window and the prayer.

Our group finishes the scripture: "Acts 2:4, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

I can't find my tongue, but the others sing, "Spirit of the Living God..." The group turns to follow David and Dr. John. I follow the group, thinking about betrayal, forgiveness, and unconditional love. The third angel and the Upper Room speak volumes.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Top left: Arched ceiling in Upper Room; single stained glass window in distance

Top right: Close-up of pillar

Bottom left: Lady shouting, "Hallelujah!"

Bottom right: Stone floor



Left: Single stained glass window in the Upper Room

Right: Rolled up prayer in the round hole in the corner of the Upper Room near the stained glass window



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Left: Door as you go out of the Upper Room

Right: Outside of the door

Dr. John says, “Hope bus out here.”

As we exit, another group fills the room and breaks into song. “Sweet Holy Spirit...” From another direction, I hear, “Site of one of the earliest Christian churches . . .”

We go downstairs and wait in a long line to go into the small room with King David’s Tomb. The tomb contains a huge casket draped with purplish velvet that has the Star of David all over it and Hebrew writing. Even Jewish authorities acknowledge this to be a Crusader burial, but it stands as a memorial shrine to King David.

A nun touches the casket to pray. Being in a room with these ancient relics, so up close and personal, boggles the mind. I have seen mummies; it is not the same. Jesus descended from King David. It is not just history, it is the lineage of faith.



Above left: Door to room containing King David’s Tomb

Center and right: Nun praying at King David’s Tomb

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Above left: Sign at entry to King David's Tomb

Above right and left: Domitian Abbey, which commemorates, for the Roman Community, Mary's falling asleep before she's carried to the Kidron Valley where she's assumed into Heaven

We head towards the Old City. I tune-in as I hear, "...professor mentioned this morning." That will not have any meaning for me. I was totally lost during that history lesson!

In the background, a lady sings, "Praise God, praise God..." We reach one of the gates at the Old City wall. Outside the gate, a man plays a harp. The walls of the Old City are two and one-half miles in circumference and about forty feet high.

David says, "Let's keep the group together."

Notes from the flute mingle with the chilly rain descending on Jerusalem. Jerusalem means City of Peace and is held sacred by Christians, Jews, and Moslems. Jesus' time here was during the Second Temple that was originally built by Zerubbabel in the sixth century B.C. and renovated under Herod the Great. Jews call the city Yerushalayim in Hebrew.¹⁸ (footnote: p. 93, The Holy Land Jubilee 2000) The Old City is surrounded by a wall built during the Ottoman period and integrated with walls from other periods. The city has eight gates: The Dung Gate, the Zion Gate, the Jaffa Gate, the New Gate, the Damascus Gate or the Shechem Gate, Herod's Gate or The Flower Gate, St. Stephen's Gate or the Lion's Gate, and the Golden Gate on the eastern wall of the Temple Mount, sealed and said to be the gate Jesus will enter when He returns to earth. The gates lead to the four quarters of the Old City: the Christian Quarter in the northwest with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Via Dolorosa; the Armenian Quarter in the southwest with the St. James Cathedral dedicated to St. James, the brother of St. John and one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus; the Jewish Quarter in the southeast with the Herodian

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Quarter; and the Moslem Quarter next to the Temple Mount in the northeast section and where most of the markets are located.¹⁹ (footnote: p 138-164, The Holy Land Jubilee 2000) Each quarter exists like a separate country with different languages, food, and customs.

We venture to the lower level and pass the old Roman columns in the Old City. I picture going shopping in ancient times. I take photographs of all the different soldiers until someone tells me not to.

We glimpse the Dome of the Rock and the Temple Mount. The heart of the struggle between Jews and Christians and Moslems circulates this spot like a hungry wolf. Jews and Christians believe that Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Isaac on a rock here. The Moslems believe that Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Ishmael on a rock here. The Bible says the son almost sacrificed by Abraham is his first born. Here-in lies the discussion. Abraham and Sarah were barren. As was the custom, Sarah gave her husband to her maid Hagar in hopes of giving him a son. When Abraham was 86 years old, Hagar did conceive and bore him a son, Ishmael. Sarah then miraculously gave birth to Isaac. In Sarah's jealousy and on God's order, Abraham cast out Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness. God promised to make a nation of the son of



Left: Walking in the Old City

Right: Cardo from 135 AD in the Old City

Below: Part of the Wall of Jerusalem at the time of Agrippa, known as Hezekiah's Wall



Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Above left: Soldier along the way who allowed us to photograph him

Above middle: Wailing Wall or Western Wall with the Dome of the Rock in the background

Above right: Hasidic gentleman

Left: Women in prayer at the Western Wall

Below left: Men in prayer at the Western Wall

Below center: Man walking to the Western Wall to pray

Below right: Woman selling rosemary



Hagar because he was the offspring of Abraham. Ishmael means God hears, and God promised to name Abraham's descendants through Sarah's son Isaac.²⁰ (Genesis 16:4, 21:10-20)

For the Jews and Christians, this is also the site of both Solomon's and Herod's temples. For the Moslems, this is where Muhammad ascended to heaven.

The Dome of the Rock is the most ancient Islamic shrine in the Holy Land. It proudly displays an exquisite blue mosaic exterior and majestic gold dome. We walk around to the top of a building where a soldier talks to us and allows us to take his picture. Then we walk down to the Wailing Wall, where I had planned to put Cartney's prayer—where the Dome of the Rock swells in the background and people dress as out of a novel. The slick, concrete floors reflect like a mirror. People cover their heads to escape the rain. I notice one gentleman standing so close to the Wall that his nose touches. The wetness of the concrete looks like gold. In contrast, white plastic chairs offer seats. Men and women separate. Is it my imagination, or are the men getting the holier spots?

An old lady wearing a wrinkled, white scarf sells rosemary, which is thought to be holy, to carry to the wall. I fall in love with rosemary. My mother falls in love with the preciousness of the sweet old lady. I think she wants to take her home.

We walk to the Wall where scraps of paper hide in every crevice. At first, emptiness tugs at my heart. Cartney's prayer is absent. A drop of rain falls on my nose, reminding me of the freshness of the living water at Jacob's Well. I look up at the sky and smile at God's gentle reminder of His generous gift. I touch the Wall, say a prayer of thanksgiving, and move away to watch the people.

Our group straggles through a tunnel and continues through the old town of Jerusalem. Men wear keffiyehs, Arabic headdresses, and dress pants. We pass the Young Israel Synagogue that looks like it must have looked the day Christ left the earth.

Merchants cook food for sale on each side of the cobblestone road where we walk. The culture almost overloads my senses. At the Kodak sign, David tells us we can buy film for four American dolla'. A car drives down the middle where we walk. A shrill, quick horn honks for us



Left: Devout Jews in prayer

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

to move out of the way. We scoot to the side. The car swerves close to us. Someone in our group mentions they want pizza and steak.

Women wear coverings on their heads. I notice graffiti on the wall. A monk passes us. A kid pushes bookmarks in my face, saying, “Twenty for one American dolla’.”

As we intersect the walk of the Via Dolorosa, I buy a pamphlet. Most of the Via Dolorosa or Way of Sorrow is in the Christian Quarter in the northwest area of the Old City. The fourteen Stations of the Cross mark the events during Jesus’ walk from the place He was sentenced to the place of the crucifixion. This route is the same route celebrated since the Middle Ages. The Station I of the Cross is in the Muslim section of the Old City. This station is called Antonia’s Fortress and is where the Romans held their court that sentenced Jesus to death on the cross. Station II of the Cross is in the central courtyard of Antonia’s Fortress at the spot of the King’s Game on the pavement and where the cross was placed on Jesus’ shoulders to carry. At Station III of the Cross, Jesus first fell from carrying His cross. Station IV of the Cross marks the spot where Jesus met His mother Mary on His struggle towards death. Station V of the Cross starts the climb towards Golgotha. This station marks the spot where Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus carry His cross. Station VI of the Cross commemorates the place where a woman named Veronica wiped the sweat from Jesus’ face. The imprint of His face remained on the cloth. Jesus healed a woman named Veronica during His ministry. Station VI of the Cross marks the place where Jesus fell the second time and is where the authorities pronounced the judgments passed on the convicted. Station VIII of the Cross marks the place where Jesus spoke to the Women of Jerusalem and addressed them as Daughters of Jerusalem. Station IX of the Cross shows where Jesus fell for the third time. Station X of the Cross shows where the Roman soldiers gambled for his robe after stripping Him of this clothes. Station XI of the Cross mark where the soldiers nailed Jesus’ hands and feet to the cross. Station XII of the Cross, also known as Calvary or Golgotha, is where Jesus died on the cross. The bedrock goes down to the Chapel of Adam and contains a large crack referenced in Matthew 27:51 that was caused by the cosmic events accompanying Jesus’ death. Station XIII of the Cross shows the Stone of Anointment where



Along the Via Dolorosa in the Old City



Third station of the cross

Jesus was laid when He was taken down from the Cross. His mother Mary stood nearby. Station XIV of the Cross marks Jesus' place of burial and resurrection. This area features The Chapel of Angel and the Holy Sepulchre. The sacred rock of the Tomb is here.²¹ (footnote: The Holy Land: Jubilee Year 2000)

We pick-up our walk today at Station III of the Cross. Soldiers sit on the steps to the left. Some in our group fear I am going to get us shot by taking pictures. We walk through the city to the back of a building. We go upstairs, then along a wooden plank sidewalk. Darkness surrounds us in areas. Unrecognizable feelings take over my body.

We stop. I am confused when tears sting my eyes. Dr. John points to the stone where soldiers played the King's Game, still shown in the stone at our feet. Did soldiers decide to crucify Christ when He lost at the game? This is where soldiers put the cross on Jesus' shoulders. This is the first place I feel the sadness of Christ.

I notice Amelia looking up at her granddaddy as her daddy, Dr. John's son, reads, "Luke 23: 4-25, And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, 'I find no crime in this man.'

"But they were urgent, saying, 'He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.'

"When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then, arraying him in gorgeous apparel, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other. Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, 'You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; I will therefore chastise him and release him.'

"But they all cried out together, 'Away with this man, and release to us Barab'bas'—a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city, and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; but they shouted out, 'Crucify, crucify him!'

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Left: Antonia's Fortress

Below Left: Actual King's Game played in Jesus' time at Antonia's Fortress. The Roman soldiers played here with Jesus. These stones are called Litho Stratros or Roman pavement.

Below Right: Amelia looking at Dr. John



“A third time he said to them, ‘Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him.’

“But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will.”

In a teary silence, we move on. Back in the Old City, we stop at Saint Anne's Church. The center aisle leads us to benches. I gaze at the tall arched front, the three high arched windows, and the pulpit with the cross. We sing “Alleluia” to hear the famed acoustics. The sound resounds.

Outside, we stop to look at the Pools of Bethesda. During Jesus' time, people fought to be the first in these pools because the waters were believed to have healing powers. When the first

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*Pools of Bethesda
referenced in John 5:1-18*

person got in the water, the pool would bubble up. People believed that this happened because an angel stirred the waters when the first person entered. A lame man had tried to be the first in the pools for thirty-eight years but did not have anyone to put him in. When Jesus came along one day, He asked him if he wanted to be healed. The man whined, but Jesus told him that if he wanted to be healed to pick up his bed and walk. It was the sabbath so the Jews wanted to know why the man was carrying his bed which was working by their laws. Later Jesus found the man and warned him not to sin any more. This scripture teaches us that healing is something from Christ; there's not magic in the water.

A cacophony of sounds attack from all directions. Ramadan, an annual Islamic holy period, ends today, making the roads especially hectic. We dodge cars, puddles, and people on our way to the bus. Mother says, "If you have a sore elbow you better not come to Jerusalem, because there is only elbow room available." Horns honk. We fear the impatient people will run us over. When cars separate us, I sense Mother's panic. I focus on the red coat in our group. I pray Mother and Thelma keep track of where I go so they can follow. Finally, we arrive at the bus, a glorious site. We collapse onto the seats.

We drive to a cafeteria to eat lunch. We seat ourselves at tables with pink tablecloths and vases of flowers. I haven't seen steak anywhere else in Israel, but it seems to be the selection of choice here and it is delicious. It is great to relax and eat. I had not realized I was so hungry.

On the way to Bethlehem, which means House of Bread or House of Meat in Arabic, we stop at Shepherd's Field. The wind blows. The cold sneaks under my coat. I shiver. I spot a shepherd with his sheep between the hills in front of us as we read, "Luke 2: 11-20, 'for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.'

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!'

"When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.'

"And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these

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Both above: In Shepherd's Field of Bethlehem



Left: Mother of Pearl of Last Supper in the store The Three Arches gift shop in Bethlehem

Below left: Carved olive wood of Joseph and Jesus, in The Three Arches store in Bethlehem

Below right: Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, oldest continually used church in the world. Built by Queen Helena, Mother of Emperor Constantine



things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

We knock the mud off our shoes before getting on the bus. We pass a few people riding donkeys on the road. In Bethlehem, we stop at The Three Arches store, owned by Nicholas Canavith. I spot a beautiful Last Supper made with mother of pearl. The olive wood is seductive. People buy statues of Joseph and Jesus, herds of camel statues, and libraries of postcards. The

owner gives us twenty-five percent off. Some of the guys finish shopping early, walk outside, and buy keffiyehs.

We return to the bus and travel a short distance. The bus pulls up to the Church of the Nativity and parks. A guide from the church greets us. “We have the Church of the Nativity where our Lord Jesus Christ was born.”

Someone in crowd says, “Amen.”

The church guide continues, “The church is built over the site, having three different denominations: Roman Catholic where we can see the Crusaders’ Crosses; Greek Orthodox, which is the main part with the small entrances; and Armenians, back in here. Now, the oldest part of the Church of the Nativity dates back to the early sixth century AD.”

We duck and go through a little door into the main part of the church. Many colors of brown surround us. On the sides, smooth, earth-laced marbleized columns support the belly of this womb. Ornate tops cap the columns.

To the right stands a blood red, stone structure that looks much like a closed well. It has a crack at one place in its stone and a fitted, massive metal top. I place the last remaining picture of my fiancé in this crack. Ancient ornate, feminine candleholders hang at different levels around the room. The darkness draws attention to the arched shadows the high windows cast above the hanging candles. The darkness, the yellowness cast by the lit candles, the striking light through the windows and their arched images introduce interesting contrasts. Some of the original Byzantine mosaic floor is exposed where the present floor has been removed.

Darkness, warmth, and wetness flow around us. This church feels like the womb of the earth.

Leaving this area, we walk through a small section where we purchase Christ Candles from priests. One minister purchases thirty-two. He says he buys them every year to have home for Christmas. On the candles, in red or blue, is “Bethlehem 1998.” I buy two. I decide we will use one with our Advent wreath at Christmas.

We go through narrow doors to the place of Jesus’ birth—the majestic of the majestic. The church guide begins, “Come right down. Okay. Watch the candles. The entrance we came down, to my left and right, was opened up by the Crusaders. This is a cave where we are, and this is where the stable was. So the main entrance is back of you where that wooden door is. This part you see here is run by the Roman Catholics, run by the Franciscan Fathers. This part of the cave, where we are, is only one-fifth of the cave.

“In every cave, you see chimneys for air and light. Here’s one of the chimneys up here. There’s another one over there. And to this corner, you can see part of the original rock of the cave. This part here is all white plaster. This gate was completely covered up in mosaic. When a fire took place in 1872, the mosaic came down. In the main part of this grotto, which is in the hands of the Greek Orthodox and Armenians, underneath the altar, you’ll see a fourteen pointed star. The fourteen pointed star marks the birthplace of Jesus. And the original star that was placed here was a golden star, solid gold, placed by the Romans in 1717. Written around the star in Latin, ‘Here Jesus Christ was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary.’ That golden star was stolen in 1843, and no one knew who stole the star, which was one of the issues that led to the Crimean War between the Russians and the French. So the Turks, in the year 1853, wanting to have peace, made a copy of the star, in symbol replacing the star with the same thing and the same

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Above: Inside the Church of the Nativity

Left: Inside Church of the Nativity



Below: Floor of Fourth Century church viewed in special openings through the current floor



writing and giving it to us as a gift. The fourteen points symbolize the fourteen Stations of the Cross which mark the fourteen traditional places where events transpired along Jesus' final walk to His crucifixion. Born at the star, laid in a manger. Where the two sconces are lighted, that's where the manger was. And the manger was taken by the Crusaders to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome. And the site of the manger is in the hands of the Roman Catholic. Is that clear? Born at the star, laid in the manger."

Dr. John says, "We're going to read scripture."

Since the church has its own special guide, David says, "I'll be outside waiting."

I hear several languages as crowds from many parts of the earth descend on this tiny stable. I shouldn't have expected the church guide to stay after giving his spiel, but I did. I know

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All: Inside Church of the Nativity



Grotto of birthplace of Jesus

he doesn't want to hear yet another Bible reading. His abrupt departure makes it all so commercial. How can he walk out on the birth of the Prince of Peace?

A lady in our group reads: "Luke 2: verses 1-8. In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirin'i-us was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city.

"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

Watching the manger, I long, as the mother does for her child, to touch the manger where baby Jesus lay.

"And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."

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New groups ascend to the stables and the crowds push, wanting our place. My spirit moves to the ceiling to keep from being squashed. Glancing over the crowd, an image brews in my mind: if only I could touch the baby's innocence one more time before He has to go through His pain. I see myself sitting by the side of the manger while the baby rests. My hand reaches back to touch the baby in the stillness. I hear the sound of the animals. Much like the bird's song, the sounds comfort me. I remember first loving the baby. I pine, "If I could just sit there and touch the baby one more time before He suffers."



The Fourteen-Pointed Star commemorates the birthplace of Jesus

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



*Me sitting on the edge of the place of
Jesus' manger*



Commemorates the place of the manger of Jesus

One of the ministers from our group taps me on the shoulder. “Would you like to sit down there on the manger and have me take your picture?”

I look at him as if God Himself has spoken to me. I hand him my camera and sit down. He snaps my picture. I turn before I get up. I look over my right shoulder, putting my right hand down as if to touch the baby.

I barely notice the confusion as some want in, others want out. I automatically join in as we sing “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Lots of people give directions as tension rises with the shuffles. Perhaps this is the reason we do not sing the song exactly right.

O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie;
above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.”

“How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is given;
so God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming,
but in this world of sin,
o come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel!”

The ruckus builds with the crowd and anger spews from all directions. Someone pushes me forward into the crowd. I don't see Mother, Aunt Jean, or Thelma. From the stable door we entered, someone yells in French over the top of the crowd. Another person shouts in a Dutch as the crowd squeezes tighter and pushes me down the dark hallway away from the stables of Jesus' birth. I try to turn around to see if I can spot anyone I recognize but there isn't room. My heart

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

races and fear rises in my chest. Could we be under siege? Did war break out? I think back to the soldiers we saw at every turn of the Bethlehem hills. There was especially a large gathering near the entry to the church we came through. I have been in a fog since then and now I am confused. Where are the people I know? Where am I? Where are we going? Before I know it, I am swept into another church that displays a small baby lying on straw in a case. Over this is an innocent Mary with cherubs at her feet. I think I recognize a few of these people but I still do not see Mother. The only thing I know to do is to follow the group. In the darkness of the new hallway, someone grabs my arm and pulls me into another small room. Frightened, I jerk my head around only to see Mother standing there. Beautiful and innocent. What a relief!

In the small dark church, Dean, a church district superintendent speaks: “There’s not only an anxiety within us, but even a spirit of ill-will, perhaps. We struggle with what it means to be coming to the place where the Prince of Peace was born, and yet there were soldiers everywhere and tensions high. We were caught up in it. I myself found that I was growing angry. Angry with everyone because with me were people who had saved many years to make this pilgrimage to the place where Christ was born.

“Crowds were everywhere, tensions were still high, and people became, frankly, quite rude as they elbowed and pushed to get to the little door to come inside the church. Then all of a sudden it was crowded again with elbows and pushes and sharp words and tempers all making their way to the stairs that led to the birth place of Christ.

“And down the steps we came and the crowds were greater there. People from many nations. You could feel the tension but somehow in the middle of it someone began to sing. And we heard the stir of Christmas in song by every tongue represented there. I believe there were Brazilian, German, American, French.



Roman Catholic Church's St. Catherine; what you see from Bethlehem on Christmas Eve; during Christmas, the carving of infant Jesus is moved from the place in the picture in the middle to the place in the picture on the right

“And as I stood there and listened and was caught up in the moment, it dawned on me, ‘Isn’t this really the reason He came? To take all of our frustration, all of our anger, all of our estrangement, all of our separateness. And in one brief moment show us not only that we are one with God, but we are one with each other. It was one of the most moving experiences I’ve ever had. And I shall never forget it as long as I live. And I shall never forget that He indeed has made us one. Thanks be to God who loved us so greatly that in that manger His own Son was laid, in that manger. Thanks be to God.’”

All softly respond, “Thanks be to God.”

Dean prays: “Lord, we thank you for this time together, for the opportunity we share with one another and with you. And for the Christ who was born here and reminds us that we are not only one with You, but we are to be one with each other. Break down the walls which separate us from that love and open those doors so that it may flow into us that we shall become all that You have dreamed us to be, with You, by You, and through You. In that same Christ, we pray. In the name of Jesus. Amen.”

“Who knows *Let There Be Peace on Earth?*” Dr. John says. “Who can lead for us?”

The darkness of the room easily houses a feeling of the collective unconscious. Some might have an earth-bound agenda. I hear the singing as one voice. The boring, stone places of Israel repeatedly unveil unsuspected treasures of the Holy Land. In the darkness, the group begins,

“Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.
With God as the Father, united all are we.
Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.
Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now.
With every step I take, let this be my joyful vow.
To take each moment, and live each moment, in peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.”

“Amen.”

We exit the crowded chapel into the bright sunlit blue sky with white clouds. A statue of Jerome, who translated the Bible, a statue of Mary, and finally a cross rise from the roofs of the building. The church guide returns and says, “And I do wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!” We laugh and clap. We duck through the teeny, tiny door made so people could not go through on horseback.

As always, street vendors approach us. One guy holds keffiyehs. Even though we are not supposed to stop, I decide to anyway. Earlier, others bought navy and white ones, but I want a red and white checkered one.

I hold a five-dollar bill in my hand and point to the red and white keffiyeh. The vendor shakes his head “no.” He holds up a rainbow colored one. “No, you to have *this* rainbow.” I counter, “No, I want the red and white one.”

He insists, “No, this one for you.” He will not let me buy the one I want. He insists this is the one for me. Go figure! The bus is ready to leave. Irritated, I give him the five-dollar bill and grab the rainbow keffiyeh and run towards the chug of the bus.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Top left: Door to the Church of the Nativity, sometimes suggested to represent the Eye of the Needle

Top right: Door to the Basilica of St. Catherine

Left: Statue of Mary on top of the church, also seen in background in picture on right

Right: Statue of St. Jerome on top of church

The wind blows fiercely. I shiver.
On the bus, everyone puts on his keffiyeh.
We arrive at our hotel to discover people, dressed in their Sunday best, overrun our lobby. On Friday night, the Jewish people observe their Sabbath by not doing any work for twenty-four hours, 6:00 p.m. Friday until 6:00 p.m. on Saturday. Even the elevators are keyed to stop on every floor because Jews consider cooking, cleaning, or even pushing an elevator button to be work. To keep from doing anything that might be considered work, Jews pour into Jerusalem hotels to stay for the twenty-four hours of the sabbath so the hotel can cook and clean for them.

Our foursome decides to stop at the bar. There is a beautiful family with a little girl in a lacy white dress and a white ribbon in her hair. She leans next to her father. I put the telephoto lens on my camera and take their picture. I don't know that Orthodox Jews are against images. They consider photographs images. The mother comes over to me and asks me to not take pictures of her daughter. I stop. An angry man yells at the desk clerk in the lobby below when the hotel doesn't have his reservation. The noise is too much; we decide to head to our room to wash up for supper.

When Jean and I reach our door, I glance at the mezuzah on the doorframe. The mezuzah is a piece of inscribed parchment and its holder. A scribe writes the inscription by using a quill taken from a kosher fowl. The indelible black ink he uses is made from vegetable ingredients. The parchment comes from the skin of a kosher animal. The inscription is Deuteronomy 6:4-9 which starts, "Hear O Israel (Shema Yisrael), the Lord our God, the Lord is One." When the parchment is finished, it is rolled up and placed inside a special metal or wooden container. Mezuzah actually means "doorpost" and this is where it is placed, on the doorpost of Jewish homes, rooms, businesses, and synagogues. It is placed at an angle on the upper third of the right doorpost to serve as a reminder to Jews to reach up towards God. When leaving a place, Jews often touch or kiss the mezuzah and recite, "May God protect my going out and coming in, now and forever."²⁰ (footnote: *The Jewish Book of Why* by Alfred J. Kolatch, p. 113-118, New York: Jonathan David Publishers, Inc. 1981) Yesterday, I ordered one to put on our door at home. Our room number reads 606.

Tonight, we eat downstairs in the banquet room instead of the regular dining room, because the Jewish guests require the food to be kosher. Large round tables with linen tablecloths fill the room. More food than usual lines both sides of the room. My aunt is a sweetaholic. She looked forward to the many dessert choices but was disappointed at their lack of sweetness and taste. I like them.

We hesitate choosing a seat, feeling awkward tonight. We choose a table with few people. A lady I don't recognize from our tour, sits down beside me and strikes up a conversation. She came with another tour and stayed behind when they left. She is leaving tomorrow. She has not been able to do what she has stayed to do.

I tell her about all the rainbows we saw yesterday and the incredible pictures I took. I tell her I was even forced to buy a rainbow keffiyeh! She almost falls out of the chair exclaiming, "What?"

As it turns out, she stayed in Jerusalem in search of a rainbow and this is her last night in the Holy Land. She is considering going to seminary to become a minister. Her husband recently died. She feels that he talks to her through rainbows and if she is supposed to minister he will show her a sign to say "yes" with a rainbow. I give her rainbows and rainbows and rainbows. The Rainbow Lady and I form a special bond. We exchange cards, and I promise to send her pictures of her Israel rainbows. In fact, I send her many pictures of God's rainbows.

It is interesting that someone was looking for a rainbow before it even rained. Most of us don't do that because we know the rain has to come first and is often a struggle.

Back in our room, Aunt Jean tries on the rainbow keffiyeh. She bows her head to emulate a demure Arab woman, but I see a rainbow with a face bowed in prayer.

Just another ordinary day of miracles in the Holy Land! I do hope it doesn't rain at the Dead Sea tomorrow. I could use some sunshine, rejuvenation, and relaxation.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Left: Door to our room in Jerusalem with Mezuzah on the right side of the doorfacing

Right: Aunt Jean in our hotel room wearing a keffiyeh



Saturday, January 31, 1998

“This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made,
that the Lord has made.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
This is the day that the Lord has made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made.”

Today we can have a free day on our own or go with our guides to explore Masada and go into the Dead Sea. Yikes, into the Dead Sea? The thought energizes me for a moment—what a delightful respite! I hear the water is great for your skin, and it will be warmer by the Sea.

I am still depressed. On the plane to Israel, I decided to put my angel with another angel and take a picture for my friend who gave me the angels. I had no idea there were few angels here. Somebody said there are not any here because angels are images. I have not seen one yet!

Yesterday, I looked forward to discovering where the Voice might tell me to put my prayer; surely it would be special. After Cartney’s, I curiously waited. But the Voice told me where to put the other prayer instead.

Today, I decide to talk to the Voice. “Well, I’m ready to do my prayer. Where am I going to put my angel?” There is silence like that when you ask someone a question and find the person of inquiry has left the room. Has he gone forever? Could I have imagined the Voice? Maybe I do not matter. I wait in quietness.

When nothing happens, in defiance, I write on the back of my angel, “Thy will be done!” My prayer finished, I decide to keep it in my pocket just in case. I cry a little on the bus ride to Masada and swear off religious emotions.

At Masada, we stand in line to ride the bright yellow cable car. Is this the highest cable car in the world? The cables reach so high into the sky that I think about the elevator that shoots out the top of the building in *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. My stomach flips. Even so, I anxiously wait my turn. Packed like sardines, our quartet squeezes into the lift. I decide not to look down and remind myself to take deep breaths. Thoughts of the weight in this lift run through my mind. I chastise myself for being such a baby. Fear and exploration are not good bedfellows! We arrive at the other end of the cable, at the fortress of Masada. We climb the remaining steps to the top.

I know nothing about Masada. David stands with his left palm turned out. His pipe rests in the right hand of his blue-jean clad body. We gather on step-like seats. I do my best to listen to the knowledge David spouts. “All right, folks, I’d like to start a tour of Masada with the synagogue because I believe this was the greatest archeological discovery made over here.



Masada

“The synagogue in Masada is the oldest synagogue that has been discovered. It is the only known synagogue that was in existence while the Temple was still in existence in Jerusalem.”

A fresh feeling gleams on the edges of the oldest synagogue. My radar ticks, telling me something is hidden here, something really exciting for mankind. Overlooking the Dead Sea, the sun feels like the morning of creation. I pick at the rocks at the bottom of the synagogue wall and stick them in my pocket.

“Masada was built by Herod the Great around 18 B.C. Masada fell into the hands of the Romans in 73 A.D. If Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., it means this synagogue outlived the Temple of Jerusalem by 3 years. And we have never discovered any synagogue anywhere that has dated to this early period.

“Ask yourself a question, ‘What kind of synagogue did Jesus worship at?’ Here you’ve got what a synagogue might have looked like in Jesus’ days.

“Now, what makes it a synagogue? First of all, something we already discussed at Capernaum, the seats which are against the wall and around the building. Something else which has to do with Jewish law. By Jewish law, one is not allowed to tear, burn, misuse, throw away, or mistreat any books of scriptures. Any Bibles, any Prayer Books, which are falling to pieces should be stored in a special ark called the aron hakodesh. In this small room, we discovered this aron hakodesh for worn Bibles and Prayer Books. We discovered over here two chapters of the Book of Psalms, Psalms 44 and Psalms 150 and Ezekiel 37 and 38, which deal with the resurrection of the dry bones.”

Isn’t it funny that Father Chacour talked about these dry bones the other day. I had never heard of them before.

“We also discovered here the commentary of Eli Ben Eleazar, which is not a part of the Bible. It’s a part of the apocryphal writings and was already found at Qumran, together with the Scrolls in 1947. But to find it over here actually indicates that some of those writings which were left out of the scrolls were here at Masada at the final stages of the uprising against the Romans.”

“In 66 A.D. Jewish rebels seized Masada from the Romans. This started the Jewish War against Rome. The rebels went to Jerusalem but returned to Masada when their leader was killed. Their new leader Eleazar stayed at Masada, the last Jewish stronghold, to wait out the war, and in 73 A.D. was there with less than one thousand Jewish men, women, and children. Fifteen thousand soldiers of the Roman Tenth Legion arrived at Masada to capture it. The Jews lasted seven months.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Above: Synagogue at Masada, the oldest synagogue ever discovered in the world; referenced in Psalms 44



Top right: Looking out over the side of the mountain at Masada



Right: Looking out over the steps at Masada

Below: Looking out over the Dead Sea



“Josephus, the historian, tells us that Eleazar, the commander of the Jews, told everyone that the Romans were going to break through the next day, and instead of being captured and abused by the Romans, each man would take the life of every family member and then take his own life. Some of the people broke out in a bitter cry, asking if they were expected to kill their own kids. To make sure the decision was fulfilled, a group of ten men were chosen to stay behind to be sure those who committed suicide were really dead and to say the last word of worship for them before killing themselves. Josephus made it very clear that the oration of Eleazar was made to the men only, the head of the families.

“Now, folks, the number ten is not accidental. In Jewish law, ten adults make a congregation. And by Jewish law there are certain prayers that can only be said in a group of ten men. This is known as a *minyan*. One could not have a Jewish funeral unless ten adults were present. One could never have a Jewish wedding unless you have ten adults present. This was, by the way, something Jesus opposed. Remember, Jesus said, ‘Wherever there are two or three, I’m in the midst of them.’ Right? You don’t need ten to form a congregation, but this was the Pharisee approach. And there are certain group prayers that can only be said in the group of ten men, and the most important prayer, folks, the only Jewish prayer that is still said in Aramaic and not in Hebrew, is the *Kiddush*. This is the prayer after the dead. It’s a prayer that was brought by the Jews from Babylon at the end of the captivity.

“The people here at Masada made sure they had the right number of men to say the last prayer for those who died, before killing themselves. On the floor of this synagogue on small pieces of pottery were discovered names of people in yellow ink. Those names were probably part of a pool to choose the ten. Three of those names can be easily read. One of them was the son of Joseph. The other name was Obediah, the son of, and the name was erased; because of aging, we cannot read it. And the third name, and the most exciting of them all, folks, the name Ben Y’air. And we know that the commander of Masada was called Eleazar Ben Y’air. The “r” of Elizar is still to be read. The beginning of the word was erased because of aging but the name Ben Y’air can be read easily. “What does it mean? We actually have archeological proof to the existence of the men. It proves something else, that this man did exactly what a good commander should do, to stay behind, to make sure that everything decided upon is going to be fulfilled before killing himself.

“You are going to see a black line along many of the buildings. Everything below the black line is original as discovered. Everything above the black line is partly restored.”

David lifts his knit cap from the ancient column. Taking it between both hands, he stretches it onto his head. “That’s why I start the tour over here. Because I believe that as far as archeology’s concerned, as far as Jewish history’s concerned, this is the most unique discovery made in Masada.”

“David?” Dr. John asks. “Men would have killed their own families?”

David puffs on his pipe. “Josephus talks about slaughtering each other, but the skeletons we discovered had broken limbs, broken spines, broken legs. We believe that most of those people simply jumped to their deaths into the valleys below.”

“When you worked on the excavation here, what part did you excavate?” a man from group asks.

David answers, “I’ll show it to you in a while. Okay, take your pictures, folks.”

“If those people could afford the four swimming pools and two bathhouses discovered here, it means they had water like a flowing river, exactly as Josephus described it.”

David stops in mid-stride as we climb the steps. “The question is ‘water from where?’ Rainwater, the same as we saw at Qumran, the same as we have all over Jerusalem, the same you’ll find today in every desert community. Roofs are natural rain collectors. Clay channels the flow into cisterns. If the cisterns are covered and the water is not exposed to the sun, it will not go stale. And if you keep the water from the wintertime, you have enough for hot summer months. Josephus said the people of Masada had water like a flowing river.”

We continue to climb. “When it rains in the dessert, it rains hot dogs. The annual rainfall in this area would be about one hundred millimeters (just under .4 inches) a year.”

At the top, we look out over the barren land. “Okay, folks. A siege of at least seven months in which Masada is completely disconnected from the outside world. Where did those people store the food for this length? That’s the storage area of Masada. These have the ceilings on top. As you walk around, you may see many date pits. Dates actually contain everything you need as far as vitamins are concerned. Something else is what you think that you invented, what you call beef jerky. Okay?” We laugh. “Drying meat in the heat is an old method of preservation. Most of the meat found here was meat of Ibex and Gazelles, plenteous in the area.

“Now if you come closer, looking down below you see those big squares. These are Roman camps built around Masada in two major groups. The first group was built towards the Southeast to besiege the snake path. So this group of camps was meant to cut off the dirt road from the defenders of Masada to starve them out. When they realized that it didn’t do much good, they built another group of camps on the other side. Imagine, the people lived up here for three years between 70-73 A.D. They saw those camps growing every day. And yet, life went on. Children were being brought up here. This was the real spirit of Masada.”

We look out over miles of nothing. “Okay, folks. When Josephus describes Masada, he does an excellent job. Most of what we discovered was found exactly where he described it. Josephus talks about the existence of two palaces at Masada—the Northern Palace and the Western Palace or the Fine Palace. The Northern Palace consisted of three terraces. We are standing on the very top of the Northern Palace, the upper terrace which still has some remains of mosaic floors.

“All the way down below, you see the lower level of the Palace with pillars still in existence. The middle part was a gigantic round tower with big windows towards the view. And you might wonder why a palace over here? Because of the wind that you are exposed to right now, folks. If there was any breeze at Masada in the summertime, when hot is hot, this is where you are gonna have it. It is the North. The wind will blow from the northwest, across the palace, which was open, hit the wall and retreat in a way that this area would have a circulation of air. An ancient air conditioning system.”

Even in battle, God provides a respite. It is ironic to me that here, in the middle of the Masada deaths and the Dead Sea where nothing lives, I am experiencing a respite today from my many Holy Land experiences. I need it.

“Who was the palace built for? It was not built for the tour guide. It was built for royalty. Right? This is the highest point of Masada. So the Northern Palace is on this side.

“If you look over the side, you see what was probably the headquarters of Silva, the Roman Commander. Look at the dirt road breaking off in two directions. One goes out to the headquarters. One goes over to the Oasis of Ein Gedi, the main source of supplies for the defenders of Masada before the Roman siege started. This is the most northern edge of Masada. Okay, watch the stairs as we come down.”

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Left: Castle at north end of Masada

Below: Birds chilling out at Masada



Left: Inside bathhouse at Masada



Right: Steam bath at Masada

“Even in a God-forsaken place like Masada, the Roman baths consisted of three different chambers with an open court at the entrance. The first room is a frigidarium, the cold water room. The second is the caladium. Come closer. I showered this morning; I smell like a rose.” We chuckle. “On the floor are posts made to support an upper floor built across the lower floor with distance between the upper floor and wall. Water was carried through hot pipes with hot water to create steam. The steam accumulated between the floors. Because steam is lighter than air, it ascended through those pipes around the walls all the way to the ceiling. Because the ceiling is round, when the steam cools off, it turns again into drops of water and drips down. Water dripped onto a hot floor, more steam. This is the way of ancient saunas.”

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



I imagine shutting out the soldiers
below, listening only to the droplets fall with

*Above left: Rocks used to fight the war from on top
of Masada*

Above right: David with apple

Center left: David at Masada

Center right: Looking out from Masada

Left: Byzantine Church at Masada

the softness of raindrops on a Spring day.

“Folks, this is identical to the Roman bathhouses you see all over the Roman Empire. Isn’t it amazing how Herod the Great used techniques of the Romans for his own needs even in this God-for-saken place? Let’s go.”

We walk to the weapons area and imagine them trying to fight a war by using rocks from way up here. They shot the rounded rocks from catapults.

Today, David makes me think of Bill. His tobacco reinforces my memory. He silently holds an apple in one hand. This symbol of life and choices reminds me that decisions are the breath of life. I remember my decision to help Abuna. And, I breathe.

David talks about the Roman ramp, a tower, the battering ram, and that the movie *Masada* was made here. “Israel’s symphony orchestra, conducted by Zubin Mehta, played Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 in the stadium over there to celebrate Israel’s great fortieth anniversary in 1988. The master of ceremonies was Gregory Peck.”

We walk to another area. “The only building at Masada which has nothing to do with the story of Masada is the ancient Byzantine church from the Sixth Century A.D. I’m sure that the ones who established it never heard about Masada. They were looking for a place to establish a church so they took over a building still in good shape.”

A partial wall overlooks the Dead Sea. It has no roof, just an arched window. The window overlooks nothingness—from emptiness to emptiness.

“Someone asked where was I during the archeological excavation in 1966. You just imagine that out of 1800 people from all over the world, they picked on me, the good Jewish boy to clean up the church.” We laugh. “See how they pick on the Jews? I’m telling you.” Laughing, we move forward. “We are beginning now to walk back. You’ll need your airline . . .” He shakes his head and we all laugh. “. . . your cable car tickets for the ride down. Okay?”

I look over the fence while we wait in line for the cable car. It falls straight down, a long way. “Okay, ten minutes, down there to the wash rooms and then come to the bus. Take a few minutes in the little store. You can buy the stupid t-shirt ‘I climbed Masada.’ Then we will go to the Dead Sea. In Genesis, it’s called the Sea of Salt, or the Ancient Sea.”

We travel back across the valley and gather at the bus. As we drive along, David says, “You are gonna see about twenty hotels that are over-booked all year round. They are mostly used by Europeans with terrible skin problems coming to bathe in the Dead Sea.”

At the Dead Sea, we rush into the store to buy Masada products, select our lunch, and go to the porch. Birds perch on the tables. We eat quickly and ready ourselves for the Sea. Those in the water warn us of the freezing temperature. Dr. John tells us not to get the water in our eyes and not to stay in longer than thirty minutes. The crystal blue water glistens beneath the sun. The golden sand looks like a sunset. The salt covered areas appear snow covered. I walk to the edge of the water and test it with my big toe.

A man with a camera teases, “Bay Watch at the Dead Sea.” An energetic, dark-haired girl runs and dives into the water. When her body pops up, I see the pain in her eyes. I guess she didn’t listen.

The people in the water call the rest of us wimps. Standing in the Dead Sea is difficult; the water quickly pops you to your back or stomach. Bodies float everywhere. One guy even reads the newspaper while he floats. I am determined to brave the cold and at least float once. Someone says it’s like a big water bed. We revert to twelve years old. We yell, scream, and laugh.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

No bacteria lives in the motionless Dead Sea. It embodies high concentrations of magnesium, potassium, and calcium. Ordinary sea water is mainly sodium. At 400 meters below sea level, the Dead Sea is the lowest spot on earth. The waters are also rich in hot springs and black mud. Pastel plastic chairs line the beach.

We get out of the water and rinse off. The dressing room is small and crowded. Impatient, I decide to change in the storage room. While dressing, I remember going to Perk's Pool as a child. I never thought water anywhere was as cold as that spring water. The Dead Sea matches it. I remember friends and laughter and water. Freshness fills my body, mind, and soul.

I walk with a lift in my step back to the bus. Watching out the window of our bus, I realize my day turned out sunny. We spot Gazelles under palm trees. White-boxed houses scatter the hillsides. The Israeli government requires all housing to blend into the landscape for aesthetic reasons. The houses sit low to the ground and have flat roofs.



*The Dead Sea at Ein Bokek
Kibbutz where we ate lunch and
swam; birds often join you
while you're eating*

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



En Gedi, where David hid in the cave and cut off the hem of Saul's robe proving that he could have killed him

At the hotel we take hot baths, dress for dinner, and return to our regular dining room. Refreshed, Mother, Thelma, and I decide to go to the entertainment at the Jerusalem YMCA. Jean decides to rest. Ali's wife sits on the first seat of the bus when they pick us up. We say hello. Jerusalem twinkles the same as other modern cities.

This YMCA is nothing like those in the U.S. and is one of the prettiest buildings we have seen. The domed ceiling and decorative, arched doorways hint of the Fox Theatre in Atlanta and the Taj Mahal. A dark-haired girl, the master of ceremonies, steps in front of the stage curtain. She asks us to raise our hands as she calls nationalities. Seven groups respond. The MC announces that from this point forward she will make each commentary in each language represented.



Left: YMCA in Jerusalem

Others: Performances at the YMCA



Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Twelve Days to Jerusalem

Group by group, performance by performance, the ancient country intertwines our lives with theirs in dress, dance, and music of times past. Our senses overflow. A tear escapes off my cheek and drops onto my heart.

On the bus ride to the hotel, sadness overtakes me. I feel as if I've been away from home for a long, long time and have finally returned, just to have to leave again. Can I really board the plane and leave? I unlock the door to my room. Aunt Jean props on the bed and watches TV. I put on my gown. We talk into the night.



Mary's Angel

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rab-bo'ni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." John 12:11-17

Sunday, February 1, 1998



*Sunday Service at Four Points Hotel
in Jerusalem*

The sun wakes the morning. We sleep in today because we are holding Sunday worship service downstairs. I open the sliding door and step out onto the balcony. The air is brisk. I decide to take a warm bath.

I lay back in the water. Relaxing for the first time in forever, I realize my angel is still in my coat pocket. The Voice never spoke to me yesterday. I know he has gone forever. Just like always, I take care of everybody else, and I do not matter at all.

My sadness intensifies, turning into anger. I can take care of my prayer myself. And if I do not find an angel, that's okay too; I will put my prayer somewhere. This won't be the first thing I've done alone!

I remember what Daddy said to me when Bill lay dying. "Mary Jane, get a stiff upper lip. Other people are counting on you." That did not destroy me, and this will not destroy me. Do you hear me, Voice?

I scrub my body, determined to meet this day with a stiff upper lip. I force myself to hum as I dry off. By the time we leave for breakfast, I am self-assured and in a happy mood.

The Sunday service room looks like a basement. The lights on the wall look like Easter crosses. The Bishop stands in front chatting, then turns to address his audience. "Felton is going to get us started this morning with some singing. And I think he's going to start with *Marching to Zion* since ya'll seem to be breaking out in song."

Why does this feel like the first Sunday that ever existed? Were all the others dress rehearsals for this day? Maybe it is good that I am in control again. Felton walks to the front and leads us. Let us hear *your* voice as we clap our hands and heartily sing:

"Come, we that love the Lord,
and let our joys be known;
join in a song with sweet accord,
join in a song with sweet accord
and thus surround the throne,
and thus surround the throne.
We're marching to Zion,
beautiful, beautiful Zion;
we're marching upward to Zion,
the beautiful city of God.

Let those refuse to sing
who never knew our God;

but children of the heavenly King,
but children of the heavenly King
may speak their joys abroad,
may speak their joys abroad.
We're marching to Zion,
beautiful, beautiful Zion;
we're marching upward to Zion,
the beautiful city of God."

Ida says, "Praise God!"
We continue singing:
"Jesus whispers sweet and low,
'Fear not, I am with thee-
peace be still,'
In all of life's ebb and flow.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus
Sweetest name I know,
Fills my every longing,
Keeps me singing as I go.

Soon He's coming back to welcome me
Far beyond the starry sky;
I shall wing my flight to worlds unknown,
I shall reign with Him on high.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus
Sweetest name I know,
Fills my every longing,
Keeps me singing as I go."

A voice from the group says, "Praise the Lord."

The Bishop asks, "Harold would you come and lead us in prayer?"

"Let us pray together," Rev. Harold Smith says. "Lord, as we gather together and worship this morning, we give you thanks for the blessings you've given us. For the experiences we've shared together as we've traveled about the countryside and walked where Jesus walked. We pray that you will help us to love one another and to love the people of the world in a new way because of what we've experienced together.

"Lord, through the years so many have prayed for peace for Jerusalem. Help us to find peace not only in Jerusalem, but throughout the world. We pray that this morning you will help us to reach some kind of accord that will bring peace for everyone."

Silently, I insert my thoughts in the prayer, "God, when I was very young, I promised you I would work for peace. I still will if You want me to."

"Lord, there are concerns on all of our hearts. There are people we've left behind who are ill, those who are troubled, our family members. Lord, there are those who are expecting additions to their families. All of these things are a part of our lives. And we lift up those

concerns and those individuals, and we pray for their healing and for your help, your strength, your guidance.”

I feel a twinge of guilt and wonder if I should have been so stern with the Voice. Even if he didn't hear me, God did.

“Lord, we would remember the churches we represent, our local churches, our district, our conference, churches around the world. We pray for services today that your Holy Spirit would be present in each and every one of them and that hearts and minds might be touched and changed.

“We pray, Lord, that as we continue our experiences together, You would keep us safe, would help us to see, even more than we've ever seen or experienced before, just how much you've loved us, how much Christ really gave when He gave His life for us.”

“Give us wisdom, give us joy, as we pray in the name of Him who taught us all to pray, ‘Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.’”

I am my old me. I delight in having the burden of the Voice lifted—even joyous—until I remember what my grandmother used to tell me. The devil keeps you happy when he has you. He only stirs things up when he is afraid God might win you.

The Bishop speaks: “I grew up in a church where on Sunday nights we shared testimonies with one another. I don't know whether any of you grew up in that kind of tradition, but I did. And one of the things that I like to do on Sundays here in the Holy Land, especially when we have a Sunday after we've been traveling together for a week, is to give you an opportunity to share a little bit about perhaps how this experience has touched your life and your soul.”

“For those who are pastors, maybe even your sense of calling and ministry in your life. I know that you've started to do that with one another. I've overheard you as you've shared around the tables these last few days. But, I wanted to give those of you who have something you'd like to share, some special moment, some special insight, that maybe is new to you and made a difference in your understanding of your faith and your journey as a Christian. We'll give a few folks this morning an opportunity to share spontaneously from your rich experience this week, how the Lord has touched your life and what that means to you. To share a testimony of faith.”

“Glory to God.”

Dr. John's son stands. “I was fortunate to be able to read a passage at the Antonia Fortress where Jesus was tried and then taken to the Place of the Pavement where the soldiers played the King's Game to win Jesus' clothes and further humiliated Him by placing a crown of thorns on His head. And one of the highlights of my life has been to share the empty tomb today with my wife and daughter. We spend a lot of time here talking about ‘they,’ but in the Antonia Fortress, I understood that it's ‘we.’ And that Jesus Christ was humiliated and suffered and was given a crown of thorns and a purple robe, and marched through the streets that we'll walk down today.

“It was really brought home to me when my daughter said yesterday, ‘Daddy, I don't know any of the songs we're singing. It seems strange that we haven't sung, *Jesus Loves Me.*’

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

“But in that Antonio Fortress, I was reminded that I’m not here only to celebrate the power of God, but also the mercy that He showed as He was beaten and humiliated in that Fortress. And so, for my daughter, I’d like for us to sing *Jesus Loves Me*.”

“Amen. Praise the Lord.”

In a hearty innocence, we all sing:

“Jesus loves me! This I know,
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong;
they are weak, but he is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.”

A lady from the group stands with her hands clasped in front of her. “Praise the Lord. Oh give thanks unto the Lord. For the Lord is good, and His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations. As surely as God does love us, and I am very thankful unto God. God bless you.”

The Bishop reads from Psalm 25 which asks God to teach us His paths and lead us in His truth. He then shares that several weeks ago before Christmas, he was in Nashville, Tennessee when he noticed a young man changing the Taco Bell sign to say, “We sell tacos.” At first, he thought this was strange because everyone knows Taco Bell sells tacos. But then, he surmised that they wanted to be sure people knew they could buy tacos there. Then the Bishop says, “I wonder sometimes if we in the church ought not be just as clear as this young man. What would we put on our sign board? The one I might suggest is ‘We make disciples.’”

The Bishop says that the one thing he would share with someone about what it means to be on the journey with Christ is that it means to be a person of prayer. He says we should not just pray during a crisis but that prayer and praise are synonymous and that there is value in being silent before God and allowing Him to work in our life. He expresses his hope that during these last couple of days in the Holy Land that we find quiet listening time to see what God might want to say to us. “And as you go home and as you reflect on this experience, which can be overwhelming, I hope you will spend some quiet time reflecting on what God would have you do in your ministry on this journey for Christ.

When the Bishop closes with prayer, the group spontaneously sings:

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
look full in His wonderful face,
and the things of earth
will grow strangely dim
in the light of His glory and grace.”

Today, I will still even my soul. Amen.

“Before you leave,” Dr. John says, “let me do a couple of housekeeping things. This evening at dinner we’ll have announcements for you as to your arrangements for luggage, check in, and all of those kind of things. Some of you were anxious at breakfast as rumors of war

increased last night and as Saddam Hussein threatened to bomb the airport at Tel Aviv, where we have to board our plane. We haven't forgotten that we got you here. Normally, most of the people here in Israel believe you've spent most of your money, so they want you now to go home." We laugh. "Those of you who still have money, you can wave it around today. They'll take it, and then you can go home. We'll do all those housekeeping issues; don't be anxious about that today as you travel.

"Now, the other thing that some of you have brought up. You heard all the rhetoric about the saber-rattling going on with Iraq and what that means. Well, it means it's all stuff that's out of our control. It also means that saber-rattling is always political posturing. And there's no real activity during the political posturing time. As you remember back, tragically, nine years ago, it took a year to go from Desert Storm to Gulf War activities. If you're talking with folks back home, you might assure them that you are not in a military state that's locked down in any way. And we need to enjoy this day without those tense and anxious moments. Have a good day and you'll get good instructions tonight. Okay?"

I feel a new determination, a new acceptance, a new focus. I may not bother with that silly paper angel. Our destination today is the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrow that Christ walked on His way to be crucified, in the Old City.

But first, we walk through the Dung Gate towards the Dome of the Rock. Today the city and I are one. My familiarity encourages the city to open its mouth. On the Temple Mount, I click pictures of one of the city's families, white-scarved women who sit on the ground waiting for prayer time. Others scurry to their own destinations. I ponder what I perceive to be the first homeless person we have run across. He reflects such dignity. When a country has a prescribed homeless culture, like the Bedouins, does this transform homelessness into a productive element of society, leaving few to be homeless creatures? Will Israel experience the tragedy of homelessness as the Jews eliminate the nomadic lifestyle of the Bedouin culture by requiring them to build non-transportable housing? Will the desire to control the free spirit come back to haunt the controller? What would happen if we prescribed homelessness as a culture in America rather than treating these people like criminals? Ironically, the nomadic Bedouins honor life with strict tribal laws, some of which allow no exposure of arms, legs, or necklines. They value family, friends, Arabic coffee, and their tents and camels. Bedouins discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. At God's command, Abraham himself became a nomad.

On the Temple Mount, Mount Moriah, Solomon built the First Temple. Solomon's Temple housed the Ark of the Covenant, a wooden chest containing the Ten Commandments, which rested in a room in the back called "the holy of the holies." Only one high priest could go in once a year to this room. On the Temple Mount, Herod built the Second Temple, but the Ark of the Covenant was already missing. The only remains of Herod's Temple is the structure's retaining wall, known as the Western Wall or Wailing Wall, which we visited two days ago.

The Dome of the Rock, Qoubbat al-Sakhra in Arabic, with exquisite mosaics and Arabic writing rises in all its splendor from the Temple Mount. Holy to Moslems, Christians, and Jews, the Moslems reconstituted the long abandoned Temple Mount, a garbage dump for years, and built the octagonal Dome of the Rock in 691 A.D. The Dome typifies the outstanding architects and artisans of the Arab culture.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

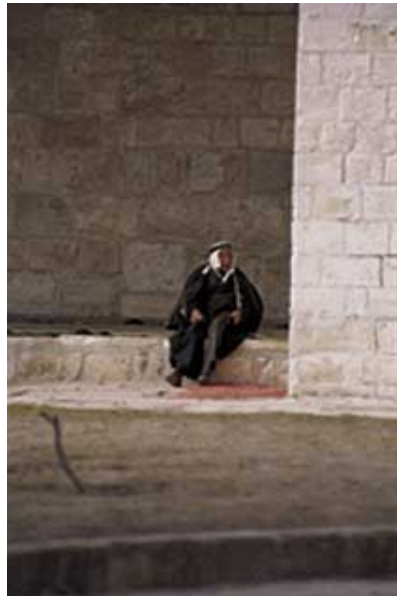


Left: Dung Gate

Right: The El Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount

Below: Arab women waiting for time of prayer

Right: Homeless Man, embarrassed when we saw him sleeping on the ground



The Dome is near the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the al-Aqsa Mosque. It houses the sacred rock, called the Kubbet es-Sakkra, on which Abraham prepared the sacrifice of Isaac, or Ishmael, if you are Moslem. Also, Mohammed is said to have ascended to heaven from here. Mohammed brought the Koran, the Moslem holy book that identifies Allah as the one God, to the Arab people. Mohammed descended from the Canaanites, through Ishmael from Abraham. He developed his doctrine “La ilaha illa ’llah!” through prayer.

On route to the Via Dolorosa, I spot a group having a stand-up picnic. The women wear white scarves. We pass women picking up their children from school. This seems strange since it is Sunday, but then I remember the Jews’ holy day is Saturday and the Moslems’ holy day is Friday. In the garden area of the Temple Mount, I capture Arab men sitting on the ground, having a serious discussion. So many people sit on the ground here.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

Left and left below: Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount



Below right: Arches leading towards Eastern Gate on Temple Mount



Twelve Days to Jerusalem

Top left: Picnicking while waiting for time of prayer to take place

Right: Picking up children from school

Below left: At garden area on Temple Mount



As we go through St. Stephen's Gate, where the Via Dolorosa begins, we are thrust into a maze of activities and exotic smells. David warns, "Now watch your things as we go through here. Pick-pockets will never touch me; they will touch you. They are afraid of me because I am a Jewish guide and would report them to the authorities. Okay?"

Churches abound in this Moslem Quarter. I do not know if David warns us of danger because he is a Jew and prejudice or if the Moslems are so repressed, with their sixty-five percent unemployment and scarce educational opportunities, that some have resorted to stealing to survive and thus acquired a bad reputation. Or, maybe it is just the artistic, spontaneous, craftsman nature of the Arab that others fear because they do not understand it. Once people taste their hospitality and see their broad welcoming smile, they respond differently and value the sincere friendship. But, it is appropriate that we should enter the Via Dolorosa under judgment of another, whatever the reasons. Euphonious sounds and smells introduce us to this quarter of the Old City.

When the route of the Via Dolorosa needed repair and the rubble was cleared, huge Roman paving stones were exposed. Jesus and His followers may well have walked on these very stones. We stroll through the Via Dolorosa, the movement of Christ from His arrest to His

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Both: Old City of Jerusalem



*Left: Station Two of the Cross,
where Jesus met His mother Mary*

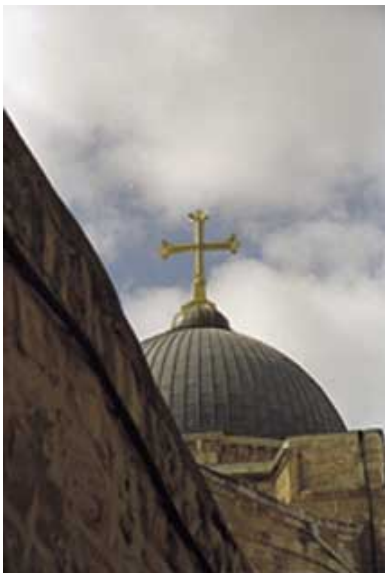
crucifixion. The Stations of the Cross are sites where the events occurred or are remembered along the walk of the Via Dolorosa. We arrive at the III Station of the Cross first today. A column in a wall on El-Wad Street designates Jesus' fall with the cross. Jesus met His Mother Mary at IV Station of the Cross. An Armenian Catholic Church is here. The ascent here becomes steep and crowded and worry about Thelma and Mother trying to walk on the paving stones and up the slopes. Simon the Cyrenian helped Jesus carry His cross at V Station of the Cross. At VI Station of the Cross, Veronica wiped Jesus' face with her veil. The House of St. Veronica commemorates this. Jesus fell again at the VII Station of the Cross, which is also thought to be the place of the Gate of Judgment where Jesus was led from the city to be crucified. Buildings cover the route to the next station where Jesus told the woman not to weep for Him but weep for Jerusalem. This is outside the Greek Orthodox Chapel of St. Charalampos. At IX Station of the Cross, Jesus stumbled a third time. A pillar marks this at the Ethiopian Coptic Church here. On Fridays, the Franciscan Catholics carry a cross and make a ceremonial stop at each Station of the Cross. The last five stations are located inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Most believe this to be the site of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. We pass by a cross on the roof of a house. On a line connected to it is a load of washing hanging out to dry.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Left: Station Six of the Cross, commemorates Veronica wiping the face of Jesus with a cloth

Right: Laundry day on way to Church of the Holy Sepulchre



Both: Russian Orthodox church, Church of the Holy Sepulchre

I will never see the Passion Play the same. Imagine the most heartbreaking thing you've ever seen or heard and multiply it by a billion. On the way to the next station, I feel the love of a mother watching her child struggle with a cross that means her son's death. I feel Jesus' gratitude for the man who carried His burden, even for a short walk. I feel the compassion of a lady along Jesus' path to death. I feel the wetness as she wipes the blood and sweat from His face. I feel Jesus' knee burn from stumbling on the rough, hard pavement. I feel the ache in Jesus' back from the weight of the cross. I see the puzzling look on the woman's face when Jesus tells her to weep for Jerusalem, not Him. I feel Jesus' possible relief that He is this far on God's journey. Can you hear the orchestra and angels?

Down the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem that day,
The soldiers tried to clear the narrow streets,

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

But the crowds pressed in to see the man condemned to die on Calvary.
He was bleeding from a beating, there were stripes upon His back,
And He wore the crown of thorns upon His head.
And He bore with every step the scorn
of those who cried out for His death.

Down the Via Dolorosa, called the Way of Suffering—
Like a lamb came the Messiah Christ the King.
But He chose to walk that road out of His love for you and me.
Down the Via Dolorosa all the way to Calvary.
Por la Via Dolorosa treste dia en Jerusalem.
Los soldados le abrian paso a Jesus. Mas la gente se acercaba.
Para ver al que llevaba aquella cruz.
Por la Via Dolorosa que es la via del dolor.
Como oveja veno Christo, Rey, Senor.
Y fue El quien quiso ir por su amor por ti y por mi,
Por la Via Dolorosa al Calvario ya morir.

The blood that would cleanse the souls of all men,
Made it's way thru the heart of Jerusalem.
Down the Via Dolorosa called the Way of Suffering
Like a lamb came the Messiah Christ the King.
But He chose to walk that road out of His love for you and me.
Down the Via Dolorosa all the way to Calvary.



Home of the Ethiopian monks



Little girl along the walk



Art in the Lutheran Church

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

David yells back to us as we near the Lutheran church, “Be sure our group is not mixed up with the other bus. Let’s go.” We duck through a doorway, then through a thick low archway. I notice primitive religious art. The ornate front wall looks like a fortune telling room. The aisle separates two sections of benches where Dr. John indicates for us to sit. I go to the front row. White wrought iron separates the seats and the priest. Quietly, others join me. The priest wears a four-inch high circular hat, a floor length white dress-like piece, and a dark cape with sleeves that spread when he raises his arms, holding a strange shaped book. As petite chimes sound, the priest begins reciting in a language I do not understand. When he turns the open book it looks like a cross. He holds the book at the bottom, bending at his waist—up and down, as if he is blessing us with the book.

The man is dark-skinned with a neatly trimmed beard. He says something to which the ministers respond, “Kyrie Eleison.” They repeat this sequence two more time. He makes the sign of the cross. He turns and places the book on a red serape type cloth hanging on an easel. He tosses the bottom of the cloth up and over the book to cover it. The priest walks under the chain that separates us and walks out. We file out. I think the past reached out to cleanse me by offering me a blessing. I will be purer to meet Jesus’ last trials.

Outside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a plain wooden cross leans against the wall. I listen to the guides discussing the location of the crucifixion, the Garden Tomb or here. I hear one guide refer to his group as “the family.” I guess they have to love us; tourist put food in their babies’ mouths.

The remaining stations are encompassed in the expansive, complex Church of the Holy Sepulchre. I need to spend weeks here! The church is shared by the Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Syrians, and Copts. I hear chants, smell incense, and see the atonement stone where they laid Jesus to dress Him after removing Him from the cross. The Atonement Stone is the XIII Station of the Cross. I go near it, but shy away from bending down to touch it like others do to pray.



Church where monk held service for us



Etheopean monk that held service for us



Outside Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

Below: XIII Station of the Cross, cleansing area where they laid Jesus to dress him; in the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre

Right: Inside Church of the Holy Sepulchre



Left: Portal window showing inside the building holding Christ's tomb

Below: Prayer candles outside the building of Christ's tomb



Dr. John tells us to hurry and get in line for Jesus' tomb, the XIV Station of the Cross. A small enclosure in the center of the rotunda encases the tomb. The enclosure encompasses two chambers: The Chapel of the Angel and the Holy Sepulchre. Glass portals interrupt the wall, offering a glimpse inside. Strewn prayer candles stick in the sandboxes lining the outer sides. We wait in line for our turn to kneel in Christ's tomb, the Holy Sepulchre. Passover began at sunset on the day Jesus was crucified. A stone was rolled over the door of the tomb that Joseph of Arimathea gave for Jesus' body.

Inside the first chamber, two priests guard Christ's tomb. They give me the feeling that if I touch anything, they will put me in prison. I am afraid to breathe. I stand in line, patiently waiting my turn, watching them out of the corner of my eye.

"Get your prayer out. Get your angel out." I cannot believe I am hearing the Voice.



Entrance into the first chamber



Two priests guarding the door of Christ's tomb in the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre



I am speechless for a moment. “Why did you come now? I don’t think this is a good time. These priests might have me arrested if I do anything strange here. And not to be argumentative, but I hope you’re not going to ask me to put my prayer in the tomb of Christ. That would be wrong. I’m telling you flat out, I’m absolutely *not* doing that!”

“Mary, look, we don’t have long. Go ahead and get your prayer out. Okay?” By this time, I am the next person in line to go in the tomb, the Holy Sepulchre. Instinct overriding my logic, I reach in my pocket for my angel.

“Now, if you will look, there is an angel in front of you. Slide your angel behind it. It’s especially for you.”

I am speechless when I see the angel two inches from my nose. In a daze, I slide my angel behind the angel on the doorfacing of Christ’s tomb. And you know what? My angel fits exactly behind it. Is that not incredible? Who would ever think? Certainly not me!

I am embarrassed that I questioned God. I am in awe that even in my questioning, He offers me the entryway of the tomb of His Son. I am so touched that I silently kneel at the foot of Christ’s tomb for only a moment because I do not know what to say to God. The source of all miracles formulate from our Lord. The joy of loving God is to believe and never expect, which centers us in constant gratitude to the love of God; through this all things are possible.



Angel on the right side of the doorfacing of Christ's tomb in the Chapel of the Angel, place of my angel

Below: Ceiling at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Right: Walls at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre



I walk out of the tomb in a daze. I am beside myself with awe. To keep the joy from bursting forth from my body and disintegrating me, I pace the floor and wander behind the Chapel. Dr. John happens to be there at the same time. "Come here, I want to show you something." He takes me over to caves that are away from everything. We stand there. Suddenly, a jarring feeling overcomes me. I am sure there are armies of angels standing here, and we are about to see them. Even though I know whatever I see, he will probably see, I panic. I quickly say something that makes no sense, turn my back, and bolt away as fast as I can. He must think I am the rudest person in the world. I do not feel like I am capable of seeing an army of angels. I can't absorb any more at the moment.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



In Syrian Orthodox tomb where I felt a whole army of angels was about to appear to me and Dr. John

I work to calm myself by strolling around the church. I stand outside the tomb walls and peer in at the people standing in line. They have no idea of the special gift I've been given. Of course, they're experiencing their own gifts.

When I go back to the place where they prepared Christ's body, I kneel down and lovingly touch the slab. On the way to another station, we pass a statue of Mary that is so sad, I imagine it crying real tears.

We stand in line to kneel at the place where the cross stood on Calvary, the XII Station of the Cross. This was called the place of the skull, or Golgotha in Hebrew.²¹ (John 19:1-19) The bedrock beneath is the original rock of Golgotha and contains a large crack caused by cosmic events that happened during Jesus' death. I squat underneath the table. There is a silver



Left: Sides of church

Below left: Cleansing rock, slab where they laid Christ to dress Him

Below: Mural of Christ's cross being laid down



Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Left: Only sad Madonna I saw in Israel, near Calvary. It commemorates Simeon's prophecy, "and a sword will pierce through your own soul also." Luke 2:35



Fissure in top of rock representing the earthquake, in the ninth hour, which ran all the way from the Temple Mount and ripped the curtain



Where the cross stood at Calvary



Inside the church

picture of Christ with a silver disc marking the spot where Jesus' cross stood. I place all of my fingers inside this hole where the cross touched. The energy radiating from this hole electrifies my arms. I quickly say a prayer of thanksgiving to God and Jesus.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



All: In the Christian Quarter outside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre



We walk through the Old City in the Christian Quarter. All three of our tour groups meet at the Orient Bazaar. Jamal and his mother, father, and other family members generously close their doors to their regular customers and open their hearts to us as they cook and serve us their national snack, falafel, for lunch as we shop in their store. This is the same store that opened for us the first night we were in Jerusalem. Jamal's family are Palestinian Christians. Christians have become a minority in the Holy Land.

We leave and drive towards Lazarus' tomb. I arose from the dead today. I did not think my angel would find a home. God not only acknowledged my angel, He asked for it at the entry to His Son's tomb.

We go less than two miles outside Jerusalem on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives to Bethany. Bethany is an old town that was around before the Crusaders. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus often shared fellowship with Jesus here. It is also here that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Today this area is an Arab village called El Azarieh which means "of Lazarus."

Ali parks the bus and we trudge up the steep, winding hill to Lazarus' tomb. Bethany appears poor and simple, as it might have when Jesus came to visit his friends. Children are not



Twelve Days to Jerusalem

in school here and gather around us in the street as we walk. People come outside, curious to have a look at the visitors. The rite of Spring fills the air. In a leaning stance on this hillside, we read, “John 11: 38-44, then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

“Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’

“Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, ‘Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.’

“Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?’

“So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me.’

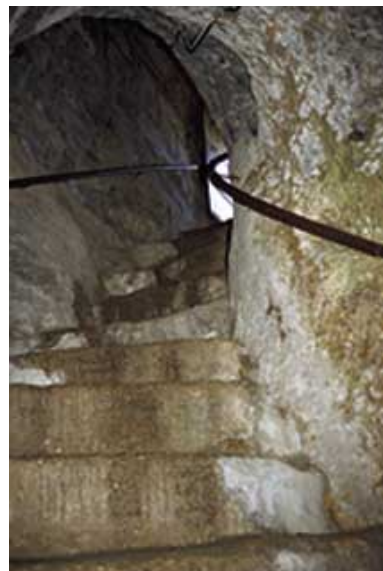
Below: Lazarus Tomb at Bethany

Right: Amelia Margaret, Dr. John's granddaughter



Left: Opening to Lazarus' Tomb

Right: Stairway down into Tomb



Twelve Days to Jerusalem

“When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Laz’arus, come out.’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’”

The smell of supper beckons me up the hill. I tie my will down to keep from running to the house I feel sure belongs to a dear relative. Bethany is so familiar to me.

An elderly village lady leads small groups through an opening of the tomb that I can barely squeeze into. The uneven stairs lead to darkness with an earthy smell. Where Lazarus lay is small and cramped. We briefly view the claustrophobic tomb and climb back into the light.

The store across from the tomb reminds me of a small open-air market. A gentleman stands to the right of the entryway. He encourages others to browse as he plays an ancient flute. I purchase a flute for Cartney and one for my artist friend, David.

The others finish their tour of the tomb much too soon for my satisfaction. I want to stay on this hillside longer. I want to see more of the dog playing on the rooftop across the street. In the memory of my skin, I want to record the breeze blowing the little red dress and the white sheets on the roof clothesline. I want to say to the people of this hillside, “I know who you are.”

The others gather at the front of the store. They are ready to head for the bus. I tug at my heart as it stretches between the children on the hillside and those at home. For now, I turn and join the group ascending the winding road. Someone says that one of our group saw friends she met when she was in Israel before and is staying behind to have dinner with them here. I am jealous.

As we near the bus, small children come out like ants to sugar. They seek an American dolla’ or candy. We throw them what candy and gum we can scrape together and vow to bring a suitcase full next time. I wonder why they are out in the streets by themselves.

We return to explore more of Jerusalem. One of the places we see is the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives where Jews, Moslems, and Christians say Christ will return. The graves look like concrete boxes above ground. They are different heights and a square hole is formed in the end. Loose rocks top many of the graves. People place rocks on top and pray a prayer for the



View from the top of the Mount of Olives



Jewish Cemetery on the Mount of Olives; the cemetery where it is said Christ will return



Olive tree at the Mount of Olives

resurrection. What a good use of resources for a country that appears to cultivate rocks! Everyone wants to be buried in this cemetery.

On the Mount of Olives, the birth of rosemary blossoms and the gnarled knowledge of the ancient olive trees intertwine. My instincts tell me life meets death here in complete peace. The young and the old produce and live here in unison. The abundance of the holy, beautiful white rosemary flowers and its healing scent nestle those near. The limbs of the ancient olive trees twist and turn, holding to the ground in sturdiness.

We share scripture. “Acts 1: 8-12, ‘but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Sama’ria and to the end of the earth.’”

“And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’ Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away.”

Amid an abundance of sunshine, prolific rosemary blossoms, and an understated peace, we stroll to the Dominus Fleuit. Dominus Fleuit translates to “Christ wept.” I overhear one of the guides saying the architect for the church here designed its dome in the shape of a tear to portray the Lord’s tears. Inside the church, the large glass and metal window frames the view overlooking Jerusalem. A cross silhouettes against the city. Jesus, knowing the coming destruction of Jerusalem, stopped here and wept over the city of Jerusalem on His entry to the City on Palm Sunday.

The smaller circumference of the room with the several-story high ceiling affords noteworthy acoustics. As we enter inside, the group before us finishes testing these acoustics by singing *The Lord’s Prayer*. We sing a song, then look at the gold plaques adorning the walls before most wander outside into the sunshine. Four or five of us stay and scatter on the benches.

My camera breaks. I rest on the bench trying to figure out how I might repair it. We have one day left. I despair until I remember my pocket Nikon I placed in my suitcase before leaving for this trip. After taking a thousand pictures, I should not complain if the camera needs a rest.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Above left: Rosemary bushes at Dominus Flevit

Above right: Inside Dominus Flevit, which means "Christ wept;" "O Jerusalem...How often would I have gathered your children as a hen gathers her chicks."

Left: Place where Jesus wept over Jerusalem; Luke 19: 41-44; inside church



Ceiling of church



Wall at the church

Speaking of rest, I am tired. I decide to sit and enjoy the view overlooking Jerusalem. A movement to my left draws my attention. An unnoticed door opens from the corner of the wall. A priest walks through and sits at the organ tucked in the corner. He smiles to the few sitting and motions with his hands, implying, "Would you like for me to play and you sing?" He speaks no English, and we certainly do not speak whatever it is he speaks. His motions and ours agree. The organ resounds the notes of *Amazing Grace* as we sing,

"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

I once was lost, but now am found;
was blind, but now I see.
When we've been there ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we first begun."

The glorious finish engulfs the walls, the ceiling, every crevice of time, and gently hugs each of us. We applaud the priest and thank him. He applauds and thanks us. He turns and steps back through the wall. The door closes. None of us speak. We bask in the moment. I pray with thanksgiving as God weaves his intricate patterns.

I join the others to go to the Garden of Gethsemane. Gethsemane means "olive press." Olive oil production is a big income for this part of Jerusalem. Here, at the base of the Mount of Olives, above the Kidron Valley, Jesus waited in solitude for Judas to betray Him with a kiss, identifying Him for the Romans to arrest. The seven ancient olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane date back at least two thousand years. New branches still grow from the trees, and the trees still produce olives.

Twelve nations contributed funds to build the Church of All Nations, enclosing the Rock of Agony where Jesus sweated blood as he suffered. The sacred Garden of Gethsemane is only a stones throw from the Rock of Agony.

Outside the entryway of the church, we read, "Luke 19: 28-40, and when he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near to Beth'phage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, 'Go into the village opposite, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat; untie it and bring it here. If any one asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this, 'The Lord has need of it.'

"So those who were sent went away and found it as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, 'Why are you untying the colt?'

"And they said, 'The Lord has need of it.' And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their garments on the colt they set Jesus upon it. And as he rode along, they spread their garments on the road. As he was now drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'

"And some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to him, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples.'

"He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.'"

"Matthew 26: 36-55, then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsem'ane, and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here, while I go yonder and pray.'

"And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zeb'edee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

"Then he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.'

"And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.'

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

“And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, ‘So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’

“Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, ‘My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done.’

“And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.

“Then he came to the disciples and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.’

“While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him.’

“And he came up to Jesus at once and said, ‘Hail, Master!’ And he kissed him.

“Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why are you here?’ Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.”

We enter the church with reverence and silence; the atmosphere cannot penetrate the darkness. The air echoes the cold and emptiness. I walk around and glance at the rock. God must know I am still recovering from the intense morning. I am unemotional and feel nothing. I stay inside only a moment and walk out. I cannot take pictures because my camera is broken.

At the hotel, we toss our bags on the bed and turn on the evening news. The political figures on the screen project nothing to abate our growing nervousness. Saddam Hussein’s denial that he intends to blow up Tel Aviv only increases our anxiety. Our fear of bombs expands daily. How did Jesus live with the threat of violence?

We pack our luggage and prepare to take it downstairs for an early check-in by El Al. How amazing that a major airline would send staff sixty miles to Jerusalem from the Tel Aviv Airport to examine our luggage and take them to the airport early. I think this is wonderful service; my uncle, who was in SACS (Strategic Air Command of the U.S. Airforce), later said we were in blackout so we would not be identified and in danger. We remember the premium of Americans hostages. I equate my blond hair to a neon sign. I decide to wear a scarf tomorrow.



*Television news talking
about new war outbreak
near where we are*



Monday, February 2, 1998



Model of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period

Anticipation and regret greet me today. I think about the hour conversation Amber and I had my first night in Jerusalem. I miss her. I will miss Israel.

After breakfast, we leave the hotel to visit the Model City. For safety, I tie a scarf over my blond hair. The Jerusalem Model City replicates the Second Temple Period. The owner of the Holy Land Hotel built the model as a tribute to his deceased son. The model covers one-quarter acre and scales to one-fiftieth the original size. Some buildings nearly reach the top of David's head. The details tout the seven years of scholarly research and four years of building put into them. The project was completed in 1966. David points out significant places and events as we move throughout the model.

Energies spent, my thoughts float in and out of the conversation. My insides jump at the sight of uniformed soldiers touring behind us. I have no desire to take their picture. Looking across the model, I see present day Jerusalem in the background. The blending of the ancient and modern as one view intrigues me. Looking through the lens of my pocket Nikon, I realize my other camera could not have captured this scope. I smile. After all, God *is* in the miracle business.

When the camera happens upon a pale yellow, boxy house with wash blowing in the breeze, I remember David telling us that once you finish a building you have to pay taxes on it,



Map of the Model City



David next to buildings of the Model City

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Model of Herod's Palace



Real city of Jerusalem seen behind Model City



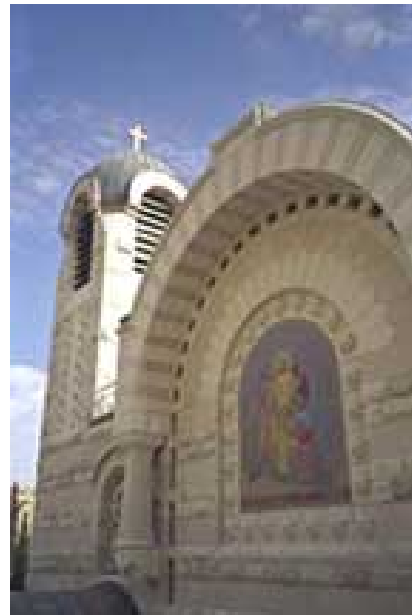
Hulda Gates and Teaching Steps at the southern end of the Temple Mount



Temple at Jesus' time

Below: Seen from the Model City

Right: Church of St Peter in Gallicantu and The Pit



so most are unfinished. Maybe this is true of life. We do not have to pay taxes on our sins until we die. Any sins left unattended when we die, are taxed. I think I will keep building on life as long as possible, just like these folks.

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Inside building

Above left: David looking down into The Pit

Above right: Our group in The Pit

Left: Hole through which they lowered Jesus into The Pit

Someone remarks The Pit is next. What in the world is The Pit? The thought bores me. We walk on steps cut into the hill beside the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, meaning the “cock-crow,” dedicated to Peter’s denial of Jesus. This is likely the path Jesus took from the Upper Room to Gethsemane and then back from Gethsemane to Caiaphas’ house the night of his arrest. The wind blows on these eastern slopes of Mount Zion.

My boredom swells until I spot an ancient hewn window looking down into a cave-like area—The Pit, excavated in 1889. David clarifies that this prison held only one person. Unlike a dungeon, prisoners were interrogated here. Four drilled holes with posts chained the prisoner. David leans on the open window overlooking The Pit. “Over here was kept acid, used to pour over the open wounds of prisoners who had been beaten by their captors.”

The group treads down the wooden stairs into The Pit, which quickly fills with tourists. Uncharacteristically, I lag behind, leaning on the door at the top of the stairs. Something restrains me when I try to move. I listen to the muffled conversations below me, then the grip loosens. I gingerly step down. Expressive faces reflect the intensity. Did a spirit swallow me? Is this how Jonah felt when the fish swallowed him? The words echo, tumbling around in my mind.

Dr. John is speaking: “The Passion Week is one of exhausting pace. You have a sense of that exhaustion with the travel week you’ve put in. Some are anxious about where you’re going next.

“And those emotions had to be part of Jesus’ experience that week—the adjuration of the crowds down the Palm Sunday walk, the face-to-face encounters with the money changers, the cleansing of the temple, the desire to celebrate the holiest meal of your tradition. Having accomplished that, going into the olive garden on the other side of the Kidron Valley and asking your friends to pray with you because of your anxiousness and tensions.

“They fall off to sleep, overcome with their own emotions and tiredness. In that garden, Jesus sweats droplets like blood as He prays. It’s a night without sleep, without peace.” Dr. John’s voice becomes thick with emotion. “To have one of your most trusted come with a temple band to betray you with a kiss, to be led across that valley, to be literally drug up these steps outside of this building.²² (Matthew 26:57-75)

“And we had the benefit of walking down. We’re assuming Jesus was lowered through this hole. The only way to get up is for somebody to put a rope under your arms and pull you up.



*Dr. John in The Pit,
talking to the Hope group*

You know if you get pulled out, it's just to be scourged in the next room. There isn't any happy event for anybody who comes into this pit.

"When Jesus was in the wilderness and tempted, His response was to share scripture with the devil. We can surmise that while He was here, once again He rested on the scripture. What seems probable would be this reading that John will share with us. John will you read the 88th Psalms?"

John, who I call Decatur Preacher, reads "Hear now this reading from the inspired word of the Living God, Psalms 88: 1-18, O LORD, my God, I call for help by day; I cry out in the night before thee. Let my prayer come before thee, incline thy ear to my cry! For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol. I am reckoned among those who go down to the Pit; I am a man who has no strength, like one forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom thou dost remember no more, for they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep. Thy wrath lies heavy upon me, and thou dost overwhelm me with all thy waves. [Selah] Thou hast caused my companions to shun me; thou hast made me a thing of horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape; my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon thee, O LORD; I spread out my hands to thee. Dost thou work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up to praise thee? [Selah] Is thy steadfast love declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in Abaddon? Are thy wonders known in the darkness, or thy saving help in the land of forgetfulness? But I, O LORD, cry to thee; in the morning my prayer comes before thee. O LORD, why dost thou cast me off? Why dost thou hide thy face from me? Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer thy terrors; I am helpless. Thy wrath has swept over me; thy dread assaults destroy me. They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in upon me together. Thou hast caused lover and friend to shun me; my companions are in darkness."

Decatur Preacher allows these last words to settle over us, then says, "May the Lord bless to our understanding this portion of the living conversation He has had with us." He closes the Bible.

Dr. John says, “Would you share together the chorus *Thank You Lord for Saving My Soul?*”

The group sings appreciation for Jesus’ agony:

“Thank you Lord for saving my soul.
Thank you Lord for making me whole.
Thank you Lord for giving to me,
thy great salvation so rich and free.”

The word “free” swells in my ears, connecting me.

Dr. John clears his throat. “Some years ago, I came to this place with an eighty-two year old woman named Betty Cope. She’d been a member of the church where I was serving for seventy-five years. And she came to this place.

“When the lights came up, she was weeping. I put my arm around her and I said, ‘Are you okay?’

“She said, ‘I’ve been a member of our church seventy-five years, but I didn’t know until this moment what Jesus did for me.’”

Several respond softly, “Amen.”

An emotional Dr. John continues, “He gave in a way that we can’t fully get in touch with. And He calls us to give back to the world in a way that the world can’t get in touch with. Arise, and go in His peace.”

I push against the crowd and move into The Pit where only a few people remain. An energy field from the cave wall reaches out and pulls me to it like a magnet. My body scrunches down, my back flattens against the wall, my knees turn to my left, my chin droops, and my arms stretch out on each side. Stuck in this awkward position, I fear people might notice. Why is it pulling me against it?

My body struggles with an unbearable pain. I take a deep breath, muster my strength, and push against the wall. I quickly move away and examine the wall. I notice a curious dark stain. Trying not to be obvious, I back slowly away and turn to a minister. “What’s with that wall?”

Pointing to the dark stains, the minister asks, “Don’t you know the story of this wall?”

“What?”

“Look at the dark spot where you were. It’s the size of a human. They say this is where Christ struggled, chained to that wall. He agonized so much that first night that his perspiration stained the wall dark.”

Sensing the hard cries Jesus wrought, I stare at the wall. No peace lives here. In desperation, I tiptoe towards the cove to the right to slip an extra angel from my pocket under a

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Stains on wall where Jesus sweated blood; referenced on sign outside The Pit; wall that pulled my back against it



Explanation read after leaving The Pit; tells about dark stains on wall



Inside the entry and exit

rock. I gently touch the dark spot on the wall as if to ease the bruise of a child before moving away. I am ready to get out of this place!

In the lobby, I read the sign on the wall:

“Sacred Pit (dungeon) - Excavations in 1889 uncovered 3 Byzantine crosses engraved in the orifice at the top, 7 red and 4 black oxide crosses on the walls and a silhouette of a praying figure on the lower south wall.

“These findings along with the ruins of a church and a large number of mosaics, coins, and religious artifacts, testify to the presence of a 5th century shrine venerated by the Byzantine community.

“Prompted by the dungeon-like appearance of the pit and its proximity to Ca’iaphas’ palace thought to have been located in this general area, the Byzantines recalled here Jesus’ imprisonment overnight as he awaited trial before Ca’iaphas and the Sanhedrin. Faithful to this ancient tradition, Christians continue to remember Jesus, the Suffering Servant of the Lord, placing on his lips the words of the psalmist:

“My soul is surfeited with troubles... You have plunged me into the bottom of the pit... Upon me your wrath lies heavy... I am imprisoned and cannot escape... Oh Lord, I call upon you.” (Ps 88).

Two drawings of the cave's contents come next, then the sign has the following descriptions by the drawings:

- * Original access to the cavity when its floor was undoubtedly at a higher level, as the 3-meter drop beneath the steps would seem to suppose.
- * Orifice in the vault, with 3 engraved Byzantine crosses, probably pierced when the cavity's floor was dug to a deeper level.
- * Different chisel marks on the top and bottom portions of the walls suggesting different stone-dressers for the upper and lower portions.
- * Opening between pit and adjacent underground caves.
- * 7 red oxide crosses on walls.
- * 4 black oxide crosses on walls.
- * Silhouette of praying figure on lower south wall."

Months later, when I talk to Cartney about The Pit, he writes this *Transcendence to Shine*. "Jesus Christ, betrayed, arrested, dragged through the streets, possibly spat on, tortured, thrown into a dark hole of a cell in a high priest's house on the way to trial, taunted, asked to defend his position as the Son of God, and after living a blameless and sinless life, having done everything right, having loved everyone. One can try to imagine the horror and what you would feel like after having done everything right—how you would feel in such a position; and you cannot, because, unlike Jesus, we have all made mistakes.

"One can conjecture on what would have happened historically, what the guards of that time would have been like, and how they might have treated him, how they might have scorned and mocked and beat him, or even how one guard might have deep inside felt the truth standing in Jesus' presence, the quiet power within Christ; yet, he still followed through with the blow of a fist or a cruel word. It is all supposition what might have gone on in any one person's mind at that time—except one—Jesus Christ.

"Whether hurt, beaten, betrayed, or spat on—and after such a perfect life—we know that he prayed for them. He forgave them. He loved them. If it were a question of being worthy or unworthy, then we would all fall short; but, that is not the question because we can never out-give God. We can give all we can and that is good. We can love all we can and that is good. And the best we can do is appreciate the price Christ paid for us so that we can accept the blessings of God, and love despite our worth. Will we? Ask God and we shall. In doing so, we lessen Christ's burden. I love you. Faith, Hope, and Love, but the greatest of these is Love. Thank you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen."

Outside the building, harsh Roman soldiers silhouette against the sunny, blue sky. Next the Garden Tomb, with the genteel nature of the English, is a welcome relief. A gentleman greets us. "Come right in, friends." Leave it to the English to normalize our sightseeing trip.

We admire flowers as we stroll. The English chap guides us to the back of the Garden where we gather on a concrete protrusion to study the mountain jutting to the sky. It resembles a skull, which is the reason Gordon dubbed this the place mentioned in the Bible as Galgotha or Mountain of the Skull. Buses and crowds on the street below drown out the Englishman's explanations. The hustle and bustle of daily life moves like heated bacteria. I imagine similar movement on the day Jesus was crucified. As He prepared to suffer, the world continued journeying forward, busy, busy, busy.

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I hear the Englishman: “Why the Lord Jesus died is more important than where the Lord Jesus died. There are two places in Jerusalem discussed as the place where Christ hung on the cross and the tomb where He was laid, here and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.”

Birds chirping and the smell of Rosemary quiets our spirits. The olive trees open their arms. Though I do not sense the spirit of Christ the human here, I explore the spirit of the Risen Lord. The garden emanates purity.



Left: Silhouetted soldiers outside building

Below: Reference crossing the Kidron Valley after the Last Supper



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Above: The Garden Tomb

*Left: Gordon's Galgotha
or Mountain of the Skull*



Top left: Barbed-wire on top of wall above Garden Tomb

Left: Plan of Garden Tomb

Above: Door to Garden Tomb



We saunter to the tomb. The gentleman continues his story of Jesus' death. Visitors emerge from the tomb joyously, saying, "Thank you, Jesus. Hallelujah. Glory to God. Glory." The Englishman continues without skipping a beat. The wooden door on the entry to the tomb reads, "He is not here. He is risen." The tomb sits in the side of white rocks. When my eye travels upward, barbed-wire rolling across the top, crowning the tomb just as the crown of thorns of Jesus, arrests my view. I rejoice that Jesus' pain ended.

Some witness this as the most beautiful day they have experienced at the Garden Tomb. Why am I not surprised?

In the concert circle at the tomb, Mother and I rest together, absorbing the sunshine. Unconditional love flows between us. The children of Galilee dance among us, and with her smile, Mother embraces the understanding that there are now three in this mission—her, me, and

the children of Galilee. That settled, my mind comes upon the fear that God may one day call me to live among the children of Galilee in this troubled land, and my heart fears that He will not.

Dr. John's son stands near me with his daughter Amelia. I have one more angel. I ask him if he would like his daughter to place it. He delights. Mission complete!

A Japanese-speaking group draws near the tomb. Our Hope group gathers at the center of the Garden, the designated communion area, with the Faith and Charity folks and the Bishop. We sit on benches in front of a rock wall where a white linen-covered tray holding the sacraments rests. The English group who runs the garden propose this Holy Communion for all who wish to accept. Having grown comfortable with fellow travelers, Thelma and Jean seek their own place among the worshippers. Mother and I sit together, sharing Communion for the last time in her life. Mother dies from massive bone cancer, July 26, 2002. The week I work on this edit will mark a year since her death. I miss her, and her delight lives in my heart.

The Bishop stands, a willowy tree to his left, the Decatur Preacher on his right. "We have several folks assisting in the service, but when we get to the point of receiving the elements, we will come row by row, then go back to our seats. This is the prettiest day I've ever had to celebrate the Lord's Supper here at the Garden. It's a wonderful time for us to be together. We'll begin with Dean leading us in a hymn."

"He is Lord, He is Lord!

He is risen from the dead and He is Lord!

Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

With open arms, the Decatur Preacher says, "Hear now this most gracious invitation, ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins and are in love and charity with your neighbors and intend to lead a new life following the commandments of God, and walking henceforth in His holy ways. Draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort and make your humble confession to Almighty God."

"Let us pray. Lord Almighty, we come to this day and this place with hearts that are nearly bursting because of the love that You have shared with us. But, Lord, we also are very aware of how we have fallen short of who You want us to be. And so, as we come to this time of Holy Communion, we lay before You confession of our sin. Knowing that we do not follow You in the ways that would be pleasing in Your sight, knowing most painfully and acutely the sins that we have committed, both those of omission and those of commission. Knowing that we are not perfect, knowing that our sins have bedeviled us in the past. But Lord, also knowing that Your grace is sufficient, knowing that you are slow to anger and quick to forgive, knowing

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Communion that the English prepared for us

Bishop Davis preparing for the service at the Garden Tomb



that as we confess our sins to You, that You will forgive us and receive us that our relationship with You might be made right. And so, Lord, we will take a moment now in silence for us to confess to You our own shortcomings this morning.”

Silence impregnates each personal prayer.

“And now, Lord, as forgiven children of yours, we can move forward in this day and in this moment, knowing that we are precious in Your sight. Lord, we give You thanks, praise, and all the glory for that most fundamental truth of our faith. In Christ’s Holy Name, we pray. Amen.”

Another minister comes to the front carrying her Bible. “Hear this reading from John’s gospel. John 19: 38-42. After this Joseph of Arimathe’a, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him leave. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who had at first come to him by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds’ weight. They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, as the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

“John 20: 1-18, now on the first day of the week Mary Mag’dalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’

“Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

“Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.

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“Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

“But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’

“She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’ Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?’

“Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’

“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’

“She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rab-bo’ni!’ (which means Teacher).

“Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’

“Mary Mag’dalene went and said to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord;’ and she told them that he had said these things to her.”

“The word of the Lord.”

In unison with the congregation, the minister says, “Thanks be to God.”

The white linen cloth removed, grape juice fills the small olive wood cups that wait on the tray. The Bishop picks up a wafer and turns towards the audience. He says: *They’d been together three years, Jesus and the disciples. They started on the shore of the Sea of Galilee together. We’ve been there, haven’t we? You know how beautiful that place is. And they began a journey together in that spot. They traveled all over Galilee, teaching, touching the lives of people, healing those who were sick. They saw thousands of people fed when it didn’t seem like the provisions were ample. They saw those who would question Jesus and saw how Jesus answered them in truth but with a kind of gentleness so attractive.*

They saw this man, that really no one knew, begin to attract a following. And then, they went to Mt. Tabor. Jesus was there. They had a wonderful spiritual experience and wanted to stay on the mountaintop. “Jesus, we’ll build some structures up here, a tabernacle or two. Let us stay on the mountaintop.” And yet, they came down into the valley and continued the ministry. And then, they came here to the city of Jerusalem.

Must have been difficult for Jesus to leave Galilee and come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. It was a climb over 4,000 feet. They came to the Upper Room, a place prepared for Jesus and His disciples. There, they were to celebrate this most important meal of the Jewish faith. As they gathered in that Upper Room, I wonder what the emotions were for Jesus as He washed their feet and as He began His preparations, knowing how this week would probably turn out.

He came, and they celebrated that Passover meal together. There’s a point in the Passover meal where whoever is leading that celebration reaches underneath the table and pulls out the Matzo bread hidden there at the beginning of that ceremonial supper. Sometimes we use different kinds of bread within the life of the church, but the bread we eat at this communion is a

piece of Matzo bread. I personally believe it's exactly what Jesus used that night. The symbolism of this bread is very special. It is unleavened, and that is a symbol to us of the sinlessness of Jesus.

It is perforated, reminding us of the nails. The nails driven into His hands. It is blistered, reminding us of the ways Jesus was battered, scourged back at the House of Ca' iaphas and along the way. It is striped, reminding us of those words of scripture, "By His stripes, we shall be healed." The Matzo bread is the perfect symbol for Jesus. And so, when Jesus took the bread from beneath the table and broke it . . ." The minister stops here and breaks the bread. ". . . with His disciples, he said, "This is my body broken for you."

After a little while they took a cup of wine. Actually, within the Passover meal, there are four cups of wine. Turning to pick up an olive wood cup, the minister continues, "You drink them at different times throughout the meal. We don't know which cup of wine this was. But, in my own heart and mind, I believe it was the third cup of wine. In the Jewish tradition, that third cup of wine was called the "Cup of Redemption." And Jesus took the cup and said, "Drink this in remembrance of me."

The scripture then tells us that they didn't finish the meal. They didn't finish the Passover meal. Instead, the scripture says, they went out to the Mt. of Olives singing hymns and praising God. You see, I think, and I can't prove it, but it makes some sense to me, that at that very moment the disciples realized, in a way they had never realized before, that Jesus was their redemption. He was their salvation. They didn't need to finish the meal. The Lord was with them, salvation at hand. They went out to the Mt. of Olives singing and praising God.

For at least 1950 years, Christians have been celebrating this Holy meal. This sacrament binds us together. In spite of all our differences, all of our denominations, all our doctrines, and all our theologies, this is one of the things that binds us together. Not only with one another, those of us gathered here in this special Garden today, but with all of the Christians who've gone before us, all of the saints who have gone before us.

I think of my grandparents who've been gone for a long time. When I celebrate this meal, I celebrate with them. Maybe you can think of someone special in your life who's not with us today. The good news of Christ is they are. They are with us today. Those hosts of witnesses that Hebrews talks about sitting in the stands, cheering us on in our great journey of faith. And we celebrate today, not only with each other, but we celebrate with them. But, you know, friends, in a real sense we also celebrate with those who will come after us, your children, your grandchildren, your great, great, great, great grandchildren, until Jesus comes again and we celebrate this meal with Him at the great banquet in Heaven.

This is a very special moment, a special day. We come to receive these elements not because we deserve them. We come because they are offered to us by God, by Christ, because we are precious children. What would you withhold from your child that they really needed? What would Christ withhold from us? And the answer is "nothing."

The good news this morning, as you have observed over at the tomb, is, He's not here. He's risen. In the words of Brother Wesley, "the best of all, is yet to come." The best of all is yet to come. Let us prepare our hearts to receive these elements.

Let us break bread together. The blood of our Savior Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life.

Offering the broken Matzo, the Decatur Preacher says, "The body of Christ, the bread of Heaven given for thee. Preserve thy soul and body for everlasting life." We commune with the

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world as a vibrant male soloist resounds in one language and little children at another spot sing in yet a third language.

When all have received communion, the Bishop says, "Let's join hands together as we share a prayer of thanksgiving. And let us stand. Lord, we come to You with such grateful hearts for the many blessings that you have bestowed upon us, even this blessing of the Holy Sacrament. May it be for us a means of grace. May it be for us strength and encouragement as we travel the path that You have set before us. May it give us the peace that we so desperately need in our lives and in our lands. Lord, we give You thanks. We give You thanks. We give You thanks. Amen."

"Remain standing to sing a chorus together, and then for our benediction."
We affirm to the world,

"I serve a risen Savior, He's in the world today;
I know that He is living, whatever men may say;
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer
And just the time I need Him He's always near.
He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me
along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart."

Then,

"Majesty, worship His majesty.
Unto Jesus be all glory, honor, and praise.
Majesty, kingdom authority
flow from His throne unto His own;
His anthems raise.
So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus.
Magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus, the King.
Majesty, worship His majesty;
Jesus who died, now glorified,
King of all Kings."

The Bishop blesses us: "Go in peace, my friends, with the realization that you are a child of God, loved more than you could ever imagine. Go and make disciples in the name of Jesus. Amen."

Our English Garden host gives us a sprig of rosemary and offers our communion cup as nourishment for our journey.

The clock strikes noon. We walk through the hotel lobby. Check out time looms in the shadows. Briskly walking to catch the elevator, Mother reminds us to leave any clothes we can in our room for the needy. We check our room one last time and leave our key at the front desk.



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Carry-on luggage and Covenant Tour passengers overrun the bar area. Mother, Thelma, Jean, and I buy lunch.

Waiting, the crowd chats to fill the task-free afternoon. I collect the three silver Hebrew necklaces I ordered for Amber, Cartney, and me. At my request, the shopkeeper cuts me a piece of white marker ribbon for my luggage. Thelma buys more postcards! I snicker to myself when I send Thelma postcards to arrive when she returns home.

Back in the bar, slices of pizza appear as the meal of choice. A gal in our tour group replies to the question from the Indiana Jones Preacher. "Great time. You look like Indiana Jones. Put your hat on." Thelma and Mother sit on the sofa. Mom wears her leopard jacket. Thelma wears her black and white spotted jacket. What a sight! Someone asks the question we are all thinking, "Are ya'll ready to go home?" Other questions follow, "Was this your first time?" "I'm ready to go back to the States." "Is that a good book?"

Dr. John wanders through the crowd stashed in the lobbies. "We're running just a little bit behind because the security people are lost."

The sun has set by the time we finally leave the hotel Monday evening. Darkness covers the night as the strings between the Old City and my heart tighten to play a Bach fugue. This is the first day of the rest of my life. The lighted digital clock on the dashboard ticks 18:12. Mother, Thelma, Jean, and I sit close. Others chatter away.

Indiana Jones Preacher quips, "What's the clergy discount?" when someone mentions the video being made of our trip.

"All right ladies and gentlemen," David says. "Good evening. Are you anxious to go home?"

Some answer, "Oh my word, am I." "You got the facts, Jack."

"Will you take me with you?" David asks.

Someone responds, "Can a camel swim?" We laugh.

"I got a feeling I'm gonna meet you guys soon, not far from here in Iraq," David says. We boo. "I'm sorry about this. It's how it develops. You tell the man over there in the White House to cool it because we don't have the time for business like this."

Someone responds, "Send one of your cute little Jewish girls over there to be his intern. That'll do it." We laugh.



In the lobby of hotel in Jerusalem, waiting to board the bus to go to the airport for home



David talking to us on the bus as we go to the kibbutz to eat dinner then on to airport to come home

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“We’ll give you two of our generals if you’ll give us two of yours,” David says. When we say okay, David responds, “We want General Motors and General Electric.” We laugh. “These are the Prime Ministers’ office over here to the left. These are the offices of Nethanyahu.” With a chuckle, he adds, “Today Nethanyahu, tomorrow I don’t know who. Jerusalem is beautiful lit up at night.”

Someone whistles a song while people mention things they miss, “Um, cornbread.” “Black-eyed peas.” “Ice tea.”

“When I come back to Israel, I’m gonna bring me about twenty-five pounds of candy and every kid I see I’m gonna say, ‘Here’s some candy,’” says another girl on the bus.

We pull up to the public restrooms. Ali opens the doors. The hillsides twinkle at us as we gaze over the lit city. It must be winking goodbye. Before leaving, my heart cries into the night before tucking Jerusalem in bed. Feeling we leave the city comfortable and warm completes me. I send a goodnight kiss on the soft breeze. “Stay safe,” I whisper.

We stop at a kibbutz for our farewell banquet. While the meal is lovely, there is a hollowness to it. Since we are at a kibbutz, I decide to walk outside to look for olive trees when I finish eating. I wish to see a real olive growing even though I know it is not the correct season.

Next to the sidewalk, I spy a young tree with tiny little green beads on the branches. I break a small branch and lift it to the stars in a toast. “I can’t believe You are even granting me these tiny little olives. Thank you, God. I love you!”



*Ali, our great bus driver,
our last night in Israel*



In Tel Aviv Airport waiting for flight home



People from the tour on the plane

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

Ali and David have grown to be part of our families. They sense it too as we wave goodbye. Time is lost as we wait for our departing flight. We buy duty free merchandise, read, watch people, and work at not being anxious.

When flight time arrives, a bus picks us up to take us to the plane. On the plane, people walk around, find their seats, and settle in. We sit on the opposite side of the plane flying home. I turn on my flight screen. The flight will take twelve hours.

Once in the air, the stewardesses dim the lights in the cabin. Everyone seeks sleep. I doze off with a mantra,

“How can I say thanks for the things You have done for me?
Always by my side, oh You came to show Your love for me;
The voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude.
All that I am, and ever hope to be, I owe it all to Thee.
To God be the glory, to God be the glory, to God be the glory,
For the things You have done.
With Your love You have saved me; with Your power You have
Raised me; to God be the glory for the things You have done.
And as I live my life, let it be pleasing Lord to Thee;
And if I gain my praise, may it return to Thee.
With Your love You have saved me; with Your power You have
Raised me, to God be the glory for the things You have done.”



Tuesday, February 3, 1998



Early morning after sleeping on the plane

Groggy from partial sleep, I wonder where the darkness comes from. I squint, remembering someone turning the lights down in the wee morning hours. I slide the small plane window shade up, but blackness fills the world. I wonder what time it is. Janice's voice jumps over the seats. A few people wander the aisle with cups in their hands looking for coffee. It must be morning. Someone says it's five hours until we are home, in New York City.

I am glad the lights are dim; they bother my eyes early in the morning. On the seat, beside the lady across the aisle, Abuna's book *Blood Brothers* lays open, face down on the seat. Israel calls my name.

I walk around as I struggle with restlessness. A quite hush hangs in the air. Did these people experience similar mind-boggling things in the Holy Land? I remember what Ray said when I told him I was going to Jerusalem: "Everyone that I have ever known who went to Israel, it changed their life. I am happy for you." I mumble, *that's an understatement!* to myself.

Twelve hours after leaving Tel Aviv, we touch down in New York. Everything turns to a blur until we board the bus to the other airport. What seemed like an unusually short ride when we left, continues for an eternity. As we ride through the heart of New York City, the sun pushes



Sunrise in New York City; on the bus going from one airport to the other



Downtown in New York City, USA

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

up over the horizon displaying oranges and yellows. The city sleeps as we pass Macy's on West 34th, where they start the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. I feel like a visitor in my own land. As if God sends me a message to let me know He is still with me, we pass the sign The Covenant House. Then one that says, Samaritan, Inc. One-by-one, remembrances of Israel cross our path. God comforts me.

We land in Atlanta in the afternoon, find our luggage one last time, and look for Thelma's daughter. I forgot to ask someone to pick me up. Thelma says her daughter can drive me home before she drives them back to Thomaston. I express my concern for their driving in rush hour traffic, but Thelma insists it is no problem. She is such a loving person. I don't think I've ever heard her say a negative word. Thelma's daughter, who is very pregnant, tells us she got sick on the way to the airport.

We chatter until the car turns right, then heads up the steep driveway. They decline my invitation to come in. I hesitate, wanting to throw my arms around Mother to make her hold onto me. Her heart does not answer my silence. Perhaps she knew all along that she would be leaving this earth soon and needed to point me more clearly in God's direction, her most valiant act of love.

When I can deny the silence no longer, I climb from the car. I run around to the back of the house to let up the garage door. Kodi jumps like a kangaroo. I return to the car for my heavy suitcase, then shove it inside the kitchen door. I notice that Amber left the lights on for me.

In the twilight, I walk back to the car to tell everyone what a great time I had. I kiss Mother goodbye. Fighting a lump in my throat, I wave goodbye.



Left top: Olive wood covered Bible

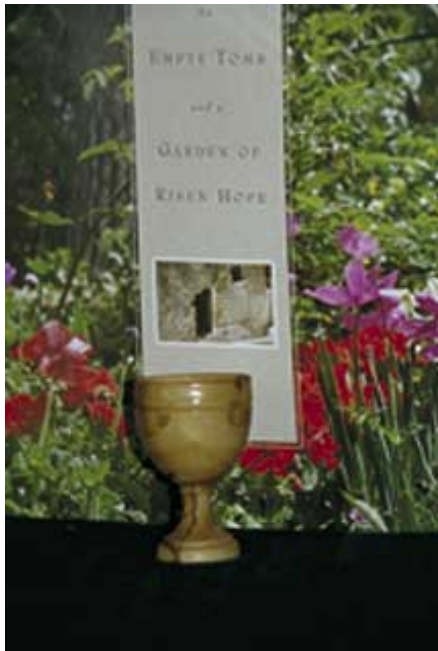
Left bottom: Mother of Pearl box with Jerusalem cross necklace

Top right: Vessel with water from Jacob's Well

Bottom right: Water and sand from the Dead Sea and a water bottle filled with water from the Jordan River



Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Above left: Olive branches with olives from the kibbutz

Above right: Postcard with recipe for national fallafel snack

Left: Communion cup from the Garden Tomb

Right: Christmas 1998 arrangement with candle from Bethlehem

I saunter around the house to remember its soul before pulling my suitcase up the steps to my room. I decide to only unpack the gifts tonight. I display them on the bed.

An hour later, the back door opens; Amber calls out, “Mom?”

“Amber. I’m up here. Come upstairs. See what I brought you.” I am overjoyed to see my precious angel. We hug then sit on my bed and chat for awhile.

After my bath, I witness the darkness covering the sky and trees out the bedroom window. The kitchen window casts a soft light on the tree in front of it. The birdhouse hanging from the tree lies dormant. The quiet fills with stillness while the shadows dance as if God, only now, breathed life into all the souls. The holiest thing we do is breathe.

In the background, Hebrew songs drift from the stereo. A very real presence fills my soul. How can I keep this feeling fresh inside me? A song JoAnna wrote speaks of my Father in Heaven and my earthly mother.

“Remember me in the melting snow.
Remember me in the river’s flow.

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

Look for me in the mountains tall
for I am part of it all.
Hear me in the wind as it flows.
I'm in the scent of each lovely rose.
Feel my warmth in the shining sun
for I am all and all is one.
For I am everywhere, and I have always been here.
Since time began, I am.
And I will never leave you for I am your friend.
Just look inside your heart,
take my hand.
Remember me in the cloud filled sky.
I'm in each tree as it reaches high.
I'm in every grain of sand, every raindrop small.
Yes, I am part of it all.
Look for me in each other's eyes.
Hear my voice in a baby's cries.
Feel my touch as you help someone.
For I am all, and all is one.
For I am everywhere, and I have always been here.
Since time began, I am.
And I will never leave you for I am your friend.
Just look inside your heart,
take my hand.
Remember me when you can't go on.
Think of me when all hope is gone.
When you're all alone and no one seems to care,
I will always be there.
For I am everywhere, and I have always been here.
Since time began, I am.
And I will never leave you for I am your friend.
Just look inside your heart.
For I am everywhere, and I have always been here.
Since time began, I am.
And I will never leave you for I am your friend.
Just look inside your heart;
take my hand.
Remember me. Remember me."



Tuesday, August 31, 1999

In the months that follow my return from Israel, one thought rolls through my mind over and over—the children of Galilee. I think about their need for educational opportunities. That the children, in the place Jesus loved so much, suffer, turns my stomach. Jesus lives in each face. If no one in my country wants my help, maybe the children of Israel do. I write Father Chacour and ask if he can use my help. His delightful acceptance energizes me. I engage everyone's path I cross to help Abuna's children.

Could Jim Brinson be right that I should write a book about my experiences with God? If I did, I could help Abuna and the children. I decide to listen to see what God thinks about this direction. While waiting, I wonder if I have the guts to open my soul to the world. Even if I get comfortable with this, how could I manage the time? With God's lead, I dedicate most weekends, some nights, all holidays and vacations to writing this book with Him. By the summer of 1999, I am almost finished with the first draft.

On Tuesday, August 31, 1999, I watch the clock on my computer roll to 5:30 p.m. I rub my shoulders to break the ache from tiredness. I look forward to getting home. I navigate my mouse to the start button, click "shut down," and wait for the last prompt from the computer. I zip my bookbag and sling it over my right shoulder while the computer processes my command. I sit back down at the chair in front of the screen to turn the monitor off. As I do this, the Voice that guided me in Israel and that I have not heard since leaving Israel, speaks. "It is time to design the cover of the book."

No, not today! I am too tired! After a pause, I remember I have not heard from the Voice in a very long time. "Hey, wait! Who are you? Where have you been for the past year and a half? What do you have to do with the design of my book cover?"

No answer. Then, "I'm sorry you are tired. It is time to design the cover of the book."

Whining, I reply, "But I'm always working late for Emory. I do not want to work tonight. I'll do it another night. I don't know if you know this, but I am very responsible. If I say I will do it, I will. But not tonight."

The Voice responds, "It is time to design the cover of the book."

I sigh. "Oh, all right! I am too tired to argue with you." Then I think to myself, when I get home, I'm going to do this as quick as I can and be done with it.

At home, the design comes together surprisingly quickly. Talking myself through the process, I decide the most spectacular picture I captured in Israel is the rainbow on the Old Road to Jericho which stretches across the Jordan Valley and connects Israel to Jordan. And the Jerusalem cross would be the perfect icon. I make a graphic rainbow to use when the photograph isn't appropriate. I believe the colors of Israel are purple and gold. No matter, they are the right ones for this book even though I do not personally like purple. Okay, type set, photo adjusted, colors chosen, better throw some copy on the back as a placeholder. I type whatever words come to my mind first. Then, I need to balance the green on the front that I put my name in with some green on the back cover. I add a tagline on the bottom of the back cover in this green. Yes, that's the balance I need.

The Voice speaks up, "The Book for and of the Spirit."

“What?”

“The tag line, ‘The Book for and of the Spirit.’”

“I don’t know who you are, but let me make it clear that while you might be comfortable speaking for God, I am not! I might be able to deal with ‘A Book for and of the Spirit,’ but I will not use ‘The.’”

His response, “The Book for and of the Spirit.”

I decide I have control of this computer, and I will not allow whoever this Voice is to talk me into doing something God might not like. I defiantly type “A Book for and of the Spirit,” and decide that’s all I will cooperate. I save the page as a pdf file so it will be permanent and close the programs. I call it a night.

Long ago I discovered it is a good habit to put a design or copy away, sleep on it, and revisit it again first thing in the morning. While I’m eating my toast, I decide to pop the zip drive back into the computer. I double-click on the icon that reads “cover.pdf.”

As I’m looking over the page with surprising amazement at what a good job I did in such a short time, I feel somewhat unsettled. Something is not quite right. I start reading the copy and feel better. Then I spot it. The “A” of my tag line is in its place at the bottom, but the rest of the line, “Book for and of the Spirit” is right across the center of the spine, perpendicular to the other words there. How in the world did that happen? That will not do at all. I quickly open the Quark document and recreate the tag line in its original place. Just to be sure, I erase the entire line and retype “A Book for and of the Spirit.” I save it as a new pdf (portable document file), pop the zip disk out, drop it into my backpack, grab my orange juice and purse, and head out to work.

At lunch, I decide to see if I still like the work I did last night. I pop the zip disk into the drive and double click on the cover.pdf icon. I can’t believe it! Again, the “A” stands alone on its original line, and “Book for and of the Spirit” runs across the center of the spine, perpendicular to the other type there. In disbelief, I decide I must be doing something wrong.

I call my best friend Mayfred and ask her if she has a minute to run up to my office during her lunch. She says sure. I show her the cover design I printed last night. She reads the copy and makes some suggestions. Then I ask her to look at the tagline. I tell her my experience the previous night and this morning. I express my interest in trying this slowly with her watching. I redo the process I had done earlier that morning. I then save it and close it again. I reopen it. The same thing. Mayfred says, “I can’t believe it, but I see it. I don’t know, Mary.”

Graphically, that is not what I would do, but I cannot make it follow my command. I give up. I guess I’ll just delete the “A” and make some pretty little design to go where I wanted the tagline to go. I thank Mayfred for being my witness. At least, I’m not crazy. I ask her to review the copy once. She agrees.

That night, a little irritated that I have to create another design element, I decide to get it over with. Since my saint is St. Therese, I decide to make a rose bud and swirly leaves for the now empty spot. When this is complete, I like this rose but pine that I do not like that type running across the spine. It looks really stupid—Book for and of the Spirit. Oh well, maybe it will do something for the marketing. I am finished thinking about that stupid line of type. I make the final changes to the other copy and turn off the computer.

The next morning I decide to glance at the cover now that it is finally finished. I double-click on the icon. The file opens up. I cannot believe my eyes! The word “The” from the second sentence at the top of the page is now with the tagline across the spine. The tagline now reads,

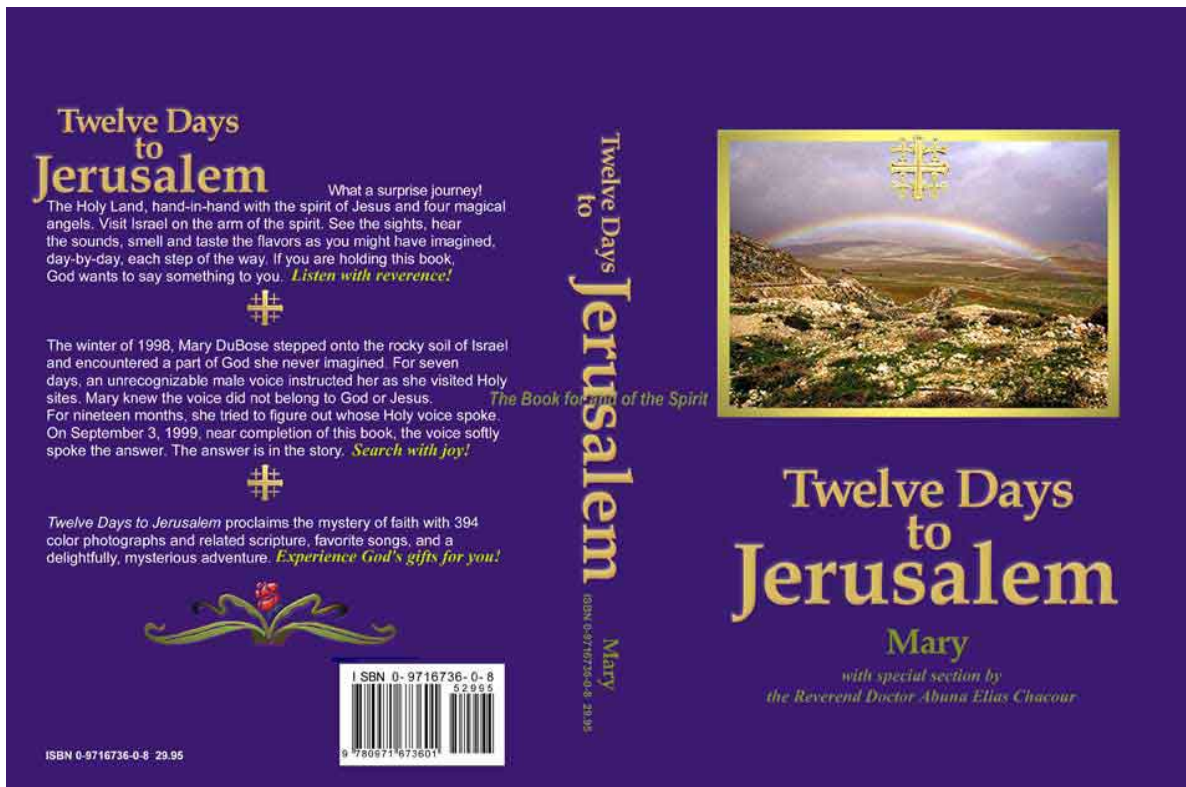
“The Book for and of the Spirit.” I am in disbelief, but I am determined now. I am mad. I am angry. I will not give in. I refuse.

With sheer determination and focus, I open the program and jerk the “The” back to where I had it in the second sentence. I save it, close the program and then reopen the cover. The “The” is back with the tag line. I go through this process over and over. I even turn the machine off and restart the computer, to no avail. Every time, “The” is with “Book for and of the Spirit.” Finally, I run out of time. I have to leave for work. I decide to give up. What else can I do? I leave the “The” with the tag line “Book for and of the Spirit.” I add a new “The” to my second sentence. I save the file in the same process I’ve done so many times now. I wonder what will happen the next time I check on the file. I go to work.

At lunch time, I shyly reopen the cover file. I am leery of what I might find. I can’t believe it. Nothing has changed this time. Everything is exactly the way I saved it this morning. I give up. I decide I have no choice but to leave the stupid tag line across the spine. This tag line now reads “The Book for and of the Spirit.”

Driving home that day, I turn on the radio to listen to music. It is now September 3. I have struggled with the cover for four days, but I have put it out of my mind. I ride along enjoying the music. In the silence of my thoughts, the small voice that first spoke to me in the Church of the Multiplication speaks again. “Now you know the answer to your question. The Holy Spirit guided your prayers to God in the Holy Land.”

As these words settle into my body, I know this to be the truth. I am in awe, and I think out loud, I did not know the Holy Spirit had a voice. I thought the Holy Spirit was just that—a spirit, the spirit of Jesus and the spirit of God combined. I thought the Holy Spirit might be a little voice inside your head, maybe your conscience. I had no idea the Holy Spirit could speak! The Bible talks about the Holy Trinity. How did I miss this all these years? I am astounded—the Holy Spirit has a voice, and I didn’t even know it. Incredible! How could I have been so stupid?



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Then the magnitude of what has happened to me since January 23, 1998 overwhelms me. A tear rolls down the corner of my right eye, another one follows from the other eye. Tears stream down my face in gratitude to God. I pray, Dear God, I am not worthy. Thank you for touching my life. Thank you for touching the lives of the people I love. Thank you for showing me the soul of Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Dear God, thank you for your patience with me. Thank you for understanding my ignorance. Dear God, thank you for giving your Son for my life. I thought I knew how much You love me, but I had no idea. Thank You for delivering me on the wings of angels. I love you.

I'd like to close this chapter of our adventure with the Holy Spirit with a prayer I discovered once in the Book of Common Prayer. "O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in thy mercy, grant us a safe lodging and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen."

And shalom and salaam.



Expect a miracle!

Have you experienced a miracle?

No one can speak for God, but I feel, from the depths of my being, that God wants me to bring this story to you. I believe you are part of this miracle.

Have you experienced a miracle? Would you like to share it with others as we join hands around the world in praise of God and great things He has done? With each new edition, *Twelve Days to Jerusalem* will add selected miracles from the readers.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR MIRACLE

Twelve Days to Jerusalem welcomes your experiences via U.S. Mail and E-mail and will pay \$200 for true, unpublished stories selected and used in the next publishing of *Twelve Days to Jerusalem*. Maximum length is 300 words.

Original contributions, which become our property upon acceptance and payment, should be typewritten. Please address your submission to:

Expect a miracle!

Twelve Days to Jerusalem

3785 Fox Glen Court

Atlanta, Georgia 30319

Our E-mail address is Mary@TwelveDaysToJerusalem.org.

For electronic mail, put “Expect a miracle!” beside “Subject.”

On paper mail, place “Expect a miracle!” on the first line of the envelope address. Then send to: c/o Twelve Days to Jerusalem, 3785 Fox Glen Court, Atlanta, Georgia 30319, USA.

Along with your typewritten miracle, please include your:

Name

Street address

City

State

Country

Zip

E-mail

Phone number*

**This information is optional.*

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION

CONTRIBUTIONS CANNOT BE ACKNOWLEDGED OR RETURNED.

Due to various considerations, even usable items may not be published in print immediately; however, items may be published electronically on our website previous to book publication. Please do not inquire about the status of your submission—we’ll be in touch if we use your material.

*Each story should be no longer than 300 words.



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*Payment of \$200 is made upon publication in the next edition of *Twelve Days to Jerusalem* or on the *Twelve Days to Jerusalem* website, whichever comes first.

*All contributions become property of *Twelve Days to Jerusalem* upon acceptance and payment.

PLEASE NOTE: The competition for publication is very intense. It may take some time for your submission to be considered. Thank you.



Twelve Days to Jerusalem



Psalm 122, 1-9

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”

Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!

Jerusalem, built as a city
which is bound firmly together,

to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
“May they prosper who love you!

Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers!”

For my brethren and companions’ sake
I will say, “Peace be within you!”

For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I
will seek your good.



Appendix A: The Reverend Doctor Abuna Elias Chacour, full text, January, 1998

We live in the midst of great stress and conflict and almost an inclination to move back from despair, considering the local political situation in the Middle East. Over the whole political situation, we need some sign of hope - a little smile. We have learned for fifty years to hope beyond despair.

I wonder what can I share with you this morning except myself. So, will you allow me to introduce who I am and then go from there to that place where you are and, then to the future? We want to live today with our children, whether they are Palestinians, Christians, Moslems, or Druze children. We have learned never to be exclusive. Why, you ask? I will tell you. I am a Palestinian, a very proud Palestinian. I have reason to be proud. I am an Arab. My mother language is Arabic. I am a clergyman as you might see by these strange clothes I have that you don't have anymore overseas. And I am, as forcefully, a citizen of Israel. So you would ask "How can a Palestinian-Arab-Christian be a citizen of Israel?"

First of all, allow me to say that I thank God because I became aware that I was not born a Christian. This is the greatest gift God has given me, to know and to understand that I was not born a Christian. I was born something totally different. I don't know about you, Americans. What were you born? I myself was born a baby—a baby created on the image of the likeness of God Himself. Nothing more, but nothing less either. This is a weak point in the society of this country, and also, in your country. We decided to reduce ourselves to something else than being born babies in God's image. We became Christians, Jews, Moslems, lord and slave, Jew and Gentile, man and woman, and conflicts everywhere, because we forgot our original birth certificate.

We want to stop . . . (planes fly over) these planes go to Lebanon. I hope they will kill nobody and will come back safely. (Picks up where he left off.) . . . We want Moslems, Christians, and Jews, all of them to go back to their roots. We have forgotten, or we refuse to accept, the roots that we have. We are all children, may I say, of an Iraqi citizen. Yes, his name was Abraham from Mesopotamia. Today Mesopotamia is named Iraq. And he was not a Jew. There were no Jews there. He was not a Christian. They did not exist then either. Who was he? Abraham says about himself, "I am a Gentile living among Gentile nations." What was he commissioned for? To reveal the purest, invisible, and unknown God, saying to go and preach to all the nations; not to the Jews, not to the Moslems, or Christians, to all the nations, chose him. "I am the only Lord, the invisible, Holy, One God."

Abraham wanted permission to give his message to the nations, to the Gentiles. When the Gentiles accept Abraham's message, they bless God. God will then bless Abraham because they bless Him, and Abraham will bless the nations. It will be a dynamic circle of blessings that reaches to the heavens. God will be pleased and society will become more human because it becomes more divine. The descendants of Abraham should be and are, all commissioned to carry that same message to the nations, their descendants, whether they are Christians, Moslems, or Jews. And I tell you what the Jewish writings teach us. If those descendants of Abraham no longer reflect the Lordship of God no matter where they might be, that land would vomit them out. The covenant has never been an unconditional covenant. And I can say to you this morning a very nice, good news. God is not Christian either. You know that? He's not Christian. He would be a confused Christian if He were. For what kind of Christian would He be? Reformed? Re-reformed? Or not yet reformed?

Isn't it for churches and Christians to do their utmost to be God-like rather than to make God look like us? We have reduced ourselves to religions, to denominations, to confessions, quite often opposing each other, quite often facing each other, instead of together facing the same Lord. We so much needed someone who spoke with authority. He was a man from Galilee, my companion, my Compatriot.

Oh, when I go to the States, you are all so kind. You like to show me your old things, your antiquities. You take me to a house 150 years old. And I have to say, "Wow, that's great, your history!" We were digging here a few months ago to move a mountain. Something fell from up there, pottery, glasswork, and bones. I showed them to a professor from Baylor University and he said, "These go back from the year 2000 before Christ." I said, "Okay, this is very recent."

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We do not tell time like you do, brothers and sisters. For us, one thousand years are like one day before the Lord. So what are two thousand years? It's for us, at most, the day before yesterday that He was strolling our villages, approaching our men and women, our shepherds. He was seeing the difference between a sterile and a fertile fig tree. He was watching our birds, our gardens with the bees, and took all of that and made with it the parables of the Kingdom of Heaven. We still smell His presence under our trees. They speak to us about Him. Our rocks speak about Him. When you go to Caesarea Philippi they say, "Oh, He is here, He was here the day before yesterday."

That's why we Palestinian Christians, although we love you very affectionately, we cannot promote any special Christian denomination as being the best or being the worst; it's none of our business. We are too busy showing you a special place, one small place, and introducing to you an especially unique person. The place we show you is very, very unique - an empty tomb. Not because it has been **empty**, but because it has been **emptied**. The person we are busy introducing to you is a risen Lord.

He is also as unique as the emptied tomb. It was my forefathers who became aware that one of their children was very unusual, very special, who spoke with such authority. They decided to follow Him. They followed Him, and unfortunately, He went up to Jerusalem. He was that stubborn. God forgives Him. And there He was arrested and crucified.

You know what happened on the third day; He was raised; they believed Him. They even believed in His promise that He would send the Holy Spirit for all. They gathered together waiting for this Holy Spirit. When He came and stormed them with courage and faith, they were unable to keep for themselves what they had shared with their companion. And they went all over the world sharing their experience with all the nations. All those who believed were baptized.

Since then I see many coming from far and near. When I see you coming here to this land I say, "Oh boy, your forefathers have done a very good job." This is the origin of Palestinian Christianity. Who were my forefathers? As said in Acts of the Apostles, there were Jews; there were Romans; there were Greeks; there were Arabs; there were no Americans.

That's why, when you ask how come a Palestinian-Arab can be a Christian, we should ask, "How come Palestinian-Arabs are not Christians?" This is because during the Middle Ages the Crusaders came, and just like we see in the Holy Land today, they used extremely violent methods against everything that mocked Christianity. And most of my people joined with the people of the land against a common enemy. They converted from Christianity to Islam. So, I am a Palestinian Christian who was born in upper Galilee in Ibillin.

Israelis destroyed my village, Biram, when I was eight years old. Why did they destroy it? They destroyed it because there was a conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. It has never been a religious conflict. It was not a racial conflict. It was not **Semites** against **non-Semites**. What is at the root of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis? It is the identical claim of two nations to the same territory, called Palestine by the one, and by the other called the big land of Israel. This conflict began right after the horrors of the Jewish Holocaust (generally considered to be 1939-1945). I say Jewish Holocaust. I don't say **the** Holocaust, because before that holocaust there was an Armenian holocaust. It was not less than a holocaust. There was also a Cambodian holocaust, a Salvadorian holocaust, and a Rwandan holocaust. We did not learn from this. I'm happy that the Jews' holocaust finished very, very early, thank God. For four years, it was a horrible time, a time of nightmares that should never come back. Never! No matter what! However, I'm sorry that for us Palestinians, our holocaust is still continuing for over fifty years. We don't see the end.

The survivors of the Jewish Holocaust wanted a homeland, freedom of national expression. Who had the right to give the Jews, survivors from the holocaust, a homeland for freedom of expression? Not one nation, my brothers and sisters, not even the United Nations or the U.S.A. The right to exist is a God-given right to every human being, and the Jews are nothing other than human beings.

I am all for a homeland for every single Jew. My problem started when the home they wanted for their people meant that I became homeless. I could not agree with a homeland for their people that meant

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my people became deportees and refugees. When the freedom of expression they wanted for themselves meant for us to lose every human right except the one they cannot stop (to make children), I could not agree.

Only fifty years ago there was no state of Israel. We're celebrating the fiftieth anniversary next year. Fifty years ago there was no Palestinian problem, no refugees, no deporting, no occupied territories. It was Palestine, already over-crowded, over-populated, with Palestinians and a smaller Jewish minority among us. Fifty years ago, something new happened in my Palestine—the state of Israel. You are now in Israel. And I wish Israel a very long life, as long as God will allow it to exist. I will do everything so that Israel exists, and exists free and respected.

Fifty years ago most of the Palestinian people were driven out, deported, evicted. Very often they fled out of fear and emigrated to other countries, because no one leaves home and lives in the streets for pleasure. My people were dispersed into three major groups. The biggest group were refugees in the Arab countries of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, as well as Israel, waiting to return home. Fifty years later, they are still in refugee camps. When they travel, they do it with travel documents with neither nationality nor passport. The second group were those Palestinians who lived in the territory, not immediately occupied by the young Jewish army but that became a part of Israel, along with those who fled their towns and villages. They arranged themselves into refugee camps near Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, Ramallah, Nablus, and the Gaza Strip. Gaza is a piece of sand on the edge of the Sinai Desert where 8,500 Palestinians struggled to live in 1948. Gaza has 900,000 refugees of which 45,000 are original inhabitants with their descendants. This cannot continue. These refugees did not come from Jaffa, Lod, Ramallah, Ashkelon, and Ashdod, as these towns and cities were emptied to make a place for the Jews. The people of Gaza were left with the minimum just to survive and make children. And that is unbearable. The third group were those poor Palestinians who managed to stay inside the territory that became Israel. Like this village of Ibillin, an accumulation of four destroyed villages, people streamed here because they had nowhere to go. And now we have 950,000 Palestinian-Arabs who are also citizens of Israel. Among these there are 130,000 Palestinian-Arab Christians. We represent twenty-five percent of Palestine Christianity. You will find the other seventy-five percent, unfortunately, either in refugee camps in Syria or Jordan or, during the past twenty or thirty years, in exile in Europe, Canada, and the U.S.A., and even in Australia.

Over the last two years, I have become so scared. After conducting a study on the Christian situation, it was discovered that during the past twenty years more than sixty percent of the Palestinian Christians left the country, immigrated and are no more. Sixty percent! All from the West Bank and the occupied territory. What will it be in another twenty or sixty years if that continues? All your children will come. They will see dirt and stone, antiquities, shrines, like those missions that go to Turkey in the footsteps of St. Paul, and visit nothing but ruins. And I don't like to imagine—I can't fathom, a Palestine as a Holy Land without followers of Jesus Christ. It's unthinkable for me.

There are 130,000 Palestinian-Arabs who are citizens of Israel. As a Palestinian-Arab Christian citizen of Israel, despite the injustice practiced, all the bad things that happen, all the ideologies of Israel against minorities, I too enjoy freedom. Not more than any Palestinian in any Arab country, but more than any Arab in any Arab country. I have to pay tribute to Israel in this respect.

In 1982 in my role as a priest for this village I noticed that for the eight thousand half Moslem, half Christian inhabitants, we had no high school. Seventy-five percent of people in Arab communities are under twenty-eight years old, and fifty percent are below fourteen years old. That means only ninety, among them five or six girls, out of seven hundred young people who should have been attending high school were able to go. I thought since the government will never build a high school, I will do it. Why not? We'll see what happens. I applied for a building permit.

The school started here in this village without gas, water, electricity, or a telephone. Very often I had to prepare my lectures in the only accommodation I had to live in, a small VW bug (beetle). For over

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six months, I lived in that Volkswagen. It was time for me to say, enough is enough. We have to go forward.

I applied for a building permit. Two weeks later, the answer came, “No, you are not allowed to build. The land on which you want to build is not listed for Arab use.” I said, “Goodness, okay. I don’t have a permit. What do I need? A building permit or a building?” I decided I needed a building, and the government needed the building permit. No matter the consequences, I started construction for the first building up there. (pointing to the high school) Two months later, the police came, “What are you doing?” “We are building a school!” “Show us your building permit.” “We don’t have one.” “How can you build without permit, Father Chacour?” “Well, sir, we never build with building permits. We always build with cement, sand, steel, and topsoil.” The police got angry. They said, “In a civilized country, you don’t do like that.” I said, “If you were civilized, you would have given me a building permit for a school immediately.”

By the way, I have visits with the police so often. I have to go again and again. I have discovered one very good thing. The Jewish police have something in common with American police. They have something in common, allow me to say, with German police, with Palestinian police, all police everywhere. Please do not forget this. In every way, unmistakably, behind the uniform you have a human being. For God’s sake, do not forget that! Not only for policeman but also for clergymen. Behind the robes, we are human beings. We have a heart. We are a man or a woman, a father, a student, a brother. This is what I was looking for. I was convinced I needed to strip the police from his uniform to discover many things. It is never easy, but it is not impossible.

Well, to make a short story long, the whole building was finished in nine months without a building permit. In September 1982, I saw in front of me eighty-two children, aged fourteen or fifteen years old, all lined up to enter the unfinished building. And to make the school of education a reality, I needed to buy the building permit two years later from an unknown Jew who would require one thousand dollars for his pocket, but so what? I organized a collection amongst the students, gave him the money, and we got the very beautiful building permit.

In 1986 we wanted to build this gymnasium. Down below we wanted to build workshops. On this side, nine classrooms. I had all the papers in order, drawings, everything, and the authorities said, “Father Chacour, you have your papers this time, but you will understand that our bureaucracy is slow, so be patient. Four or five months and you will get your permit.” I said, “Yes, I know it very well. God bless you.” I left the visit with them, and I got busy with construction. One and one half years later, the police came again, “Where is your building permit?” “I don’t have it.” “This is why you must stop building now, and you are summoned to court.” The building had commenced, and there were piles of dirt and stone and steel everywhere. Intentionally, every year for years, I put the chairs between the steel, the blocks, the cement, and the sand for the graduation party, and I invited all the officials of the government to come. And they came very often. And I always used to read what Ezekiel prophesied about dry bones. (Chapter 37 of Ezekiel tells us that God told Ezekiel to prophesy upon the hopeless dry bones from the graves of the valley. The Lord God then caused breath to enter them, caused them to come together, and then put spirit in them, bringing them back to life.) And I substituted the dry bones with cinder blocks and sand, scattered far, to come together and make a building that would glorify God.

Fortunately, the first time the officials called me to court was a Sunday. I wrote a letter to the judge saying “I am a Christian priest. I never go to court on Sunday!” That judge understood very well. He said to me, “I will postpone the decision for six months. He scheduled my next court appearance for another Sunday! I wrote him again, and he postponed it for another Sunday! It took him six years of Sundays and me six years of knocking on doors before I got desperate.

Then I decided to take big means to reach a small goal—to build this gymnasium. I decided to buy a plane ticket to a city called Washington, D.C. You have a very good Secretary of State called Jim Baker. I heard he had a problem with President Bush (senior). Bush wanted to install gates around his house, and Baker did not want all that rubbish. He wanted to be a human being. I said to myself, “This is

all done for me.” Why don’t I go and just pop into the residence of Jim Baker and meet the **(born a baby as a child of God)** Secretary of State, and “que sera sera,” I say to myself. They will not kill me.

I parked my car in front of his residence. I knocked on the door. He was not there, but his wife Susan was. She asked as she opened the door, “Who are you?” I said, “Ma’am, I am another man from Galilee.” That sounds great, no? She asked, “Do you have an appointment with us?” I said, “Ma’am, I’m sorry, we men from Galilee, we never make appointments, we make appearances.” She took it exactly as you take it now. Because later on I discovered that she was born a beautiful baby, a child of God. I went inside.

She gave me something to drink that I never liked, a glass of iced tea. By the way, it’s your problem, America, that you like iced tea. God forgives you. Only God is perfect. I drank this iced tea, and after only a few minutes, she said to me, “Sorry, Mr. Chacour I don’t have time to see you longer, because I am busy with twenty American ladies. We are studying the Bible.” I said, “What are you studying in the Bible, ma’am?” She answered, “We are having a look at the Sermon on the Mount.” “Well, I pity you.” She said, “Why?” And I replied, “You will understand nothing from that sermon.” She said, “Why not?” I said, “Because, it was not written in English but in our Semitic languages. It was not written by an American, but by a companion of mine in the nearby village of Cana and Nazareth. And it has nothing of the American mentality. It has an oriental Semite mentality. I wish you luck ma’am.” And Susan Baker said, “Can you help us understand that?” What better could I hope for? It took me two hours to explain to this group of nice, gentle and mild ladies what those first eight verses of the Sermon on the Mount meant. You sometimes call them the Blessings, the Beatitudes. And when you go worse, you call them the “Be Happy Attitudes.” Right?

I told them, “Do not please think that my compatriot ever invited His disciples to sit quietly like at church waiting for justice to be done. If you are really hungry and thirsty, you fight and fight to bring about justice. When your stomach is empty, you never have peace. You cannot work, you cannot live, you cannot love, you cannot enjoy. You have first to go out and find a piece of bread. We have two different words in the text for ‘blessed.’ The one in Matthew says, ‘ashrei.’ The other says ‘tovahoun,’ which means straighten-up, straighten up yourself. Get up, go ahead, do something, move! Get your hands dirty if you are hungry and thirsty for justice. And more than that, if you want peace to be made, you do not sit idle contemplating the beauty of peace. You have to get up, go ahead, do something, and get your hands dirty so that you become peacemakers. And there are so many examples. One of them is your Doctor Martin Luther King. Another was your neighbor, Oscar Romero. Still another is from a non-Christian country, Mahatma Gandhi. We are all claiming to be the disciples of the Man from Galilee, who did not only get his hands dirty, but all of His body. So please go and invite your husbands to get their hands dirty. If they don’t want to do that, one or two fingers would be enough to bring justice and peace between the Jews and Palestinians.”

I left them there. And that, as you might imagine, was immense.

Only one week later, I found myself back on the telephone praying with Susan and Jim Baker. We became prayer partners. She said later on, that since she read my book *Blood Brothers*, every morning she would write a small paper and put it under the coffee cup or the plate of her husband saying, “Today, Jim, do not forget the Palestinians.”

Three months later I recalled that I went there not so much to pray with them. I went there for the building permit. So I asked Susan to write a letter to Shamir (Israel’s prime minister) urging him to give us the building permit for this gymnasium. She wrote the letter. She showed it to her husband. He said, “No you will not send that. You will create a diplomatic crisis in Israel. Give me that letter. I will sign it and go, take two books of Abuna Chacour’s, and hand deliver them to Shamir. I want that permit in my hand!” Can you imagine, that’s what we had to do to receive the building permit for such a dangerous thing, a gymnasium for sports?

Much more important, one and one half years later, Jim and Susan Baker decided to come and visit us here. When they were leaving their guard in front of the building, he said, “Father Chacour, I am

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not coming to see you. We see each other enough in Washington. I am coming with you to make an act of solidarity with our Palestinian-Christian brothers and sisters and to tell them that we want to see them stay in Israel/Palestine.”

This is how I understand your visit, by the way. You made an important detour, an important act of solidarity. You see the painting of the Good Shepherd up there. When I was explaining to Jim Baker that this was the Good Shepherd, he said, “But Father Chacour, your Good Shepherd has no head.” I said, “This is intentional. It is because we want your head to be there.”

And Jim Baker’s visit was so important that only a few months later a telephone call came from Jerusalem saying that Shimon Peres, Israel’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, had won the Nobel Peace Prize and he wanted to give his first official speech on peace in our school. Did we agree? Of course we did. Not only did I agree, I invited 1800 Palestinian personalities to this place for refreshments and to listen to Peres who was standing here at this very podium, speaking about peace and justice as he perceived it. I told him the story of the gymnasium. He said, “That is why I came to see you, in order to see what Jim Baker raised hell for in Jerusalem.” Peres then promised to be our ambassador with the Israeli government. I wrote him a letter a few days later. “I want to know what kind of ambassador you will be, a good or a less good ambassador?” He answered me, “I am usually an excellent ambassador.” He has been more than excellent; he has been outstanding. In a very short time, he encouraged the Minister of Education of Israel to go and see what is going on in that unknown village of Ibillin!

Four year ago in 1994, we noticed that Palestinians, Arab-Christian or Moslems, were leaving Israel and emigrating to other countries especially America. Those emigrating were our intellectuals with PhDs or those with ambition to go to college. We studied this very thoroughly and agreed we needed a college!

We opened the college without any blessing from any authority. I started to work to gain recognition and accreditation. This was not a game. This was more important than having endowment funds. And it was very difficult.

Rubinstein (Israel’s Minister of Education) came to see the school and brought us a priceless gift, a very expensive gift! A priceless gift from a stricken child is never money. It’s affection. It’s friendship. Rubenstein came to officially recognize the existence of the college and to accredit us with the public acceptance of our children. What a victory that was! What a great gift! This was a victory not for me or Rubenstein, but for the whole of Israel—for the Jews and for the Palestinians.

Two weeks later Rubenstein sent us a letter saying, “Now that you are officially recognized and at liberty, would you accept and enroll Jewish students in your school and especially young Jews when they have finished their military service?” What could I say? In this circumstance, I don’t think so much, rather I pray to God and answer him. “For God’s sake, send me the whole Israeli army!” I have two things to teach them. To destroy their weapons. Throw them in the garbage and join me to conquer the hearts of the Palestinian children with the smile that expresses the relevance of justice, peace, and security for all of us. Later we were able to welcome a small number of former soldiers.

The first year of the college, we had one hundred students, the second year 340, and the third year 550. This year we have eight hundred registered! I am expecting over one thousand for next year. Can you imagine? We already have almost three thousand students in the Mar Elias schools and we are using the same facilities that were too confined ten years ago for one thousand students. We need to expand. We need to build again.

I don’t know how we did it, but we have so many friends. We have never had huge amounts donated—one hundred or two hundred thousand dollars! It’s always only a few thousand or a few hundred. But I believe the Arabic saying that says “If you take one beard and put it beside the other, you make a big beard like mine”—provided you put them together. I will never forget the big gift I received six months ago. An American lady, a senior citizen wrote, “I read your books. I’m impressed. I identify with you. I decided to send you my savings from last month.” In the envelope was a check for ten dollars.

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I cried. I decided that one of the rooms would have her name as long as the school stands. She has been with us every year.

I want to have fifteen hundred university students here. Why? Because then I can provide jobs for three hundred PhD holders. I can employ one hundred-fifty support staff. With meaningful employment, these people will not need to emigrate. Our students are learning high tech. I want them to compete with their Jewish neighbors in technology.

I want them today here in this room—Christians, Moslems, Druze, and Jews—to sit down at the same table, to go to the same cafeteria, to go on the same field trips. I want them together today to prepare for the common future they want for their children tomorrow. This is our aim. We are going to accomplish it. If you feel to help, we need that. I invite you to buy the books, *Blood Brothers* and *We Belong to the Land*, for more details.

Edited 19th April 2000 by Fr Elias Chacour

Father Chacour's book is available at most libraries or can be ordered through Amazon.com. The information is:

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