

Holy Land 2015

This trip to Israel and Egypt was a pilgrimage of faith. My primary concern in writing this account is to bolster your faith and mine. I also want to inform, but historians, archeologists, Biblical scholars, and theologians disagree about many of these sites and the stories that are told about them. I, for the most part, am not qualified to join in their debate so I will try to simply tell you what I have found credible. I will also discuss what I was thinking and feeling as I visited these places and how my thoughts and feelings have grown in the time following my return home. With each place described below I have cited relevant Scripture passages and picked a hymn appropriate to the site or the experience. I pray that you will be blessed through this account of one pilgrim on his first trip to the Holy Land. I found much of this information about Israel at two web sites: www.seetheholyland.net and www.archpark.org. For Egypt, I found the web site www.touregypt.net very helpful. — *Brother Mike*

An Invitation to The Holy Land

I would like for you to take a trip to The Holy Land.
You do not have to go when I go or use the same tour company that I use.
The trip described here was taken during the winter –
but you should go whenever the time is right for you –
I don't think there is a bad time to be in The Holy Land!

You, most likely, will not see a rainbow over the Sea of Galilee
or the sunbeams bursting through the clouds over the Dead Sea
or Jerusalem in the snow.
But you will be blessed!

I think the blessing of traveling in The Holy Land is best described
by Cleopas and his friend in Luke 24, verse 32:

***“Were not our hearts greatly moved and burning within us
while the Risen Christ was talking with us on the road
and as he opened and explained to us the sense of the Scriptures?”***

altered from the Amplified Bible

As you travel through The Holy Land
(and perhaps even through the pages of this notebook)
and see with your own eyes the places you have read about in the Bible
your heart will be greatly moved
and you will be awed and humbled
by what God has done for you
through your Savior, Jesus Christ.
And if you ask him, Jesus will come and walk with you
through this adventure and every other adventure of your life.
Thanks be to God!

Brother Mike

Day 1 – Thursday, January 8

Tabgha

Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

Matthew 4: 23-25

Luke 6: 17-19

The name “Tabgha” is a corruption of the Greek name *Hebtapegai* or “Seven Springs.” Tabgha is on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee (Sea of Kinneret, Lake of Gennesaret or Sea of Tiberias). It is a small valley which forms a natural amphitheater overlooking the lake below. Christian tradition places three major events of Jesus’ ministry in this valley: The Sermon on the Mount; the first feeding of the multitudes; and Jesus’ resurrection appearance to seven of his disciples.

During our January visit the valley was beautifully green (the Sea of Galilee is about 600 feet below sea level which makes it about 1,000 feet lower than most of Northeast Texas) and created a gorgeous contrast with the blue lake. There had been thunderstorms the night before



our visit and as we drove north from Tiberias a rainbow appeared over the north end of the lake. Our whole bus (23 pilgrims) was awestruck and we all knew that this sight would be one of the highlights of our time together.

Our guide, Nader Mascobi, told us that this lovely, peaceful valley lies between two sites of carnage. The first site we drove by on our way to Tabgha: caves in the Arbel Cliffs that were occupied by zealots who were pulled out with hooks by Herod in 47 BC when he was Prefect of Galilee. The second is a battleground which lies to the northeast. This area which had seen more than its share of bloodshed was the spot which Jesus chose to expound God’s kingdom with words – the Sermon on the Mount – deeds – the feeding of the five thousand – and, by founding his Church – commissioning Simon Peter to feed his sheep.

The Church of the Beatitudes

He Leadeth Me

Matthew 5: 3-10

This octagonal-shaped (8 beatitudes) Roman Catholic church was finished in 1938. The architect was Antonio Barluzzi. It sits near the ruins of a Byzantine era church dated to the late fourth century. Part of the mosaic floor was recovered and is displayed in Capernaum.

This is one of those spots where, when you first see it, you know that your time here is going to be too short. I could have spent at least an hour contemplating the contrasts between the blue sky, the blue water, the green earth, and the lovely sanctuary



The Church of the Beatitudes with the Sea of Galilee in the background.

that fits so well into its surroundings.

In this place of beauty and peace Steve read the beatitudes out loud to us. Blessed indeed are all who hear these words and know that the kingdom of God is open and available to each of us. The kingdom of heaven is near – it is now here!

The Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes Break Thou the Bread of Life

Matthew 14: 13-21

Luke 9: 10-17

Mark 6: 30-44

John 6: 1-14

When Lady Egeria, a Spanish nun and pilgrim, visited the area in 383 AD one rock close to the highway (Via Maris) was said to mark the place where Jesus had fed the multitudes with five loaves and two fish. A primitive Syriac church had been built around 350 AD and a larger Byzantine church in 450 AD. In 614 the church was destroyed in the Persian invasion.

In 1932 the site was uncovered and the beautiful mosaics which can be seen today were found and preserved.

There were several large cut stone implements in front of the church including an olive oil press. Before we entered the sanctuary our group gathered in the church courtyard and I read the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish from Matthew 14 to our group. One great help to us as we toured was our “Whisperer” system – each individual was given a receiver with one earphone and Nader, our guide, operated the transmitter. This allowed Nader to speak softly and as long as we were within a hundred feet of him we could hear what he was saying.

The present church was built in 1982 and is owned by the German Association for the Holy



Land and is maintained by the Benedictine Order of Jerusalem. This church was built in such a way as to incorporate the ancient mosaics into the modern floor including the famous mosaic of two fish and four loaves – the artist considered Jesus to be the fifth loaf! But the most striking feature is the rock under the altar upon which Jesus placed the loaves and fish as he blessed them. The mosaic mentioned above is directly in front of the altar.

A few months after we were here a small group Israeli terrorists entered The Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes and set fire to the office area and

spray painted graffiti on the walls. Apparently these people do not want any non-Jewish places of worship in Israel. This unreasonable attitude makes them as intolerant as the Muslim terrorists who threaten the very existence of Israel. Fortunately, these radicals are a very small minority and have little influence in a country where Jews, Christians, Muslims, and non-religious people all depend heavily on tourism.

Church of the Primacy

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

John 21

Down by the seashore, this church commemorates the story from the twenty-first chapter of the Gospel of John. It was easy to imagine Jesus building a charcoal fire on one of the large rocks that dot the shoreline here. This is a good fishing area because the fish are attracted to the warmer water coming into the lake from the seven springs. As we left the bus we immediately noticed one of the seven springs flowing just inside the gates. The grounds were marvelously maintained and included several outdoor worship areas. One area included a sculpture of Peter and Jesus called “Feed my Sheep.”



I could hear Peter saying, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.”
Do you love Jesus?

In the Church of the Primacy of Saint Peter, built of and on black basalt rock, the altar sits behind a rock which rises up out of the floor. This rock is called “*Mensa Christi*,” the Table of Christ – it is the rock on which Jesus built his charcoal fire.

This place had a different kind of beauty from the Church of the Beatitudes. Most of this area is dominated by the black rock of an ancient lava flow. Even down to the beach - I had not expected to find a rocky shoreline. I scooped a handful of water and eased the heat of

my face and forehead. What a privilege to be able to come to this place. I pray that each of us will be able to find the forgiveness which Jesus offered to Peter in this place.

Capernaum

Silence, Frenzied, Unclean Spirit

Matthew	4: 13	8: 5	9: 1	11: 23	17: 24
Mark	1: 21	2: 1	9: 33		
Luke	4: 23	4: 31	5: 17	7: 1	10: 15
John	2: 12	4: 46	6: 17	6: 24	6: 59

This was Peter's home town. In Mark 9: 33 we read that Jesus had a home in Capernaum. With sixteen mentions in the Gospels Capernaum definitely seems to have been Jesus' base of operations (see Matthew 4: 13). From the context of the Gospels it also seems that Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew all lived in Capernaum.

This small town did well through the Roman and the Byzantine periods but was partially destroyed in the Persian invasion and in the Muslim takeover and then completely abandoned early in the second millennium.

The synagogue of Capernaum is of special interest. We learn from Luke that a Roman centurion helped to build the synagogue here. The black basalt foundation stones (gathered locally) of that early synagogue in which Jesus taught and healed are still here today under the white limestone of the later synagogue (which may have been a Christian pilgrimage site).

But the main attraction in Capernaum is a small (by today's standards) room in an ancient home. Incorporating the walls of the home, Christians of the fourth century built a "home church." Around an interior room the Christians of the fifth century built an octagonal church (which is an indication that they felt that this was a place of special significance). The room and the remains of the octagonal church and earlier home-church can be seen through the glass floor



The glass floor is within the iron railing.

of the modern church built in 1990. It is believed that this was Peter's home and that the largest room of his home was used as one of the first Christian meeting places.

Our visit to this site was inspirational. The story of the faith of the centurion has always been one of my favorites and now I have been in the synagogue he helped to build! Then you add to that that this is also the synagogue where Jesus taught and cast out a demon – well, this is why I came to the Holy Land – simply awe-inspiring! And then to walk just a few yards away and see a place where the first Christians worshiped together really brings life to these stories.

Boat Ride on the Sea of Galilee

Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me

Matthew	8: 23	14: 22	Luke	8: 22	
Mark	4: 35	6: 45	John	6: 15	21

After we left Capernaum we continued our clock-wise drive around the Sea of Galilee. We crossed the Jordan River at the top (north) of the lake and then headed down the western shore. The shoreline was still the beautiful green we had seen on the eastern shore. About half the way down the west side we stopped at the Kibbutz Ein-Gev for lunch and then a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee.

A kibbutz is a collective community in Israel. The first kibbutzim were agricultural but today they encompass other industries including hotels. An individual member of a kibbutz is called a kibbutznik. There are about 250 kibbutzim in Israel and though they began as a blend of socialism and Zionism, most have now been privatized and no longer practice communal living. We had a nice family style lunch (my fish still had its head) and then we went out to the small harbor for our boat ride. It seemed as if the weather had gotten worse as the day went on



and now the Sea of Galilee appeared to be quite choppy with a few small white-caps. But the boat ride turned out really well. The sailors kept the speed low and the boat cut through the waves quite well – it was a smooth ride and no one got seasick. The pastors were invited to try a walk on the water but we all passed and decided to get back to shore the regular way.

Jordan River Baptismal Site

Shall We Gather at the River

Matthew	3: 13-17	Mark	1: 9-11	Luke	3: 21-22
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On the south end of the Sea of Galilee we stopped at the Yardenit Baptismal Site on the Jordan River. There were five of us who wanted to reaffirm our baptisms in the Jordan River. We were given white robes to wear. We had been warned that these robes are see-through when

they are wet and that we would need to have something on underneath the robes. So we were prepared for that. What we were not prepared for was how cold the water was. We knew that it was going to be cold but it was really cold! I am guessing that the water temperature was probably in the low 50's. Steve waded in to act as our baptizer and he did a good job. We all got dunked, took a few pictures, and then headed as quickly as possible to the changing rooms for a wonderfully warming hot shower.

Before I got out of the water I was able to use my Coke bottle from lunch to capture some Jordan River water to bring back home with me. I plan to use the water in baptisms that I hope to be conducting in the future – perhaps my own grandchildren!?

It is special now to think back on reaffirming my baptism in the Jordan River. At the time of doing it – it was just cold!



What a great first day!

Day 2 – Friday, January 9

This morning we left the hotel really early because there was going to be a marathon in Tiberias and they were going to be closing many of the local roads at 6:00am.

Nazareth

Ask Ye What Great Thing I Know

John 1: 46

We entered the Nazareth area from the Northeast driving through Cana and along a ridge above Nazareth to our first stop.

Mount Precipice

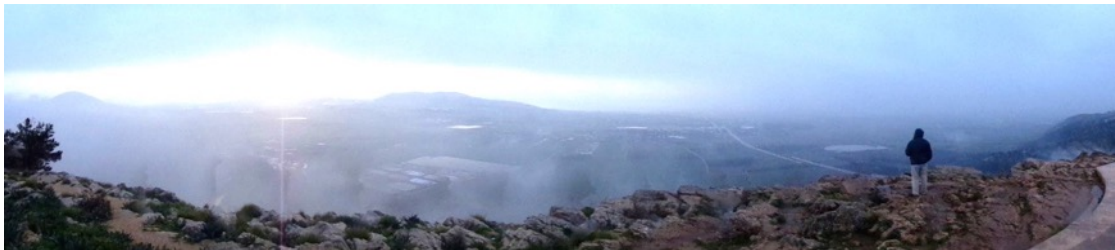
And Are We Yet Alive

Matthew 13: 53-58

Mark 6: 1-6

Luke 4: 16-30

Directly south of central Nazareth and at the pinnacle of a ridge that runs northeast to southwest Mount Precipice gives dramatic views both of Nazareth and the areas to the East, South, and West of Nazareth. The weather this morning was overcast, cold, rainy, and windy. To the east we could just make out Mount Tabor standing by itself. The Basilica of the Annunciation was visible and appears to be about two miles away as the crow flies. This seems to be a bit too far for the people of Nazareth to have brought Jesus



to throw him from the precipice. Perhaps that is why Jesus was able to escape with his life.

Basilica of the Annunciation

To a Maid Engaged to Joseph

Luke 1: 26-38

Located in the downtown area of Nazareth this large church is surrounded by a beautiful courtyard decorated by artwork from around the world and is topped by a large cupola which from the outside looks much like a lighthouse. This church is built over a cave where it is thought the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced that she would give birth to the Son of God.

The main worship area, used by the local Catholic community, is above the cave-



The main sanctuary – notice the artwork on the walls.

home of Mary and her parents Anne and Joachim and has an octagonal opening in its floor in front of the altar which exposes the grotto below with the cupola above. On the grotto level a worship area is built in front of the cave-home which is surrounded by the remains of earlier churches.

The first church was built on this site around 427. This was followed by a Crusader church that was destroyed in 1187. The Franciscans built a church in 1740 which was razed to build the present Basilica. Prior to the modern construction extensive excavations were carried out. These excavations revealed the remains of the ancient village on Nazareth with its silos, cisterns, and other cave-dwellings. The most sensational discovery was of a shrine or synagogue-church dating back to before the first church was built. Scratched on the base of a column appeared the Greek characters *XE-MAPIA*, translated as “Hail Mary” – the Archangel Gabriel’s greeting to Mary.

The custodial staff were cleaning the Grotto Chapel area when we arrived. We waited and watched for about five minutes but they appeared to be doing a quite thorough job so we went upstairs and then over to the nearby Chapel of Saint Joseph before we returned to the Grotto later.

Chapel of Saint Joseph

Matthew 13: 55

Luke 4: 22

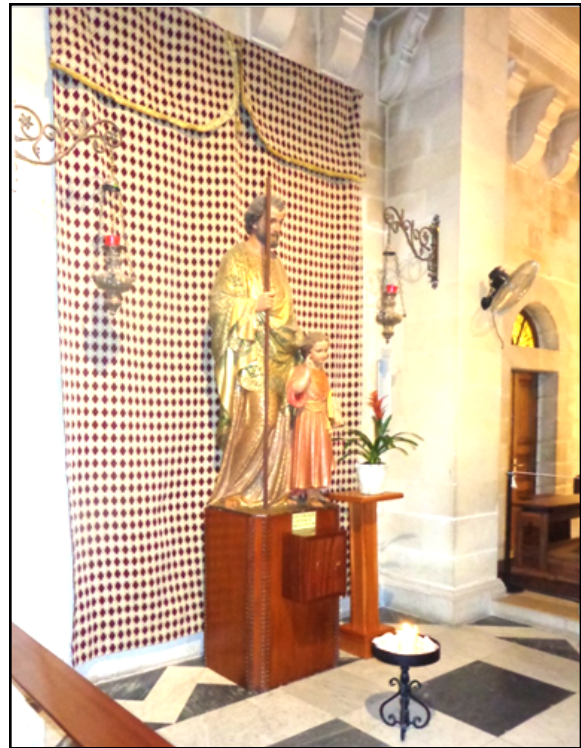
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Less than a hundred yards south of the Basilica of the Annunciation is the Chapel of Saint Joseph which was built over the site of an ancient system of caves; one of which might have been used by the Holy Family. Whether Joseph was a carpenter or some other type of builder or artisan we do know that Jesus was raised in this village after his family returned from Egypt.

The caverns contain a square basin which is likely a first century baptistery which means this cave is the site of one of the world's first churches. The caverns also contain ancient grain silos and water cisterns.

This site was very inspiring when you think about what a good father Joseph must have been. Joseph raised a son who when he wanted to describe a loving God to the people he was teaching called God "Abba - Father."

Joseph and his son Jesus 



Cana of Galilee

John 2: 1-12 4: 46-54

Jesus' first two miracles, according to the Gospel of John, were performed in the village of Cana in the region of Galilee. The first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding feast. Jesus had six large stone jars filled with water and when the steward of the feast was called he found them filled with wine.

The second miracle was the remote healing of the son of an official who lived in Capernaum and had come to Cana looking for Jesus. Cana and its Franciscan church are located about three miles northeast of Nazareth.

Fill My Cup, Lord



Within sight of the Franciscan church is the Greek Orthodox Church of the Marriage Feast. As with many other sites in the Holy Land there is more than one location with a legitimate claim.

Megiddo

Let There Be Peace On Earth

Revelation 16: 16

“The Crossroads of History” has become a cliché but it can be truly said of Megiddo. A site of human occupation dating back to a least 6000 BC, the Tell of Megiddo (a Tel is an archeological term for a mound or hill containing the remains of successive layers of human settlement) rises 200 feet above the surrounding countryside. Archeologists have found the remains of at least 20 cities in the layers of this 15 acre site.

Megiddo is best known as a battleground. The Apostle John’s apocalyptic vision in the Book of Revelation names Megiddo (Armageddon from the Greek Harmagedon or Mountain of Megiddo) as the site of the next-to-last battle on Earth. It is also the site of the first recorded battle on Earth; the 15th century BC battle between Thutmose III and the resident Canaanites. Egyptians, Canaanites, Ancient Israelites, Greeks, Romans, Byzantine, Muslims, Crusaders, Mamlukes, Mongols, Persians, French, Ottomans, British, Germans, Arabs, and Israelis all fought on this blood-soaked battlefield in the Holy Land.

After we had a nice lunch in the visitor center’s cafeteria we started our tour of Tel Megiddo. It was cold and raining and windy but we wanted to see one of the most important archeological sites in Israel. We entered near a stairway that is about 2,700 years old and up a ramp built into the hillside. Once on top we crossed through the Canaanite city gates that are about 3,500 years old and moved through the site to the side of a trench that was dug in the early twentieth century AD. After digging through many layers the archeologists stopped when they exposed a worship area that appears to have been used for about 2,000 years beginning in 3000 BC. From our spot above this trench we could also look out over the Jezreel Valley to the East. As we moved back across the tell we saw a 12th century BC palace, 9th century BC stables, and 7th century BC grain silo, as we made our way to the city’s water supply. In order to have access to water without going outside the city walls the residents from the time of King Ahab (9th century BC) dug a shaft straight down and at the same time dug a downward sloping shaft from a spring at the base of their hill. The entrance to the spring was then sealed up giving the city residents a secure water source. We walked down a modern steel staircase to the bottom of the pit – we were glad to be out of the cold, blowing rain. The ancients’ ability to cut two tunnels to meet is incredible. We climbed up to the spring and then walked out to our bus.



Looking east across the Jezreel Valley

This is another site which I had wanted to visit – Armageddon! I wish the weather had been a little better so that we might have taken a bit more time on top of the tel and been able to

see a bit more of the country side. But this is God's time and God may have something better in store for us.

Mount Scopus

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

If you were to divide Israel into five parts of equal widths north to south, Megiddo would be at about the one fifth line from the north. We left Megiddo headed to our hotel in Jerusalem where we will stay the rest of our time in Israel. Jerusalem is about another fifth of the country south and twice as far inland of the Mediterranean as Megiddo. The only highway in Israel equivalent to our Interstate system runs along the western edge of Israel's central hill country. So between getting to that highway from Megiddo and then from that highway to Jerusalem we had a ride of about two hours ahead of us. We were tired but too excited to sleep.

As we headed west on Highway 1 toward Jerusalem we began to slowly gain elevation. As we reached the western suburbs of Jerusalem the light drizzle turned into a light snow. Our guide, Nader, called an audible and had our driver, Mahmoud, take us to the campus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on Mount Scopus. It had already been a long day for all of us, but especially for Nader and Mahmoud. It would have been so easy for them to stick to the original plan and take us directly to our hotel – there would have been no way for us to know what we had missed!

The Latin name "*Scopus*" comes from the Roman Army's use of this mountain as a vantage point to plan their attack of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Binyamin Mazar Street offered ample parking for our bus and terraced walkways with marvelous views of the Temple Mount and Old Jerusalem to the southwest across the Kidron Valley. As we took and posed for pictures it began



snowing harder until finally the Dome of the Rock faded out of view. We loaded our warm bus and headed for the Olive Tree Hotel – our home for next seven nights.

What a way to end our second day!

Day 3 – Saturday, January 10

Bethlehem

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Genesis 35: 19 Ruth 1 Samuel 16 John 7: 42

Bethlehem is about six miles southwest of Jerusalem in the Judean hill country on the road to Hebron. As we rode along this morning we enjoyed the snow covering which had fallen the evening before. Before we got to Bethlehem we had to go through a check point and cross into Palestinian Territory (Israeli citizens are not allowed by the Israeli government to enter Palestinian Territory).

Shopping

A Charge to Keep I Have

Our first stop this morning was at the Nissan Brothers' Bethlehem New Store, the largest tourist store in Bethlehem. This is one stop shopping at its best. The Nissan Brothers have grown a wonderful business here in Palestinian Territory. They specialize in olive wood carvings and have their own factory on site.

In the afternoon we stopped at Jerusalem Gates Souvenir shop also in Bethlehem. One of their specialties is ancient coins. Both of these stores were great places to shop – make sure your bargaining skills are well honed.

Church of the Nativity

What Child Is This?

Micah 5: 2 Luke 2: 1-7

The most popular tourist attraction in Bethlehem is, of course, the birthplace of Jesus Christ - The Church of the Nativity. We left our bus in a parking garage about four blocks from the church and walked up to Bethlehem Square. If there were no signs a first-time visitor would not be able to pick out the entrance to The Church of the Nativity except by watching where everybody was going. It is a very modest entry-way. Most folks need to duck to enter through the short doorway that looks like it was installed as an after-thought. But once you are inside you realize that it really is a church.

They were doing some construction (the sign outside called it “roof and window restoration”) while we were there so they had each of the large columns wrapped to protect them from any damage – this is one of the oldest churches in Israel. Our guide led us down the right side of the sanctuary to a place where others were gathering to move down a few steps and through a doorway down into the lower level of the church.



As our group shuffled along with the crowd a group of Russian pilgrims came up behind us and began moving ahead of others who had been waiting before they arrived. One little woman came up behind me on my right and continued to push against me as we moved down the steps and through the doorway. As I raised my arms to take this photo she moved past me – that’s her on the right! James is taking a picture of the Star of Bethlehem – the place where Jesus was born. It has now been covered with marble and embellished with religious decorations.

After we each had a chance to kneel at the Star we gathered at the back of the grotto. We read the Christmas story from Luke 2 and the prolog to the Gospel of John. This is a special place, it is the place where the Word became flesh and lived among us! The reality of this brought a song to our lips and we sang together: *Joy to the world . . .*

Church of Saint Catherine of Alexandria

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

1 Timothy 1: 8-14

As we came up out of the Grotto of the Nativity we left the church and entered a walkway which leads to the Courtyard and Church of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. Saint Catherine was a 4th century martyr whose body disappeared as soon as she was beheaded and was taken to Mount Sinai. The monastery and town there are also named for her and we will visit them later in our trip.

As we entered the church we thought a worship service might be in progress but it turned out to be the organist practicing – which we enjoyed. This is the site from which broadcasts of “Christmas in Bethlehem” originate. This is the church of the local Roman



Stained glass window above the altar.

Catholic community. At the back right side of the church there is a staircase which leads down to:

Saint Jerome's Cave

Romans 7: 1-13

Thy Word Is a Lamp Unto My Feet

Saint Jerome was born in Dalmatia which lies on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea north of Greece. As a young man he became secretary to Pope Damasus I. The Pope encouraged Jerome to use his gift with languages to translate the Bible into Latin. Jerome moved from Rome to Bethlehem and took residence in this two room cavern near the Grotto of the Nativity.

Jerome spent 30 years working on his translation known as the Vulgate. This remained the authoritative version for the Roman Catholic Church into the 20th century. At his death in 420 Jerome was interred in one of the adjacent caves until his remains were removed to Constantinople and then Rome.

This site was not on our itinerary. A docent saw us standing around the roped-off stairwell down to the caves and told us we would have to wait a few more minutes while another group finished their worship service below. We did not know what we were going to see – sometimes it pays off to look like you are lost!

In adjoining caves:



Chapel of Saint Joseph

Trust and Obey

Matthew 2: 13-15

This chapel was consecrated in memory of Joseph's dream which warned him to flee with his family to Egypt.

Chapel of the Holy Innocents

On Jordan's Stormy Bank I Stand

Matthew 2: 16-18

This chapel commemorates the children who were murdered by Herod in his rage to retain his throne.

The Shepherds' Field

Luke 2: 8-20

On the night that Jesus was born there were shepherds keeping watch over their flocks in fields all around Bethlehem. Which field or fields did the angels appear in? That is a question that has been asked in Bethlehem for almost two thousand years. Tradition says that it was one of the fields east of the village. Today there are three sites that compete for pilgrims' attention. On this still cold and drizzly day we went to the Protestant Shepherds' Field. As with the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Shepherds' Fields our site included not only a field but also a cave which the shepherds

Angels We Have Heard on High



would have used for shelter for themselves or if they were large enough also for their sheep.

This was a lovely site and we could easily imagine shepherds and their sheep on a dark and quiet night enjoying the peace of this place. Then suddenly . . .

Herodium

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Matthew 2

In 40 BC Herod the Great had to flee from Jerusalem and his enemy Antigonus who caught up with Herod southeast of Bethlehem. A desperate battle followed and Herod escaped and made his way to Rome where the Roman Senate crowned him the King of the Jews and sent him back to Judea. Three years later his kingdom was secure under Roman rule.

To commemorate the battle that changed his life Herod built a governmental and administrative center that was also a palace and a fortress on this site at the edge of the desert



and named it after himself.

The first feature that catches your eye is the double-walled circular tower palace-fortress surrounded by a man-made mountain. But this is only one of the three main parts of this groundbreaking ancient wonder. There is also a ground-level entertainment and administrative center north of the tower/mountain. And on the northeast slope of his artificial mountain Herod built his funeral complex including his tomb and a royal theater.

The story of Herodium did not end with Herod's death in 4 BC. His son Archelaus used it for about a decade. The Romans then took over until Jewish rebels captured it in 66 AD. The rebels at Herodium were expelled in 71 AD by the Romans. In 132 AD the Jews leading the Bar Kokhba Revolt took Herodium as their headquarters. Upper and lower Herodium were occupied until the 7th and 9th century, respectively, and then abandoned.

It was amazing to see to what extremes Herod would go in order to feel safe and comfortable in his own kingdom. It seems that every palace that Herod built was also a fortress. But I guess it is not necessarily paranoia if lots of people really do want to kill you.

The Garden of Gethsemane

Go to Dark Gethsemane

Luke 22: 40-46

John 18: 1-11

We traveled back into Jerusalem and to the base of the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. The olive trees seen below are probably over one thousand years old but no one



knows for sure because olive trees do not have tree rings. We know these are not the trees from Jesus' time because during the siege of Jerusalem the Romans cut down all the trees around the city. Of course much else has changed in two thousand years.

What really matters as we visit these different sites is not whether they are authentic or accurate or just the way Jesus saw them. What matters to us as pilgrims is that we are growing closer to Christ and feel the presence of Christ with us as we walk in his steps. This garden and the church next to it definitely helped us feel his presence.

The Church of All Nations

I Stand Amazed in the Presence

Matthew 26: 36-46

Mark 14: 32-42

Located within the Garden of Gethsemane is the Church of All Nations, also



known as the Basilica of the Agony. This edifice was completed in 1924 and is the third church built on this site. The main feature of this church is the rock rising through the floor in front of the altar.

It is not surprising in a country with exposed bedrock almost everywhere you look that rocks

would be used as markers for many important events. This, of course, is not an ordinary rock. It is the rock on which Jesus knelt in prayer the night he was betrayed and just hours before he gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

On this rock Jesus asked his Father to take the cup of suffering from him. But like his mother, Jesus was willing to do whatever God wanted him to do. How could we not be moved as we knelt and touched this holy stone? What prayer could we utter that would express how we felt to be in this place?

“Thank you. Thank you for being what we cannot be; for doing what we cannot do. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Please help me to be just a little bit like you.”

Just a few yards away Peter, John, and James could not keep awake and pray with Jesus.

“Lord, help us to be alert and pray according to your will.”

Golden Gate

Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

Matthew 21: 1-11

Luke 19: 29-38

Mark 11: 1-10

John 12: 12-15

From the front portico of the Church of All Nations we had an excellent view across the Kidron Valley to the eastern wall of the Old City and the Golden Gate, the only major gate into the city which is sealed.



There has been a gate near this location since Solomon built the first Temple. In those days it was simply called the East Gate. When returnees from the exile rebuilt the Temple they named the eastern gate the Susa Gate in honor of the Jews who had remained in the Persian capital and helped pay for the construction of this new Jerusalem. During the years of the first and second Temple the Scape Goat was cast into the wilderness through this gate. After Herod rebuilt and expanded the Temple Mount this is the gate through which Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The Romans destroyed that gate when they razed the Temple in 70 AD.

The present gate was built by the Byzantines in the 6th century. The Ottomans built the present walls of the Old City in 1540. In 1541 they sealed the Golden Gate. They also built a cemetery in front of the gate. They sealed the gate and built the cemetery in front of the Golden Gate in hope of preventing the Messiah from entering Jerusalem through this gate. Both Christians and Jews expect the Messiah to enter Jerusalem through this gate. I think if Jesus wants to enter though this gate nothing any human does will keep him from doing it.

Today we have gone from the place where Jesus was born to the place where he was arrested and where we can see the place where he will return. It was another wonderful day in The Holy Land – I wonder what tomorrow will bring.

Day 4 – Sunday, January 11

The Old City

Blest Be the Tie That Binds

2 Samuel 5: 6-12

1 Chronicles 11: 4-9

Today we are going into the heart of Jerusalem, The Old City. The Old City is defined by the wall that surrounds it. The wall as we see it today was built by the Ottoman Turks in 1540 AD. In some places it was built on top of the older walls. In some places it was extended outward from the older walls. In some places it was brought in from the older walls. In fact the oldest part of Jerusalem, the City of David, which King David captured from the Jebusites a thousand years before Christ, is not within today's wall.

Since David's capture of the original Jebusite city there have been five major expansions of the city walls: during the 10th, 8th, 2nd, and 1st centuries BC and the 1st century AD. The two major contractions of the walls came with the Roman destruction in 70 AD and the earthquake of 1033 AD.

Inside the wall The Old City is divided into four quarters: Jewish, Christian, Armenian, and Muslim. The practice of dividing the city into quarters goes back to the days when this was a Roman city. The Romans built in the form of their military camps – with two main streets meeting in the middle, one running north and south and the other running east and west.

These quarters are separated only by a line on a map and it is easy to move from one quarter to another; as easy as walking across a narrow street. The Muslim Quarter is the largest and includes the northeast corner down to the north end of the Western Wall, west to the Damascus Gate, and all of the Temple Mount. The Christian Quarter is second in size and includes the northwest corner east to the Damascus Gate and south to the Joppa Gate. The Jewish and Armenian Quarters are about the same size and occupy the southern side of the city and are divide by Habad Street which roughly follows the ancient Roman north/south street.

There is a different feeling in The Old City. Whether that feeling comes from entering through the narrow gates, crossing through the wall, or by what lies inside, or by a combination of all three I am not sure. The narrow streets and alleyways of the city reminded me of being in Astroworld, an old theme park in Houston. At Astroworld I had learned my way through the short-cuts but in The Old City of Jerusalem I was always on the verge of being lost.



Herod's Gate

Lift Up Your Head, Ye Mighty Gates

Herod's Gate is located at the northeast corner of Jerusalem's Old City between Damascus Gate and Lion's Gate, adjoining the Muslim Quarter. It is also called the Flower Gate because of intricate stone designs above the gate, and the Sheep's Gate because of the animal market held outside of the gate.

The name "Herod's Gate" was based on the belief that King Herod's palace was located near the site. In fact, the gate was a modest entrance until the 1870s when the Turks built the more

impressive gate to give access to neighborhoods north of the Old City. Notice the narrow trailer going through the gate. These narrow vehicles are needed to negotiate the gates and the streets of The Old City.

Hadrian's Arch

Be Thou My Vision



In 135 AD the Roman Emperor Hadrian transformed Jerusalem into a Hellenistic city named *Colonia Aelia Capitolina*; a Roman colony named for Hadrian's family and the three gods to be worshiped there – Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. Hadrian intended to stamp out the practice of Judaism and barred Jews from entering or coming within sight of this new city. The arch seen to the left was the center span of a triple arch built at the western end of the eastern marketplace. It commemorates the Roman victory over Jewish rebels led by Bar Kochba. In the mid-19th century, the northern arch was incorporated into the interior of the Convent of the Sisters of Zion, the southern end was destroyed. Today the center arch is topped by a small room which is used as an office and the northern arch can be seen inside the convent chapel.

Ecce Homo

Are Ye Able

John 19: 5 & 13

The name “Ecce Homo” is Latin for “behold the man,” words spoken by Pontius Pilate when he presented Jesus to a hostile crowd. At one time it was believed that this was the place where Pilate brought Jesus out to the people. Hadrian's marketplace plaza was mistaken for “The Stone Pavement” of John 19: 13. (“The Stone Pavement” is *Gabbatha* in Aramaic and *Lithostrotos* in Greek.) So Hadrian's Arch became known as the Ecce Homo Arch and the convent was named the Ecce Homo Convent.

Struthion Pool & Lithostrotos

During the construction of the Ecce Homo Convent in 1857 the pavement from Aelia Capitolina's eastern marketplace plaza and Hadrian's victory arch was uncovered. And below that pavement a large cistern (about 180' x 50' x 15' deep) cut from bedrock

was found. This was once an open pool that Hadrian had vaulted so that his victory plaza could be built. The name “Struthion” means “sparrow” in Hebrew and comes from the



Struthion Pool

name of the open pool which was part of a chain of reservoirs providing water for the citizens of Jerusalem.

Antonia Fortress

Rock of Ages

The pavement over the Struthion Pool also stretches to the east toward the Antonia Fortress. This vast military garrison was built by Herod the Great and named in honor of his patron Mark Antony. The fortress was built against the northern wall of the Temple Mount and rose above it giving the Roman troops a commanding view of the Temple Mount.

Part of the site of the Antonia Fortress is now occupied by the Al-Omariya Madrasa, a school for Muslim boys and men.

Via Dolorosa

Ah, Holy Jesus

Matthew 27

Mark 15

Luke 23

John 19

“The Way of Sorrows” is the traditional route that Jesus carried his cross to his execution. We were on part of the Via Dolorosa as soon as we stepped onto the street where we could see Hadrian’s Arch. At that point “The Way of Sorrows” stretched in front of us and behind us.

Each Friday Franciscan friars lead a procession beginning at 3pm (4pm in the summer) and starting in the Al-Omariya Madrasa (Station 1). The procession moves west and ends at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Stations 10-14). Each procession is accompanied by Muslim guards in Ottoman uniforms.

The route, and the number and location of stations, has changed over the centuries. But walking the Via Dolorosa has been a Christian tradition since the 4th or 5th century. Today's route was established in the 18th century with the present 14 stations, though some of the station locations were changed in the 19th century.

Though we did not get to follow the entire route of the Via Dolorosa on this day, I think that it is a wonderful devotional act. It began as a way for people who could not travel to Jerusalem to experience viscerally, the sorrow of the first Good Friday. You, too, can walk The Way of Sorrows right now where you are.

Chapel of the Flagellation (Station 2)

Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed

Matthew 27: 27-30

Luke 23: 13-25

Mark 15: 16-19

John 19: 1-3

The Chapel of the Flagellation is (in my opinion) the most striking of all the churches, chapels, and basilicas we visited. It is, of course, a somber place that evokes quiet and contemplation. The inside of the chapel is dominated by browns, grays, and black and the lighting is subdued.

As you enter your eyes are immediately drawn to the three stained-glass windows behind the altar and on either side of the sanctuary. Viewing clockwise, they show Pilate washing his hands, Jesus being scourged, and Barabbas expressing joy at his release.



The stained-glass windows of the Chapel of the Flagellation

Then, as you absorb this tragic scene while walking up the center aisle, your eyes are drawn upward. On the ceiling above the altar, a mosaic, on a deep golden background, depicts Jesus' crown of thorns pierced by stars.

The affect is absolutely stunning! As I stood surrounded by these light-stopping windows and over-shadowed by this diadem of pain I felt the power of his sacrifice for me in a way that I never had before.

This place is a great example of the power of art.

Chapel of the Condemnation and Imposition of the Cross (Station 2)

In the Cross of Christ I Glory

Matthew 27: 31

Mark 15: 20

Luke 23: 25

John 19: 4-16

Across the courtyard from the Chapel of the Flagellation is the Chapel of the Condemnation and Imposition of the Cross which is the traditional site where was

condemned to crucifixion and where he was compelled to take up the crossbeam on which he was to die.

I am trying to be careful in how I word this description because we need to remember that no one took Jesus' life from him, he gave his life so that you and I might live. Jesus took up his cross and started toward Golgatha from this place. But he had been on his way here since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit.



That's me and Grace in front of the Chapel of the Condemnation

The chapel is topped by five white domes and surrounded by examples of archeological findings from the construction of this complex. Paving stones at the back of the chapel are part of the pavement that extends under the Ecce Homo Convent.

Pools of Bethesda

There Is a Balm in Gilead

John 5: 2-8

Bethesda means “House of Mercy” and these pools, which were part of Jerusalem’s rainwater collection system, were known for their healing properties. For centuries Bible scholars searched for the pools mentioned in John 5 without success. Some believed they did not exist until archeologists in the early 20th century unearthed two large water reservoirs separated by a broad rock dike. They were rectangular in shape, with four colonnaded porticos around the sides and one across the central dike.



Also found were the remains of a 5th century basilica and a Crusader chapel (which can be seen to the right of center in this photo). Support columns for the basilica can be seen to the left of the chapel and one of the pools is at the base of these supports.

This was an incredible area to visit. The archeological work done here has been tremendous. The pool that was uncovered must have been at least 25 feet below today’s street level and they continued on at least another 15 feet.

Church of Saint Anne

Amazing Grace

The 5th century basilica that was built by Byzantine empress Eudocia was named “Mary where she was born.” This was done in honor of a tradition which says that Jesus’ maternal grandparents, Anne and Joachim, lived here and his mother Mary was born here. Next to the excavations of Bethesda is the Church of Saint Anne, the best preserved Crusader church in Jerusalem.

Constructed in 1140 its strong lines and thick walls give Saint Anne's a fortress-like appearance. Its simple dignity offers a space for prayer and contemplation without distraction. It is also unusually asymmetrical in the detail of its design: opposite columns do not match, windows are all different sizes, and buttresses differ in thickness and height.

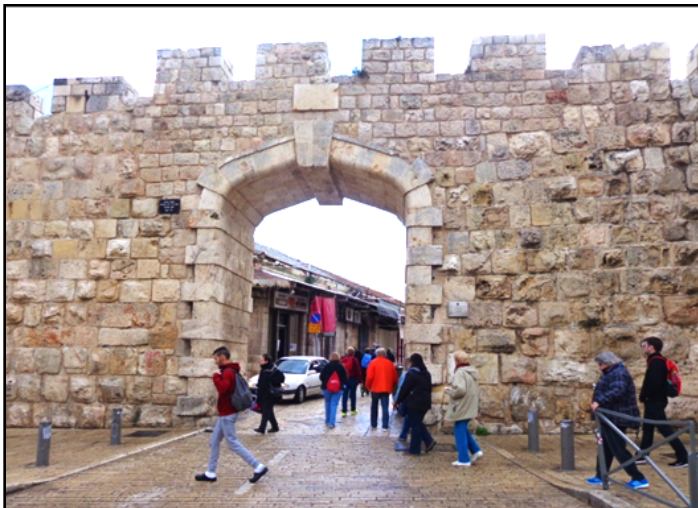
The Church of Saint Anne is renowned for its remarkable acoustics and reverberating echoes. The voices of even a small choral group can sound like a large congregation in a vast cathedral. We got to experience this first hand as we sang together a couple of songs. We also got to listen to one other group sing a song in a language none of us could identify.

Lions Gate (Saint Stephen's Gate)

He Lives

Acts 6: 8 – 8: 1

The Lions Gate is the only open gate facing east toward the Mount of Olives. It stands adjacent to the Muslim Quarter of The Old City. The "lions" carved on both sides of the gate are actually panthers, the symbol of the Mamluk Sultan Baybars (1223-1277). The panthers were believed to have been part of a Mamluki structure and placed at the gate by Suleiman to commemorate the Ottoman victory over the Mamluks in 1517.



This is also called Saint Stephen's Gate because tradition says that Stephen was taken through this gate in order to be stoned. An older tradition says that Stephen was taken out through one of the northern gates.

During Jesus' time the gate in this area was known as the Sheep Gate because this is where the sheep sacrificed in the Temple were brought into the city.

New Gate

This Is a Day of New Beginnings

Unlike the other ancient gates, the New Gate was opened in 1889 by the Ottomans, giving direct access to the Christian Quarter of The Old City.

Nader's School

Tell Me the Stories of Jesus

Just inside the New Gate our guide, Nader, showed us where he went to school as he grew up in The Old City.



Nader's Home

Happy the Home

Nader also took us off the main routes to see the family home where he was raised. Nader's uncle still lives in the home and we did not go in. This looked like a very nice neighborhood and as you can see in this photo the streets are kept very clean.

Nader told us that his uncle had at one time talked to him about an offer he had received to buy the family home. Nader said that he felt that a home in The Old City is priceless. I agree.

Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Stations 10-14)

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

Matthew 27: 33 – 28: 10

Luke 23: 32 – 24: 12

Mark 15: 22 – 16: 8

John 19: 17 – 20: 18

This is THE site for Christians. It is meaningful to see the places where Jesus was stripped of his garments (10) *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*; nailed to the cross (11) *Were You There*; crucified (12) *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*; taken down from the cross (13) *O Love Divine, What Hast Thou Done*; and laid in the tomb (14) *Were You There*. But the main attraction is the site of Jesus' resurrection! (The Greek Orthodox name for this church is the Anastasis – The Church of the Resurrection.)

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ makes this place the most important place in the world for Christians. But that does not mean that the other things that happened here are unimportant. Each event had its own place in God's plan to bring redemption to all of creation.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is usually crowded which when combined with its size and complexity can make a reverent visit difficult. It helps to have a basic understanding of what you are seeing and how the different parts of the church are related to one another.

There is only one entrance to the church. You can see that this one entrance was once a double entrance – the right doorway has been sealed. It is usually much darker inside so take a moment to let your eyes adjust, then turn right. You will see a stairway that will take you to the top of Calvary/Golgotha and the place where Jesus was nailed to the cross and crucified.



It is a bit disconcerting to see the places you have always read were not only outside but also outside the city gates – now, not only inside but inside the city gates. At the time of Jesus’ crucifixion this site was outside of the city walls. The area had most likely been a quarry. The rock that was left exposed had been deemed less worthy for construction but suitable for executions and tombs.

The early Christians had already begun to venerate this site before the Bar Kochba Revolt in 132 AD. After the Romans had put down this second revolt in 60 years the emperor Hadrian was determined to put an end to Judaism and any sects of Judaism like Christianity. Hadrian had the major temple of his new Hellenistic city built on this site. Unwittingly, this helped mark this site and keep it well preserved.

In 326 the emperor Constantine I had the pagan temple torn down and the hillside cut away from around Christ’s tomb. He then had a church built around these two sites (the crucifixion and resurrection). Constantine’s church was burned by the Persians in 614 and then rebuilt. That church was destroyed by the Muslims in 1009, including the destruction of the rock tomb, and then partially rebuilt. The Crusaders finished the reconstruction in 1149 and that is substantially the church we see today.

After you have spent some time contemplating the crucifixion you move to the left and away from the altar and down a different flight of stairs. This brings you back to the entryway where, to your left, you see the place where they cleaned Jesus’ body after he was taken down from the cross. If you continue forward you will move into the Rotunda of the Sepulcher. The place where Jesus’ tomb was located is now surrounded by a structure called an edicule. Special examinations of this structure show that what we see today is the fourth layer of the structure, each subsequent layer built around what was there before. You will probably notice a fifth layer – steel I-beams which have been added to keep the stone edicule from falling over.

This first visit I made to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was rather frantic. The crowd was large and we were not given very long to see so very much. In my notes from that day I wrote, “I am not sure what I was looking at, but I know who died and rose for me!” I will get a second chance in just a few days.

Jaffa Gate

All Who Love and Serve Your City

The Jaffa Gate of The Old City is unquestionably the busiest gate in the ancient walls. Damascus Gate, bordering the Muslim Quarter, serves a large pedestrian population, and the Dung Gate is an important exit for visitors to the Western Wall. But Jaffa Gate, so named because it faces west toward Jaffa, is the main entrance for pedestrians and motor vehicles – buses, trucks, taxis and cars. It wasn't always so. Until



the late 1800s the narrow angled gate limited wheeled traffic. A moat was an additional barrier. All that changed when the Ottoman authorities rebuilt the gate to allow the German Emperor's carriages to enter the city in 1898.

The Jerusalem Archeological Park - Ayyubid Gate

Faith of Our Fathers

West of the Dung Gate (to the left when facing The Old City wall on the outside) stands a gate within a tower, built of large ashlar (finely cut stone) blocks. Though it seems to be built against the outer face of The Old City wall, the Ottoman wall is later than the tower and was in fact built over it. This tower was part of the city fortifications constructed in the thirteenth century AD. Still visible south of the tower are the remains of paving stones and bases of columns that once lined a street. In 1535 AD, when the Ottomans built the present walls of The Old City, they closed up the Ayyubid Gate with ashlar blocks and mortar, replacing it with the newly built Dung Gate. The Ayyubid Gate was reopened in 1995 and is used exclusively to enter the Jerusalem Archeological Park.

Southern Wall Excavations

To God Be the Glory

These excavations were begun by Benjamin Mazar in 1968 and were the largest earth-moving archeological projects in Israel. Work continued here until 1978 and was resumed in the 1990s under the direction of Ronny Reich. These excavations are the most important for understanding the Temple Mount because of the impossibility of excavating on the Temple Mount itself.

The area of this archeological work includes a small area west of the Dung Gate road, the area around the base of the Temple Mount retaining wall starting at the southwest corner and extending north to the Western Wall Plaza and extending east to the southeast corner of the retaining wall and Ophel Road.



During the time of Solomon's Temple the area along the western wall was the Tyropoeon (Central) Valley which formed a steep barrier for Jerusalem. This valley was partially filled during the 8th century BC by King Hezekiah in order to expand the city to the West. But the valley still drained the western side of Mount Moriah and the eastern side of the Mount Zion. The water would drain to the south into the Kidron Valley near its confluence with the Hinnom Valley.

Herod the Great had the eastern half of the Tyropoeon Valley filled in with the Temple Mount and its massive retaining wall. The bottom of the valley was covered with a street lined on both sides with shops. Under the street was a sophisticated two level drainage system.

When the Romans destroyed everything on top of the Temple Mount much of the debris was pushed onto the street which ran along the base of the western wall of the Temple Mount. This debris remained there for almost two thousand years until the Southern Wall Excavations started in 1968.

The Jerusalem Archeological Park also extends south across Ophel Road but we did not visit those sites – the City of David, the East Slope of Mount Zion, the Kidron Valley, the West Slope of the Mount of Olives, and the Valley of Hinnom.

Western and Southern Walls

How Firm a Foundation

Isaiah 66: 14

Matthew 24: 1-2

In 20 BC Herod the Great began his reconstruction of the Second Temple and its surrounding precincts. When he was finished the Temple Mount was a massive 1,575 feet in length and 920 feet in width. It was surrounded by four tremendous retaining walls built of ashlar blocks with dressed margins. The remarkable scale of the construction is particularly evident from the size of the stones; this corner of the retaining wall incorporates stones that are about 35 feet long, 5 feet wide, and 4 feet high and weighing approximately 100,000 pounds.



An observer standing at this corner can readily appreciate the magnitude of the achievement that it represents, even though only a small part of the enclosure – a few dozen yard of the west and south walls – is visible from here. Herod's construction is easily discernible: large, well-cut stones, with the typical dressed margins forming a rectangular frame, set in horizontal courses of generally uniform height. Most of the stones weigh from two to four tons but at certain places, such as the corners, where particularly sturdy construction was necessary, the masons used even larger stones. These massive stones were laid in the corners in alternating directions – east/west then north/south.

The walls of the Temple Mount rest on bedrock. Here at the southwest corner the natural rock foundation is seven courses below the visible stones, about 25 feet below our feet. No mortar or other cementing material was used. Stability was ensured by the great weight of the stones and by receding each course 1 to 1.5 inches from the course below.

It was amazing to stand at this corner and look up and see these huge stones towering over us and extending north and west beyond where we could see. I can understand why the disciples were awed by these great buildings.

Western Huldah Gate (Double Gate)

Leaning On the Everlasting Arms

In the Second Temple period there were two gates in the south wall of the



Temple Mount, known as the Huldah Gates. The western Huldah Gate (the Double Gate) lies under the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Today the opening is blocked up and a medieval building adjoins it. In front of the gate are the remains of a partly-reconstructed monumental stair-case. The eastern Huldah Gate (the Triple Gate) consisted of three arched openings; they too are blocked up today.

The two gates may have been named after the prophetess Huldah who, according to tradition, lived in Jerusalem in the First Temple period. The Gates led into tunnels through which people could pass beneath the Royal Stoa (portico), on

their way to the Temple Courtyard of the Gentiles.

The entrance tunnel of the western Huldah Gate has been completely preserved under the Al-Aqsa Mosque. It contains columns bearing capitals and four carved stone domes of high architectural and artistic standards.

This area, which is accessible from the Temple Mount enclosure, is not open to the public.

Much of the western Huldah Gate is now covered by the medieval building adjoining the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The gate had a double entrance, of which only the east (right) quarter is visible today. In this corner the original stone steps (Teaching Steps) are exposed and you can stand in a place where it is highly likely that Jesus walked. This was another one of the highlights of our trip – standing where Jesus once stood!

Teaching Steps

Spirit Song

Psalms 120 - 134

The monumental staircase leading to the Temple Mount consists of alternating narrow and broad steps. The original stairs are grayish in color; some are broken and others are hewn in the natural rock. Their remains are quite clearly distinguishable from the reconstructed steps, which are more crudely dressed of white limestone. The staircase leads up to the western Huldah Gate and a similar staircase probably led to the eastern gate.

These steps were 200 feet wide and some suggest that the fifteen broad steps may have been one of the locations where pilgrims sang the fifteen Psalms of Ascent as they went up to worship.

The Western Wall

Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire

The holiest site in Judaism is the western retaining wall of the Temple Mount. Because the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD this retaining wall is the closest remains to that Second Temple. Jewish Israelis call it Kotel (wall) while others sometimes call it the Wailing Wall. What we can see today as we stand on the Western Wall Plaza is part of the Second Temple wall (the bottom seven layers of stone) and the



rest was added later. But below the plaza level there are eight more layers of the ancient wall. What we can see of the Western Wall is also divided into a side for men and a side for women – you can see the moveable barrier between the two sides in the photo above (men in the upper section women in the lower).

To enter the Western Wall Plaza you must first pass through a security check and a metal detector. Men and married women are required to wear some sort of head covering as they approach the Western Wall and the whole area is considered a place of worship. This is a site of pilgrimage for Jews and Christians and a place of prayer for all people. It is also a site of celebration for young Jewish people celebrating their coming of age (bar or bat Mitzvah).

What a wonderful privilege to be able to pray in this place. I am grateful that the Jewish people and the Israeli government allow us to share this place with them. As I got closer to the wall I was given a skullcap (kippah) to wear. There were plastic chairs available to use so I took one and sat where I could lean forward with my head against the Western Wall as I prayed, “God, give me joy and peace.”

Dung Gate

Go Now in Peace

Nehemiah 3: 13

Close to the Temple Mount and facing the ancient City of David and the Shiloach (Siloam) spring, the original gate was probably well traversed. The gate is at the lowest point of the walls, and indeed it was probably used for removing refuse and possibly ashes from the Temple. A major drainage tunnel near the gate, more than 1,965 feet long and dating back at least to Herod's days, has recently been discovered and cleared and opened for tourists.

The Ottoman-built gate was small and narrow, the upper arch of which is still visible above today's gate. In 1952, during Jordan's occupation of The Old City, the gate was widened to permit vehicles to enter. The opening was reinforced with cement posts. The gate was renovated by Israel after 1967 to match the Ottoman stone and design.



After we had finished our prayer time at the Western Wall we exited The Old City and returned to our hotel. It was a meaningful way to end a busy Sunday.

Day 5 – Monday, January 12

Zion Gate

Marching to Zion

The location and name "Zion Gate" appear on maps dating back to the 12th century. It is one of eight gates in The Old City wall. Located between Mount Zion and the Jewish and Armenian Quarters, the gate was the setting for fierce fighting during the 1948 war.



We did not go in through this gate but we did see the outside today and the inside a few days later. Notice the pot marks around this entranceway – these are bullet holes from the 1948 war.

The ridge on which this gate sits is the third high point to be called Zion. The original Zion was in the City of David which is east of this location. The second Zion was where Solomon built the first Temple, today's Temple Mount or Mount Moriah. The true summit of today's Mount Zion is inside The Old City near the Citadel. But it is the area just outside the Zion Gate that is considered Mount Zion today. This was very confusing to me before I found the explanation in my reading at:

www.seetheholyland.net.

The Upper Room (Cenacle)

Matthew 26: 17-30

Luke 22: 7-38

John 13 – 14

Acts 1: 13 – 2: 47

Mark 14: 12-26

24: 9-11, 33-49

20: 2, 10, 18-29

12: 1-19

For the Bread Which You Have Broken

16: 14-18

15: 3-21

This is a site which exemplifies the importance of what happened as opposed to where it happened. It is obvious that this is not the Upper Room where Jesus observed Passover with his

disciples. It is a second floor room but its Gothic arched architecture points to its origins as a 12th century Crusader chapel that was part of the Church of Our Lady of Mount Zion.

These facts, however, do not mean that we are in the wrong place – we are in the right place (perhaps) at a different time. Archeological research shows that this 12th century chapel was built on top of a church/synagogue constructed by the 1st century Jewish-Christian community of Jerusalem. This may have been the first Christian church!

This archeological evidence gives credence to the claim of this site as the Upper Room where Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and/or washed his disciples' feet; where the disciples gathered and locked themselves in hiding after the crucifixion; from where the women left and to where they returned that first Easter morning; where the two disciples who met the Lord on their way to Emmaus came to make their report; where Jesus appeared suddenly in the midst of his disciples and then a week later appeared again for Thomas' sake; where the disciples gathered and chose a replacement for Judas; and, where the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. This may also be the site of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.



It was hard for me to get over the outward appearance of this room. I think I was a bit overloaded with highly decorated holy sites: the Church of the Annunciation, Cana of Galilee, the Church of the Nativity, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. All of them were great places to see and to be but when the closest you can get is to put your hand through a gilded hole in a

slab of marble and touch something you cannot see, the decorations can become a barrier instead of an enhancement.

I spent my time in this space trying to get a few good photographs. I studied the architectural elements and the Muslim additions of the 16th century. As I think back on my time in the Upper Room and learn more about its history I have more appreciation for being allowed to spend a few minutes in a place of such significance for the Church of Jesus Christ my Lord. I was not a part of what happened here but now that I am a believer I am a part of all that took place in the Upper Room.

King David's Tomb

I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath

1 Kings 2: 10-11

1 Chronicles 29: 26-30

Below the Upper Room is King David's Tomb minus King David. This state of affairs came to be through the confusion over the site of Mount Zion. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the banishment of all Jews from the new city of Aelia Capitolina in 135 AD the original Mount Zion (the City of David) was lost and the new Mount Zion (the Temple Mount) was a pile of rubble. Mount Zion moved across the Tyropoeon Valley and along with it the sites which were supposed to be on Mount Zion.

Since the Bible says that King David was buried in the City of David and since the City of David was on Mount Zion pilgrims looked for the King David's Tomb on what they thought was Mount Zion. Of course they never found it but the Crusaders used three very old walls (from the 1st century church/synagogue cited above) to create the tomb we see today.



The real tomb of King David has never been found on the original Mount Zion or in Bethlehem. Slowly over the centuries acceptance of this site grew among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. From 1948 until 1967 when Jews did not have access to the Western Wall this was a major pilgrimage site and a focal point for prayers and it grew in importance.

As I visited this site I did not know that this may have been the site of the first Christian church. It is quite obviously a place of prayer and the power of hundreds of years of prayers can be felt. As with the Western Wall this site is divided into a side for men and a side for women.

Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu

Freely, Freely

Matthew 26: 31-75

Luke 22: 31-62

Mark 14: 27-72

John 13: 36-38

18: 1-27

Gallus Cantus means cockcrow in Latin. So imagine being Peter when the cock crowed. We have all been where Peter found himself in that instant: in denial of our knowledge of Jesus Christ; denial of our place in his kingdom; denial of his place in our lives and in our hearts. You and I might not put it into words as Peter did that night but we do act out our denial by doing things we should not do and saying things we should not say and by not doing things that we should do and not saying things we should say. You and I have been in Gallicantu!

That is the power of this place. Even if you have never been in Israel you have been in Gallicantu – we all have.

The Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu is in a relatively new building but it has a long history that is illustrative of many sites in the Holy Land: a major church built here in 457 was damaged in 529 during the Samaritan Revolt and destroyed in 614 by the Persians. It was rebuilt around 628 and destroyed in 1009 by the mad Caliph Hakim. Rebuilt around

1100 by the Crusaders, it was destroyed in 1219 by the Turks. Then a chapel was built, but it was destroyed around 1300. The present church was completed in 1931 and renovated in 1996.

As you may be able to gather from the name given to this church it is believed that this is the site of the house of the high priest Caiaphas. Evidence for this includes the remains of buildings from the Second Temple period found in the midst of the foundation pillars of the 5th century church. Some of these remains are cut from the bedrock and include a kitchen, a silo, and a flour mill. Artifacts found include cooking pots, a complete set of weights and measures for liquids and solids as used by the priests in the Temple, coins from the Jewish revolt against the Romans, and a door lintel with the word “*korban*” (sacrificial offering) inscribed in Hebrew.

The Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu is built on four levels with the top floor being below the entranceway level – this is all built upon the steep eastern slope of Mount Zion. The top level is the main sanctuary. There is artwork everywhere including mosaics uncovered in excavations of the site. The most spectacular art is the stained glass cross built in the domed roof and featuring a dazzling variety of colors.



Down one flight of steps is a large chapel that seems to spring from the bedrock. This chapel is also decorated with many beautiful pieces of artwork and includes an opening in the floor which allows one to look down into the two lower levels. Through this opening you can also see three Byzantine crosses cut into the rock between levels.

The Deep Pit

Psalm 88

Rescue the Perishing

The lower two levels are a guardroom and a dungeon cut from the bedrock. If this is the site of Caiaphas' house then this would have been where Jesus was held



captive waiting for sunrise and the gathering of the Sanhedrin. The lowest level is a pit which would have only been accessed from above using a harness and rope to lower and raise occupants.

Even if Jesus was not brought to this pit, Peter, John, and the other apostles would have spent some time here and been whipped in the dungeon above. (Acts 4-5)

The Flour Mill

Take Our Bread

Leviticus 24: 5-9

The significance of a flour mill at this site is that much of the salary for the priests came in the form of their share of grain offerings. This mill would have allowed the priests to grind the grain into flour and more easily convert it into cash.

The Ancient Stepped Street

Sent Forth by God's Blessing

On the north side of the Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu is an ancient stepped street which runs east and west

down the steep grade of Mount Zion into the Tyropoeon Valley. These steps were uncovered during the archeological work done in the late nineteenth century. Just over one hundred yards of this street have been uncovered and while for the first one hundred years since they were exposed pilgrims were allowed to walk the ancient steps they are now behind locked gates and a fence.

There is disagreement about just how old these steps are. Some scholars believe that they date to the time of the Second Temple and would have been in use by Jesus and his disciples as they traveled between the city and the Mount of Olives, Gethsemane, Bethphage, and Bethany. Others believe that this stepped street dates from the time of the construction of the Byzantine church in the fifth century.

The Mount of Olives

Go, Tell It on the Mountain

2 Samuel 15: 30	1 Kings 11: 7	Ezekiel 11: 23
Zechariah 14: 4	Matthew 21: 1	24: 3 26: 30
Mark 11: 1	13: 3 14: 26	
Luke 19: 29	19: 37 21: 37	22: 39
John 7: 53	8: 1	Acts 1: 12

The Mount of Olives, a long ridge to the east of Jerusalem, is the location of many biblical events. At nearly 2,700 feet, it is Jerusalem's highest peak and offers an unrivalled vista of The Old City and its environs. The ridge, also called Mount Olivet, takes its name from the fact that it was once covered with olive trees.

This was the first bright, sunny day since we arrived in Jerusalem yet still cool enough that I wore a long-sleeve shirt and my windbreaker as we gathered for our group picture.



Holy Land 2015 Maroon Bus

There were only two of these people that I knew before this trip but we had a lot of fun together. We were a combination of four different groups from six different states. Our guide and our bus driver were so good to us and good at their jobs. I would go with these folks anywhere!

After we were done taking our group picture there were vendors available for camel or donkey rides. James decided he wanted to ride a camel. He gave the vendor a nice tip and got a little extra time on the camel – what a wonderful experience!

Until the destruction of the Temple, the Mount of Olives was a place where many Jews would sleep out, under the olive trees, during times of pilgrimage. During the siege of Jerusalem which led to the destruction of the city in 70 AD, Roman soldiers from the 10th Legion camped on the mount. In Jewish tradition, the Messiah will descend the Mount of Olives on Judgment Day and enter Jerusalem through the Golden Gate.

Jericho

How Great Thou Art

Numbers 22: 1	26: 3 & 63	31: 12	33 - 36		
Deuteronomy	32: 49	34: 1-3			
Joshua 2 – 10	12: 9	13: 32	16: 1 & 7	18: 12 & 21	
20: 8	24: 11	2 Samuel	10: 5	1 Kings	16: 34
2 Kings 2: 4-18	25: 5	1 Chronicles	6: 78	19: 5	
2 Chronicles	28: 15	Ezra 2: 34	Nehemiah	3: 2	7: 3
Jeremiah 39: 5	52: 8	Matthew	20: 29	Mark 10: 46	
Luke 10: 30	18: 35	19: 1		Hebrews	11: 30

It is reputed to be the oldest town on earth. The Israelites brought down its walls with a great shout and trumpet blasts. Here Jesus healed Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, and dined with Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector. Cleopatra and Herod the Great both coveted this lush oasis and competed for its resources.

The name Jericho means City of Palms and it still lives up to its name. Water from Jericho's powerful perennial spring provides irrigation for abundant fruit, flowers, and spices. "When the orange and lemon trees are in bloom, in the spring, the air is so heavy with their perfume that the visitor is sure he could bottle some of it and take it home with him," writes archeologist Godfrey Kloetzli. The spring is associated with the prophet Elisha, who purified its waters by throwing salt into it.

In addition to being the oldest town on earth Jericho is also the lowest town on earth at over 820 feet below sea level.

The Mount of Temptation

Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days

Matthew 4: 1-11

Mark 1: 12-13

Luke 4: 1-13

The Mount of Temptation, with a gravity-defying monastery clinging to its sheer face, is traditionally regarded as the mountain on which Christ was tempted by the devil



after his 40-day fast. The summit of the mount, about 1,200 feet above sea level, offers a spectacular panoramic view of the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, and the mountains of Moab and Gilead.

Tradition dating from the 12th century places two of the devil's temptings on the Mount of Temptation. The temptation to turn a stone into bread is located in a grotto halfway up the mountain. The offer of all the kingdoms of the world in return for worshipping the devil is located on the summit.

Tel al Sultan

God of the Ages

The first hunter-gatherers settled here around 9000 BC. Archeologists have unearthed the remains of more than twenty successive settlements at Tel al Sultan (or Sultan's Hill), a sun-baked earthen mound a mile and a half north of the present city.

The fifty feet tall mound was formed over the centuries as towns were destroyed and new ones built on their rubble. The most striking discovery unearthed is a thick-walled stone tower, twenty-three feet high and twenty-five feet across, dating back to 7000 BC.

Zacchaeus' Tree

He Touched Me

Luke 19: 1-10

Near the center of the city, a centuries-old sycamore tree recalls the incident in which the tax collector Zacchaeus, too short to see over the crowd, climbed a sycamore tree's branches in order to see Jesus. The African sycamore fig should not be confused with the sycamore of Europe and North America, which is a different species.

Qumran

Wonderful Words of Life

In the foothills on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea a Bedouin goat or sheep-herder by the name of Mohammed Ahmed el-Hamed threw a rock into a cave in an attempt to drive out a missing animal. The sound of breaking pottery drew him into the cave, where he found seven clay jars containing scrolls that had been wrapped in linen for nearly two thousand years.

Eventually parts of about 850 scrolls were found in eleven different caves in the area. These ancient manuscripts were in various states of decay and completeness. Only a few were intact, the largest being more than twenty-five feet long. Most were written in Hebrew, some in Aramaic, and a few in Greek. Most were on parchment, with a few on papyrus. Their preservation had been aided by the hot, dry climate.



The Dead Sea Scrolls include at least fragments of every book of the Old Testament except the book of Esther. They are the oldest existing copies of the Old Testament and they

generally confirm the accuracy of later manuscripts. Other scrolls give a new insight into the Jewish society in which Christianity began.

The prevailing view is that the scrolls were written or copied by a devout group of Essenes, a strict Jewish sect formed in reaction to what they saw as religious laxity in Judaism. The Essenes at Qumran lived an austere lifestyle in their remote desert surroundings. Study of the Jewish law went on in shifts around the clock. The community gained the admiration of the Roman statesman Pliny the Elder, who wrote, “They are unique and admirable beyond all other peoples in that they have no women, no sexual desire, no money, and only palm trees for company. Owing to the influx of newcomers, they are daily reborn in equal numbers.” The Essenes believed the end of the world was imminent. They never married because they wanted to be ritually pure when the Messiah appeared.

The Essenes arrived in the area towards the end of the second century BC. In 31 BC there was a serious earthquake and the sect abandoned the site. Within twenty-five years they returned and rebuilt. The Qumran community was driven from its wilderness retreat by the Romans in 68 AD, leaving its library of scrolls hidden in caves for safe-keeping. Ruins of the sect’s communal site remain, including an aqueduct, cattle pen, cemeteries, cisterns, dining hall, kiln, kitchen, laundry room, pantry, pottery workshop, ritual baths, stable, watchtower, and writing room. Members of the sect lived in huts and tents nearby or from time to time occupied the caves they had dug to practice isolation.

After the discovery of the first scrolls archeologists began looking for the center of the Essene activity in the area. A team of French archeologists excavated the area between 1951 and 1956 and found additional scrolls and early structures. These finds supported the theory that Qumran had indeed been the nucleus of the Essene community. The site became a National Park in 1967.

Sound and Light Show at the Citadel

Rise Up, O Men of God

The walls of the Citadel, just south of the Jappa Gate in the western wall of The Old City, serve as a stage for a nighttime show which is a celebration of sight and sound. Amidst the archeological remains in the Citadel’s courtyard and to the sound of original music, the story of



Jerusalem unfolds through giant breathtaking, virtual reality images.

The Night Spectacular uses trompe l’oeil technology – the stones of the walls and structures fade into the scenes and the screened images envelop the viewers and whisk them off to a one-of-a-kind multi-sensory experience. Innovative techniques and a sophisticated computer system operate twenty projectors, ten video players,

fourteen computers, fourteen loudspeakers, six miles of cable and two projection rooms.

Though it was very cold out we were well prepared – bringing a blanket from the hotel was a good idea – this was a wonderfully entertaining show and a great way to end our fifth day.

Day 6 – Tuesday, January 13

Masada

Onward, Christian Soldiers

Like “an aircraft-carrier moored to the western cliffs of the Dead Sea” (Jerome Murphy-O'Connor) the palace/fortress of Masada floats on the eastern fringe of the Judean Desert between En Gedi and Sodom. A National Park and UNESCO World Heritage Site this warship of the desert is topped by the ruins of Herod the Great's luxurious residential palace on the north-facing prow. Elaborately designed and decorated, Herod's palace cascaded in three tiers down the cliff face, each tier connected to the level below by a rock-cut staircase.

On the western side of the warship's 1,800 feet by 900 feet deck are the remains of Herod's ceremonial palace and administrative center. The largest building on Masada, it covered nearly 54,000 square feet. Herod's creature comforts include bathhouses and a swimming pool. The most elaborate bathhouse had a hot-room with the floor suspended on low pillars. Hot air from a furnace was circulated under the floor and through clay pipes in the walls.



To supply water in this arid setting, a sophisticated system channeled winter rainfall from nearby wadis into huge cisterns quarried low into the northwest of the mountain. Water was then carried by men and beasts of burden up winding paths to reservoirs on the summit. The lower cisterns alone are estimated to have a capacity of over ten million gallons.

Herod planned Masada as a palace stronghold and desert foxhole, and fortified it with walls, gates, and towers. He wanted a place of refuge in case the Jews should rebel against him, or the Egyptian pharaoh Cleopatra (who coveted Judea) should try to have him killed. Before Herod the Hasmonean's had used Masada as a fortress and after Herod the Romans stationed a garrison here.

One of the first events of the Great Revolt of the Jews against the Romans was the conquest of Masada by the Sicarii in 66 AD. The last of the rebels fled to Masada after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and joined those already at the fortress under the command of Eleazar Ben Yair. In 73 or 74 AD the Roman Tenth Legion Fretensis laid siege to the mountain. The legion, consisting of 8,000 troops built eight camps around the base, a siege wall, and a ramp made of earth and wooden supports to the west. Captive Jews brought water and food to the troops, apparently from En Gedi.

After a siege of a few months the Romans pushed a siege tower with a battering ram to the top of their ramp and broke through the rebels' fortifications. They found that of the 960 rebels all but two women and five children had been killed or killed themselves.

The Romans kept a force stationed here for another twenty-five or thirty years. After that Masada was left to the desert before a monastery of hermits was founded here in the 5th century. Two hundred years later the rise of Islam apparently led to the end of the monastery.

Masada faded into history for over a thousand years until scholars identified the site in 1838. Some explorations occurred over the next one hundred years and then major archeological work began in the 1950s. Masada National Park opened in 1966 and the first cable car was built in 1971. Conservation and restoration work continues today.

The complexity and luxury of Herod's fortress/palace is overwhelming. The engineering is every bit as impressive as what was done at Herodium and on the Temple Mount. The work that the Romans did to breach this fortress is also extremely impressive. I would like to come back some time and watch the sound and light show they do on the west side of the mountain during the summer months. One of the great advantages to visiting Israel in the winter is how comfortable it was here at Masada and down at Dead Sea shore.

The Dead Sea

For the Beauty of the Earth

Genesis	14: 3-4	Numbers	34: 3-12	Deuteronomy	3: 17
Joshua	3: 16	12: 3	15: 2-5, 61-62	18: 19	Ezekiel 47: 8-11



We had our lunch at Qumran National Park and then headed down to the shore of the Dead Sea. About half of our group wanted to float in the sea. Nader (our guide) told us not to think of it as swimming because he said we did not want to dive into the water or get our heads under the water. He did not explain why except to say that the extra buoyancy of the water, that is ten times as salty as ocean water, makes it very hard to stay under. I waded in and remained in a standing position as I paddled out to where I could not touch the bottom. I was floating without any effort with my armpits out of the water!

The real reason for not diving into the water or putting your head underwater is that it tastes terrible! Take my word for it – you do not want to get even a little bit of this water in your mouth or on your lips. I did get some in my mouth accidentally and it was horrible (it did not taste salty at all). I do not like the taste of alcohol but since one of my bus mates had a beer I asked if I could take a swig to get that horrible taste out of my mouth. I took a swig of beer and swished it around in my mouth and then rubbed some of the beer on my lips to get the taste off them as well – wonderful relief!

The Dead Sea is quickly approaching the 1,400 feet below sea level mark. The water level is dropping an average of about three feet per year due to the diversion of fresh water from the Jordan River Valley into Israel and Jordan. This diversion of the inflow of fresh water also means the minerals in the Dead Sea (minerals like magnesium chloride and potassium in the form of potash which is harvested from evaporation pans at the southern end of the sea) become more concentrated – and make the water taste worse.

The low humidity, high air pressure, therapeutic water, and soothing black mud still attract many visitors today as it did Herod the Great and Cleopatra in the 1st century BC. But the continued drop in water level is making it hard for the seaside spas to survive.

The Israel Museum

Shalom to You

The Israel Museum is the largest cultural institution in the State of Israel and is ranked among the world's leading art and archeology museums. Founded in 1965, the Museum houses encyclopedic collections, including works dating from prehistory to the present day, in its Archeology, Fine Arts, and Jewish Art and Life Wings, and features the most extensive holdings of biblical and Holy Land archeology in the world.

Model of 1st Century Jerusalem

Jesus, Remember Me



The time is 66 AD, the fateful year the Great Revolt of the Jews against the Romans erupted, resulting in the destruction of the city and the Temple built by Herod the Great. All that's missing from the buildings of Jerusalem limestone are the people. This is also the time when Christianity was in its formative stages and the Dead Sea Scrolls were being created. The crucifixion of Jesus was only 36 years before,

and the mound of Calvary can be seen just outside the Second Wall but well inside the new north wall begun by Herod Agrippa I. The ancient city was then at its largest, spreading over 440 acres – more than twice the size of the present Old City.

Construction of the Model of Ancient Jerusalem was undertaken in the 1960s by Hans Kroch, owner of the Holyland Hotel, in memory of his son Jacob, who was killed in Israel's War of Independence. Originally in the grounds of the hotel, it was transported in 1,000 pieces to its present site at the Israel Museum, three miles away, in 2006. The model covers about 43,000 square feet, using a scale of 1:50. A human figure on this scale would be about one and a third inches high.

Shrine of the Book

This Little Light of Mine

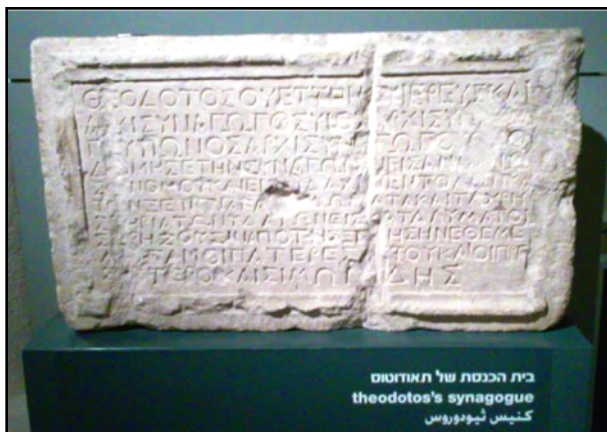
The building's white-tiled dome is shaped like the lid of the first jar in which the Dead Sea Scrolls were found at Qumran. In contrast nearby stands a black basalt wall. The black-white imagery symbolizes the theme of one of the scrolls – *The War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness*. The rest of the structure, two-thirds of it below ground level, recalls the caves in which the scrolls were found.

The Shrine of the Book holds all seven of the scrolls found in what is called Cave 1 at Qumran. A facsimile of the scroll of Isaiah, arranged around a huge elevated spindle, provides a dramatic centerpiece in the exhibition hall under the dome. Also in the collection is the Temple Scroll, the best preserved of the Qumran scrolls. At more than 26 feet long, it is the longest of the Qumran manuscripts. The Community Rule is the rule book for the group that wrote or copied the library of scrolls the library of scrolls – believed to be a group of Essenes, a strict Jewish sect, who lived an austere lifestyle in their remote desert surroundings.

I was disappointed that the Isaiah scroll was a facsimile. But it was nice to see a few of the actual Dead Sea Scrolls – an impressive display.

The Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Archeology Wing

O God, Our Help in Ages Past



An inscription stone from a 1st century BC synagogue.

The museum's permanent exhibition of archeology is devoted to the ancient land of Israel – home to peoples of different cultures and faiths for more than a million years. Presenting some 6,000 finds, mainly from archeological excavations in Israel, the Bronfman Archeology Wing tells a unique story arranged in seven chronological chapters,

shedding light on momentous historical events, cultural achievements, and technological

advances, while revealing the everyday lives of the peoples of the region from the Stone Age through the Ottoman Period.

This was a really wonderful display of ancient artifacts that we did not have enough time to enjoy. We had to move quickly from one highlight to another. Perhaps I can visit again when I have more time to muse.

This has been another wonderful day in the Holy Land!

Day 7 – Wednesday, January 14

The Old City

This Is the Day

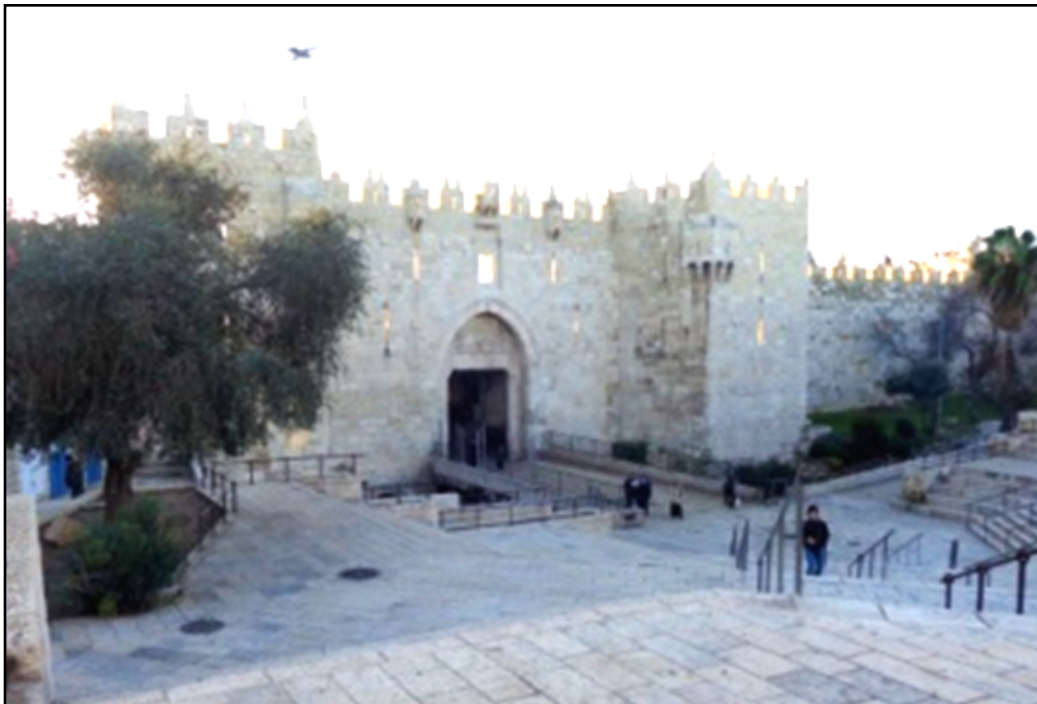
This morning we have some free time – our tour buses will be leaving our hotel at about 11:00 am. I think EO does this because this is the last day of our Israel tour and everyone who is not going on an extension tour will be flying out of Israel tonight. This free time allows those who are leaving time to get organized and packed and it allows those of us who are staying to sleep late or do a little exploring on our own.

During our tour of the Israel Museum last night I got to meet a couple of young pastors from Tennessee. They were planning to use their free time to go into The Old City and see some things I wanted to see. So we got up and left the hotel at about 7:30.

Damascus Gate

Lord of the Dance

It is not far from the Olive Tree Hotel to the Damascus Gate, about seven blocks – a brisk morning walk in January. The city was just beginning to awake. We saw a lot of folks on their way to work or school and vendors selling the pastry buns that are a popular breakfast for those on the move. The Damascus Gate was almost deserted.



The Damascus Gate is located on the north side of The Old City and is the dividing point between the Muslim Quarter on the east and the Christian Quarter on the west. It is the busiest gate of The Old City for foot traffic. Vendors often fill the steps leading down to the gate and Muslim worshipers crowd the way as they gather for services on Fridays. The gate was built in 1541 by the Ottomans but its history dates back to the 2nd century AD and the Roman city of Aelia Capitolina.

As we entered The Old City the streets were mostly deserted except for those going to work or school. Ninety-five percent of the shops were still closed and so the streets looked roomy and a bit eerie. We are headed to the Temple Mount.

The Ancient Wall (The Broad Wall)

'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus

Isaiah 22: 8-11

Nehemiah 12: 38

As we entered the Jewish Quarter we came across an excavation site that exposes the Broad Wall. This wall was built during Hezekiah's expansion of the city. Jews from



the northern tribes of Israel, who had been overrun by the Assyrians in 721 BC, fled down to Judah and the city of Jerusalem for protection. They settled outside the city walls to the west on the Western Hill. To protect them and their residences Hezekiah fortified the western part of this newly expanded city around 721 BC with a wall. The uncovered remains of this wall are 23 feet wide and 213 feet long. This portion of the wall ran west from the Temple Mount over the Tyropoeon Valley toward the western corner of the southwestern hill (which would be where the Citadel is today). Evidence

uncovered during excavation seems to indicate that Hezekiah had to destroy some homes in order to build it. This portion of the wall was uncovered in 1970 during the excavations that took place in The Old City after the Six-Day War won by Israel in 1967.

The book of Nehemiah places the Broad Wall near the Temple Mount wall when, during the dedication of the new wall, one group of priests walked in procession on the wall, past the remains of this Broad Wall.

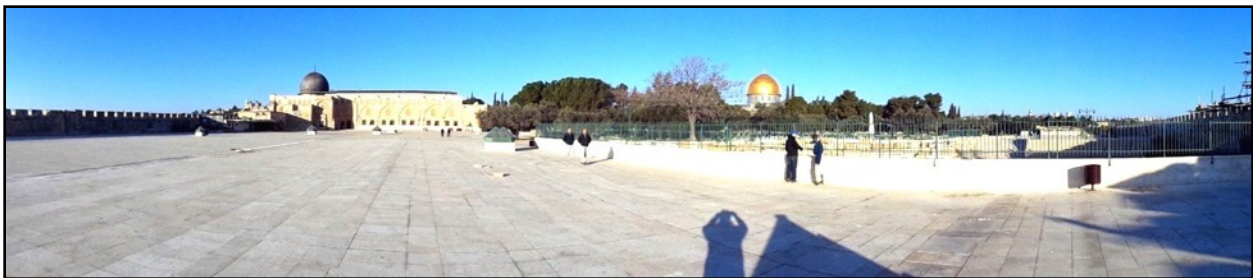
The Temple Mount

Lord, Speak to Me

Genesis 22: 1-19	2 Samuel 24: 18-25	1 Kings 5 – 6
Matthew 24: 1-2	Mark 11: 15-19	Luke 2: 22-52

The Temple Mount is a massive masonry platform occupying the southeast corner of Jerusalem's Old City and has hallowed connections for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. All three of these Abrahamic faiths regard it as the location of Mount Moriah, where Abraham prepared to offer his son Isaac (or Ishmael in the Muslim tradition) to God. For Jews, this is where their Temple once stood. For Christians, this is where Jesus once taught and prayed. For Muslims, this is *al Haram al Sharif* (the Noble Sanctuary), Islam's third holiest site.

Israel's King Solomon built the first Temple around 950 BC on the traditional site of Mount Moriah. His father, King David, had bought a Jebusite threshing floor and "then he built an altar for the Lord" some forty years earlier. Solomon's Temple stood for about 360 years until invading Babylonians destroyed it and took most of the Jews into exile. Fifty years later the Jews were allowed to return from Babylon. They rebuilt the Temple, completing it in 515 BC.



The Temple Jesus knew was rebuilt by Herod the Great in a project he began around 20 BC. Although the Temple had already been rebuilt once, Herod's Temple is still known in Jewish tradition as the Second Temple. Herod began his grandiose project by extending the Temple Mount on the north, south, and west to create a vast platform supported by a retaining wall of huge limestone blocks. The expansion, which nearly doubled the previous area, involved burying several structures, including Solomon's palace. Herod's Temple was totally destroyed when the Roman army took Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Arab Muslims conquered Jerusalem in the 7th century and converted the Temple Mount into an Islamic sanctuary. They cleared the rubbish and erected the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Muslims consider the entire Temple Mount to be a mosque and a holy place behind only Mecca and Medina in reverence.

This is another place that I had long wanted to visit – the Temple Mount of Jerusalem! Early morning was the perfect time to be here – so few people and so peaceful. It is too bad that we could not go into these two places of worship.

The Al-Aqsa Mosque

Jesus Is All the World to Me

The Al-Aqsa Mosque, originally constructed about twenty years after the nearby Dome of the Rock early in the 8th century, is Jerusalem's largest mosque. Its spacious interior, divided by columns into seven aisles, allows room for more than 4,000 Muslim men to stand or prostrate themselves on the carpeted floor during worship. The name Al-Aqsa translates to "the farthest" mosque, a description relating to Muhammad's Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and back on the winged horse Barak.

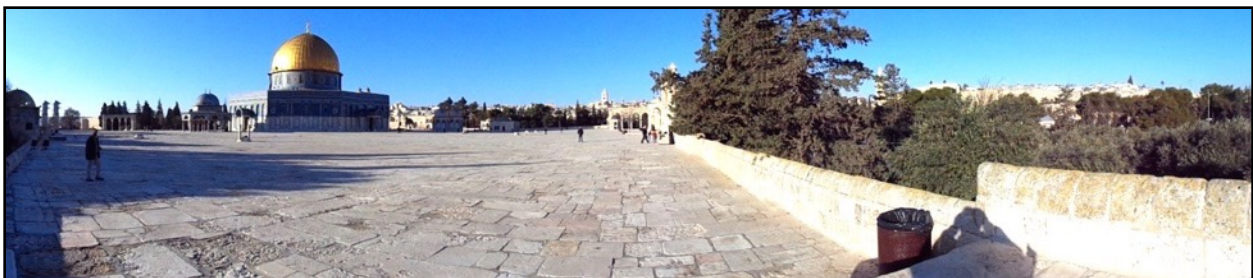
The mosque has been reconstructed many times for various reasons. It is particularly susceptible to earthquake damage due to the fact that it is built on fill material and is not anchored in bedrock as is the Dome of the Rock.

As we entered the Temple Mount platform we could hear two women calling loudly, "Allahu-akbar!" which means, "God is great!" It took us a bit to see exactly who was hollering because they were standing near one of the pillars at the front of the mosque. The women are not allowed in the main mosque but there is a large women's mosque next door. We were told that we would not be allowed to enter the Al-Aqsa Mosque so we did not approach the doors.

The Dome of the Rock

Near to the Heart of God

Jerusalem's iconic symbol is the gleaming Dome of the Rock, whose golden-roof has dominated the Temple Mount for centuries. This Islamic holy place stands on a site that is sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims.



View from the northeast corner of the Temple Mount.

To Muslims the Dome covers the sacred rock where Muhammad prayed and went to paradise during his Night Journey. The Dome of the Rock was the first major sanctuary built by Islam. Although it is sometimes erroneously called a mosque it is actually not a mosque but an adjunct to the nearby Al-Aqsa Mosque. It was commissioned by Caliph Abd al-Malik and completed in 691 AD. Its rich ornamentation was the work of Syrian Christian artists.

The roof is covered with gold-plated anodized aluminum. During our visit there was a worker with a ladder doing something around the bottom of the dome.

Inside, the sacred rock is protected by a 12th-century cedar wood screen. Crosses on some of the columns show that they were taken from churches. A high reliquary beside the rock is believed to contain a hair of Muhammad's beard. On the southern side of the rock, steps lead down to an ancient cave, known as the Well of Souls, to which many Jewish and Islamic legends are attached. The Crusaders used the cave as a confessional.

By building the Dome of the Rock, Caliph Abd al-Malik symbolized the transformation of Jerusalem – once a Jewish city, then a Christian city – into a Muslim city. Today, of course, the city is both culturally and religiously diverse.

The Church of the Redeemer Tower

This Is My Father's World

The Church of the Redeemer is the newest church in the Old City of Jerusalem, but its site has a history going back to Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman Emperor, in the 9th century. The plain-looking neo-Romanesque building — with a tall bell-tower dominating the ancient Church of the Holy Sepulchre nearby — is the headquarters of the Lutheran Church in the Holy Land. It is the home to congregations that worship in Arabic, German, Danish and English.

The bell-tower and its birds-eye view of The Old City was the main attraction for Josh and Chris in our early morning adventure. I knew nothing about this tower before they told me that that was where we were going. The church and the tower did not open until 10am so we spent some time in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – which was almost completely empty when we arrived.

It was much better to visit the church without the crowds. We had time to spend at each of the stations of the cross without feeling rushed by long lines behind us. This was a much more meaningful visit for each of us.

We also had time to get coffee and a coke at an outdoor café. We found a good spot in the morning sunshine and enjoyed our drinks. At about 9:35 we went back to the Church of the Redeemer and waited in their lobby. At ten 'til ten a docent came and took us to the tower.



View from the tower looking west with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to the right.

It was quite a climb for me. The spiral staircase was just wide enough for my shoulders and I don't know what I would have done if I met someone coming the other way – one of us would have to back up. There were two floors we could stop on and I took full advantage of both of them. The view from the top was worth the climb. The

morning was clear and bright and I think we all got some great photos. We stayed at the top for about ten minutes and then headed back to our hotel.

It has been a great day and its only 10:15am!

Ein Kerem

Luke 1: 5-24 & 39-66

Christian tradition places the birth of John the Baptist— who announced the coming of Jesus

Blessed Be the God of Israel

Christ, his cousin — in the picturesque village of Ein Karem five miles south-west of Jerusalem. Ein Karem is still a tranquil place of trees and vineyards, but the municipality of Jerusalem has spread to incorporate the former Arab village. It is now a town of Jewish artisans and craftspeople, but Christian churches and convents abound.

The Catholic Church of the Nativity of Saint John, identifiable by its tall tower topped by a round spire is also called “Saint John in the mountains”, a reference to the “hill country” of the Scripture. The church combines remnants of many periods. An early church on this site was used by Muslim villagers for their livestock before the Franciscans recovered it in the 17th century. The Franciscans built the present church with the help of the Spanish monarchy. The high altar is



dedicated to Saint John. To the right is Elizabeth's altar. To the left are steps leading down to a natural grotto— identified as John's birthplace and believed to be part of his parents' home. A chapel beneath the porch contains two tombs. An inscription in a mosaic panel reads, in Greek, "Hail martyrs of God". Whom it refers to is unknown.

Ein Kerem is a pleasant place of sidewalk cafes and shop-lined streets. After we entered the church compound some of our group enjoyed a coffee from the gift shop and others read the plaques engraved with the Cantic of Zechariah in many different languages while we waited our turn to enter the church. The church is a quiet place of tranquil beauty and prayer. Our visit here was a good preparation for our next stop.

Yad Vashem

We Shall Overcome

Yad Vashem is Israel's official memorial to the Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust, and is dedicated to documenting the story of the six million victims and imparting their legacy for future generations. It is located on a hillside of Har Hazikaron, Jerusalem's Mount of Remembrance. Tree-studded walkways lead visitors through a sprawling complex of museums, outdoor monuments, exhibition halls, an archive, a library, and other resource centers extending over forty-five acres.

The Holocaust History Museum

Go Down, Moses

The first thing you notice is the top of this museum's long central gallery, a triangular skylight which keeps this connecting center filled with light. Nine underground galleries arranged on alternating sides of the central gallery tell the story of the Shoah (Holocaust) from the point of view of the Jews. The chronological and thematic narrative is punctuated by a look into the worlds of Jews who lived – and died – under Nazis and their collaborators. The exhibits incorporate a wide variety of original artifacts, testimonies, photographs, documentation, art, multimedia, and video art. The frequent return to the light of the central gallery reminds us that despite the cruelty that continues to live our world – faith, hope, and love abide.



Israel with his arms around his murdered children.

The Children's Memorial

Jesus Love Me

This unique memorial, hollowed out from an underground cavern, is a tribute to the approximately 1.5 million Jewish children who perished during the Holocaust. Walking through the memorial, we heard the names of murdered children, their ages and countries of origin in the background. Before, behind, and above us we beheld a million and a half points of light moving as we moved reminding us of what we have lost. This stirring memorial was designed by architect Moshe Safdie.

The Garden Tomb

In the Garden

Matthew 27: 33 – 28: 10

Luke 23: 32 – 24: 12

Mark 15: 22 – 16: 8

John 19: 17 – 20: 18

The Garden Tomb (also known as Gordon's Calvary) is believed by many to be the garden and sepulchre of Joseph of Arimathea, and therefore a possible site of the resurrection of Jesus. The Garden Tomb is an alternative site to the famous Church of the Holy Sepulchre for you to consider the Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Garden is a beautiful place in which you will discover several things that were all here on the day Jesus died and which match the accounts in the four Gospels. We never claim to be in the right place as we could never prove that; but where Jesus died is of little importance compared with why. So here we ask you to open the Bible and see what it says about these vital Christian truths. The Garden Tomb is a quiet place preserved for worship and reflection, with many places to sit and enjoy the surroundings and listen to groups from all over the world worship in their native tongue.



The Garden Tomb

At the back of the Garden Tomb property there is a rock face, the remains of an ancient rock quarry, with several large and small formations shaped like a skull. Jesus was crucified at the "Place of a Skull," *Golgotha* in Hebrew, and *Calvary* in Latin. It was also written that the place was where people were passing by, suggesting that it was near a major road, which was a way the Romans liked to advertise their form of justice. Today, the rock face at the Garden Tomb stands above a transportation center for a Jerusalem bus company.

The rock-cut tomb is near the street, though you enter in such a way that you do not see the tomb until your guide leads you there. It is a lovely, garden setting and it is easy to imagine the stories of Good Friday and Easter morning happening in this place. We quietly took turns entering the tomb to see the place where he was laid. But the tomb is empty – he is not here!

We gathered at a site overlooking the entire garden. We sang and prayed together. We heard the Scriptures read. We shared together in Holy Communion.

We have shared more than a trip with each other – we have been united in pilgrimage!

We are saying goodbye to some good, new friends tonight. *Bon voyage!*

Day 8 – Thursday, January 15

The Old City & the Damascus Gate

Today is a free day for those of us who are going on to Egypt tomorrow. The fabulous five from the maroon bus have decided that we want to sleep late and then go into The Old City for shopping and sightseeing at 10:30. If you are looking for the hustle and bustle of a real Middle Eastern Market then entering through the Damascus Gate is where you want to go. Be prepared to negotiate on prices and you might be able to find the best bargain of your trip.

Our three ladies were excellent shoppers and drove hard bargains with a number of different shop keepers. James and I were not really into the shopping but we did enjoy just absorbing the ambiance of the market. The variety and quality of items was quite high and it seems you can find almost anything you want or need in The Old City. It was a pleasure to visit with so many of the people of Jerusalem – everyone we talked with was unfailingly kind, helpful, and genuinely glad that we had come to their city. There is no doubt that tourism is the major industry of the Holy Land and the people go out of their way to make you feel welcome. But they are also trying to get you to leave as many of your dollars with them as they can.

The Muslim Quarter

The Muslim Quarter is the largest and most populated (approximately 20,000) of the four quarters in The Old City. Developed by Herod the Great, organized by the



An Old City market just inside the Damascus Gate

Christian Byzantine Empire, and then occupied by the Christian Crusaders, even this section is full of churches and Christian shrines. The main streets, El-Wad (which leads to the Damascus Gate) and Via Dolorosa (which runs from the Lions Gate to intersect El-Wad), are bazaars with Muslim shopkeepers ready to sell the Christian Pilgrim a plastic crucifix or olive wood nativity set. When Jesus walked through these streets to his crucifixion they were busy even then and would have been filled with shops. Closer to the Temple Mount buildings from the Mamelukes' reconstruction of the city from 1250 to 1516 can be seen. This area today preserves some of the fine medieval Islamic architecture.

The Jewish Quarter

The Jewish Quarter is a thriving modern community with more than 1,000 families. It has been rebuilt out of the rubble that was left from the Jordanian occupation of the area from 1948 until the Six Day War of 1967. Since the destruction was severe, the Jews who returned to The Old City in 1967 excavated the quarter's archaeological remains first and then built their city over, around and beside the ancient discoveries. Today there are numerous synagogues and schools for Jewish studies, along with contemporary shops and restaurants up and down the streets. The ancient Roman *Cardo*



Cardo Maximus: the main street of Aelia Capitolina

Street (135 AD) with its old Byzantine bazaar (325 AD) has been preserved and is filled with trendy new businesses that sell a wide variety of items, including original art work by local artists. It also has a hamburger shop that makes really good burgers.

The Armenian Quarter

The nation of Armenia was the first nation to declare itself a Christian nation. They did this in 301, before the days of Constantine, but Armenians had been living in Jerusalem since 95 B.C. The Armenian Quarter was established on Mount Zion 301. Right before the Crusader period (1099-1187 A.D.) the Armenian Quarter began to develop. It reached its current size during the Ottoman period (1517-1917). Today the Armenian "quarter" covers about one-sixth of The Old City. We tried to find the Church of Saint James but this area is not as conveniently marked as the other quarters and they do not seem to be as visitor-friendly. It started raining on us while we were looking for the church and so we started to head back to the Damascus Gate. Along the way we found . . .

The Church of Saint Mark – Syriac Orthodox

Acts	12: 12	13: 5 & 13	15: 36-41
Colossians	4: 10	1 Peter	5: 13

The Church of Saint Mark is home to one of Jerusalem's smallest and oldest Christian communities, but it is the setting for a remarkable set of traditions – including the claim to be the site of the Upper Room of the Last Supper. Its worship employs the oldest surviving liturgy in Christianity, based on the rite of the early Christian Church of Jerusalem. The language used is Syriac, a dialect of the Aramaic that Jesus spoke.

Saint Mark (also known as John Mark) came from Cyrene in Libya. He became a traveling companion and interpreter for Saint Peter, and used Peter's sermons when he composed the earliest of the four Gospels. Mark's mother, Mary of Jerusalem, had a house where members of the early Church met. It was to this house Peter went when an angel released him from prison. The Syriac Orthodox believe the Church of Saint Mark is on the site of that house – a belief supported by a 6th century inscription discovered in the church in 1940.

The Syriac Orthodox Church claims Saint Peter as its first patriarch, in Antioch in 37 AD. The word "Syriac" is not a geographic indicator, but refers to the use of the Syriac language in worship. Syriac Christians see themselves as the first people to adopt Christianity as natives of the Holy Land. Often called "Jacobites" (after an early bishop), the Syriac Orthodox form one of the Oriental Orthodox churches that became separated from the mainstream of Christianity in the 5th century over a disagreement about the nature of Christ. They are not in communion with either Constantinople or Rome. Their community in Jerusalem, centered on the Church of Saint Mark, numbers only about 600 including our tour guide, Nader Mascobi.

The Christian Quarter

The Christian Quarter is the most visited quarter of the Old City because it includes the site of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection - the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This quarter is cluttered with a seemingly endless cluster of churches and holy sites whose roofs, domes and facades are built so close together that they are indistinguishable. The streets are filled with narrow storefronts leading into shops that continue long narrow paths to the back. The market streets are noisy with modern pilgrims and shopkeepers trying to lure them into their stores.

It is time to get a good night's sleep – we have a big day tomorrow!

Day 9 – Friday, January 16

Today is a day of travel. We will be going by bus from Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea and then south along the Great Rift Valley to the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. We will then walk across the border to Egypt and board a different bus that will take us to the foot of Mount Sinai where we will spend the night.

Sunrise over the Dead Sea

As we drove along the western shore of the Dead Sea the sun began to break through the morning clouds in a few small spots. When these sunrays struck the surface of the sea it gave the appearance of the water glowing. I tried to get a photo of this beautiful scene but was having a hard time doing it from our moving bus. Finally, I got a good photo with my fourth attempt.



Only after I got home did I realize that this striking photo and the photo of the rainbow over the Sea of Galilee were both taken from our moving bus on the same road, Highway 90, about 70 miles apart.

Yotvata Kibbutz

Founded in 1957, the Yotvata Kibbutz is famous in Israel for its production of popular dairy products. Yotvata (named for the oasis in Deuteronomy 10: 7 called Jotbathah) was the first kibbutz founded in the southern Aravah (the section of the Great Rift Valley between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba) area in Israel.

We stopped at Yotvata's large rest stop on Highway 90 to get something to eat and enjoy



their dairy products – I got some delicious chocolate and a really good milkshake. From their parking lot we could see across the rift valley to the mountains of southern Jordan – about forty miles south of Petra. We are only about a mile from the Jordan border.

Eilat

Over the years, the city of Eilat has become the ultimate resort city with hotels and beaches packed with thousands of Israeli vacationers and tourists from around the world, who come to relax in the country's southernmost spot. The secret of this little city's charm is its special location at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Eilat's location made it strategically significant during the many historical periods in which it served as a port – starting in the days of King Solomon, through the Nabataens, the Romans, the Arabs, and the Crusaders, all of whom ruled the Land of Israel. The modern city of Eilat was established in 1950. In the early 1950s, a quay was built in the new city, and subsequently a port which became the basis for the new city's economy. Toward the end of the 1960s, the tourism industry started developing in the city, and today Eilat is a paradise for tourists, travelers, and vacationers.

We stopped and shopped at an Eilat jewelry store that specializes in precious stones of



many different colors. Their work looked absolutely beautiful and I especially liked their jade pieces. The photo above was taken from in front of the store looking across Highway 90, the Gulf of Aqaba, and the city of Aqaba to the mountains of southern Jordan.

The Gulf of Aqaba

Just below the southern tip of Sinai Peninsula the Great Rift Valley splits in two. The western branch forms the Gulf of Suez while the eastern branch forms the Gulf of Aqaba. The entire Red Sea, including these two gulfs, is well known as a divers' paradise. Scuba divers and snorkelers come from around the world to experience these warm waters and colorful coral reefs.

As we drove by in our bus the urge to go swimming was almost overwhelming for several of us. The water looked so clear and cool and the drive through the desert had parched our eyes if not our throats. The Gulf of Aqaba is bordered by Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

Egypt

Our bus, bus driver, and guide could not go with us into Egypt so we grabbed our luggage and left them all behind with a fond, "Farewell and thank you." The border crossing was relatively quick and painless and our buses and Egyptian guides were waiting for us on the other side.

Taba

Taba is Egypt's border city. We got to see a bit more of Taba than we had planned. We missed our escort (the American embassy has asked the Egyptian government to provide escorts



for every American tour group) and had to wait about two hours for the next escort. At first we were going to wait at a very small shopping center but then our guides made a few phone calls and we were taken to the Taba Hilton. The Taba Hilton is a very nice seaside resort. It is too bad that we could not get to our swim suits but our time will come.

Pharaoh's Island

Pharaoh's Island is the location of a Crusader fortress built by Baldwin I, the King of Jerusalem, around 1116 AD. The fortress was originally named Ile De Graye Castle. At various times while in Crusader hands, it was used to collect taxes on Arab merchants, and sometimes to attack Arab shipping, while at the same time protecting pilgrims traveling between Jerusalem and Mount Sinai.



Pharaoh's Island was captured by Salah ad-Din al Ayyubi (Saladin) in about 1170. He was the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty and is one of the greatest sovereigns in the history of Islam. Most of the business end of this fortress is on the eastern side, as the water is too restricted for attacks to have occurred on the mainland side. It is also notable that T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) made a somewhat daring and unauthorized visit to the island during his Wilderness of Zin survey in June 1914. This fortress would undoubtedly draw much larger crowds of tourists were it located in a more accessible location, but tourists who make an effort to visit the fort will usually have the island mostly to themselves.

Climbing Mount Sinai

As we were approaching our overnight stop our guide told us that we had the option of climbing Mount Sinai. This would involve getting up and leaving the hotel at about midnight and making the climb of over 2,200 feet during the night. We would get to watch the sunrise and then head back down the mountain to reconnect with our group by 9am. We would have Bedoin guides and later I found that you can hire a camel to ride up the mountain. We chose not to go.

It was a long day of traveling but I get to wake up in the mountains in the morning!

Day 10 – Saturday, January 17

Morgenland Village



We actually arrived at Morgenland Village last night but it was quite definitely dark and we could see very little so I am including it in Day 10.

We are here at about one mile in elevation to visit Saint Catherine's Monastery and see Mount Sinai. It was quite cold when we arrived last night (in the low 30's) and the dining hall was not warmed up and neither were our rooms. James and I both like it to be cool when we sleep so we slept just fine but others were too cold. I got up early and went out to look around and take some photos. Much of the scenery reminded me of the Big Bend region in Texas with a lot of pink granite mountains with scattered volcanic intrusions.

Morgenland Village is about three miles from the village of Saint Catherine and three miles from Saint Catherine's Monastery.

Saint Catherine's Monastery

Exodus 3 19

Luke 17: 26-37

Saint Catherine of Alexandria, also known as Saint Catherine of the Wheel and The Great Martyr Saint Catherine is a Christian saint and virgin, who was martyred in the early 4th century at the hands of the pagan emperor Maxentius. She was born in Alexandria of a noble family and was known as a scholar. Converted to Christianity through a vision at the age of fourteen, she denounced Maxentius for persecuting Christians. Fifty of her converts were then burned to death by Maxentius. The Emperor offered Catherine a royal marriage if she would renounce her faith. Her refusal landed her in prison. While in prison, and while Maxentius was away, Catherine converted Maxentius' wife and two hundred of his soldiers. He had them all put to death. Catherine was also condemned to die. She was put on a spiked wheel, but at her touch the wheel shattered. She was then beheaded. Tradition says that her body was immediately taken by angels to Mount Sinai where it was not discovered for almost three hundred years. Joan of Arc identified Catherine as one of the saints who appeared to her and counseled her.

Saint Catherine's Monastery, also known as the Monastery of the Transfiguration, is situated at 5,249 feet in the high mountains of the Sinai Peninsula. It sits at the base of Mount Sinai (7,500 ft.) where Moses met with God, first at the Burning Bush and then later to receive the Ten Commandments.



Monastic life started at a very early period in the region around Mount Sinai. Christian hermits began to gather at Sinai from the middle of the 3rd century. The life that these early hermits followed was neither easy nor safe. The 4th and 5th centuries were particularly bad times, when Christians were not only persecuted, but suffered from barbarian assaults. This, however, did not prevent the development of monasticism in the Sinai desert, nor did it prevent the fame of many of the hermits from spreading both East and West.

Tradition holds that, in 330 AD, in response to a request by the ascetics of the Sinai, the Byzantine empress Helena ordered the building of a small church, dedicated to the Holy Virgin, at the site of the Burning Bush, as well as a fortified enclosure where the hermits could find refuge

from the attacks of nomadic tribes. By 374 there were also churches at the summits of Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb. In the 5th century the growing population of hermits compelled their Bishop to request assistance from the Byzantium emperor Justinian. Justinian responded by founding a magnificent church enclosed within walls strong enough to withstand attacks and protect the monks against nomadic raiders. That compound is the Monastery of Saint Catherine.

In the 7th century the monastery survived the Muslim conquest of the area through the direct influence of Mohammed himself, who saw the Christians as brothers in faith. In the 10th or 11th century a mosque, which still stands today, was built within the walls. Today it is not uncommon for a hundred or more pilgrims and tourists to visit the ancient sacred site in a single day. Greek Orthodox monks tend the monastery and its extraordinary collection of Byzantine art and illuminated manuscripts.

The Well of Moses

Exodus 2: 15-22

Probably misnamed - but the story of Moses meeting the seven daughters of Jethro does not give this well a name. So it has become the Well of Moses, where he met his wife, Zipporah. The well probably had a name before Moses showed up but that



James next to the Well of Moses at Saint Catherine's Monastery

name has been lost. It is still a functioning well today and helps supply the monastery the water they need. (According to the monks, it never dries up.)



The Burning Bush

Exodus 3

You were not expecting to find the Burning Bush at the base of Mount Sinai – neither was I! It was transplanted here about one thousand one hundred years ago. It is a

rare species of the rose family called *Rubus Sanctus*. This species is wide-spread in the Sinai and extremely long-lived, a fact which gives scientific credibility to the site. If you look closely you can see under the overhanging bush an icon of Moses removing his sandals.

Sharm el Sheikh

After our tour of Saint Catherine's Monastery we re-boarded our bus and headed back the way we had come last night – but this

time we get to see the scenery. We cannot go west from Saint Catherine because the Egyptian Army has closed that road for security reasons. So we are headed east and then south to the resort city of Sharm el Sheikh. My understanding of this “resort city” is that normal Egyptians do not get to live here or visit here unless they can come as paying vacationers. The workers of this “resort city” are bused in and out. The city itself was fairly clean but as we drove toward the city the desert was filled with plastic trash for miles.

Glass-Bottom Boat Ride

We drove past most of Sharm el Sheikh and approached it from the west. It is quite an amazing contrast to drive through the desert for several hours and then suddenly come upon the beautiful blue water of the Red Sea. The effect on me was to give me a strong desire to get into that water! I will get my chance this afternoon.

Just north of the main civil harbor is a beautiful little bay called Sharm el-Moiya. This bay is about eight or nine miles up the Gulf of Aqaba coast from the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. Our tour guide had arranged a glass-bottom-boat ride for us. We

walked out on a plastic pier that seemed to be built like a child's toy with interlocking parts.

After we boarded the boat and headed toward the entrance to the bay the sandy bottom began dropping below us. At about half a mile out the bottom rose again in coral reefs. We cruised around the entrance to the bay watching many different kinds of fish and seeing many different types of coral. The colors were amazing and everyone was



Our "first mate" and host on the glass-bottom boat.

mesmerized. After about an hour we headed in and our host took us topside to enjoy the sunny day – it seems we have left the cold weather in the mountains.

Swimming in the Red Sea

After enjoying lunch we checked into our hotel, the Veraclub Queen Sharm. We have a free afternoon and I plan on going swimming in the Red Sea! This hotel has a



pool deck and a nice beach from which we can see the islands of the Strait of Tiran, the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba. There is a floating plastic pier which allows you to get beyond the shallow water to where the reef ends and the bottom drops precipitously. The bottom goes from being right there, two or three feet down, to not visible!

I had a partner from our group and we jumped right in – it was cold, but not Jordan River cold. We adjusted to the temperature quickly and simply enjoyed floating there and letting the water massage away a morning of bus-riding. We noticed that the

water seemed to be more salty than Texas Gulf Coast or Virginia Beach water. I hypothesized that this was due to the fact that there were no major (or minor) inflows of fresh water anywhere near us – unlike most of America’s coastline.

After we were done with our relaxing float we went back to the swim deck and found some comfortable chairs to sit in and good companions to visit with while we dripped-dried.

This is another good way to end a day of touring!

Day 11 – Sunday, January 18

Exodus Route

Exodus 12: 31 – Joshua 3: 17

Today we are leaving Sharm el Sheikh and going to Cairo. Our route will take us along the west coast of the Sinai Peninsula and then under the Suez Canal just a few miles north of the City of Suez. We will not rejoin the Exodus Route until we reach El Tur about a quarter of the way up the gulf coast.

The Gulf of Suez

The Gulf of Suez is the western branch of Red Sea that has the Sinai Peninsula on the east and the mainland of Egypt on the west. It begins at the south with the Strait of Jubal and ends 195 miles north at Suez and varies between 12 and 25 miles wide. From the highway we could see that the Gulf of Suez has a lot more large ship activity than



does the Gulf of Aqaba. We also saw quite a few oil rigs, a few refineries, and at least one manganese mine along the coast.

El Tur

Exodus 15: 27 16: 1 Numbers 33: 9-10

El Tur is the capital of South Sinai and located about sixty miles north of Sharm el Sheikh. It has also been called Raitho and in the Bible, Elim. It has always been known as a place where water is available and crops can be grown – it is the only large city in the Sinai with a natural underground water reservoir. Some of that water is now sent to Sharm el Sheikh which has no natural source of water. El Tur is also the place where most of Sharm el Sheikh's workers live.

Abu Zenima

We stopped in Abu Zenima for lunch. The food in Egypt does not seem to be very much different than what we had gotten used to in Israel though we do have to be a lot more careful about the water. El Tur looked like a fairly good sized city though we



did not see many people out and about on a Sunday afternoon. This area is a mining district. Local production includes uranium, manganese ores, silica sands, gypsum, and kaolinite. It also has a good sized port for shipping these natural resources.

Marah

Exodus 15: 22-26

Numbers 33: 8-9

After leaving the Sea of Reeds, Moses led the Israelites for three days before they came to the spring at Marah (which means “bitterness”) – but the water was bitter. The Lord instructed Moses to throw a piece of wood into the water and it became fit to drink. We stopped and found a well whose water was definitely unfit to drink. You could tell



that there was other water in the area because of the presence of a variety of trees. When I checked this site on Google Map I could see a rather large underwater delta projecting into the Gulf of Suez where the waters of this oasis flow. This is a good indication that large amounts of water have issued from this area in the past.

The Ahmed Hamdi Tunnel

Ahmed Hamdi was an Egyptian engineer and a general in the 3rd Army of Egypt. During the Yom Kippur War he was killed while crossing the Suez Canal with his soldiers. The tunnel under the Suez Canal was the first underwater tunnel to join two continents – Asia and Africa. It is a two-lane road and was built between 1975 and 1980. The total length of the tunnel is just under three miles and has a maximum depth of about 160 feet.

Africa!

Once we crossed the mid-point of the Ahmed Hamdi Tunnel we were officially in Africa! This is now the third continent I have been in – the first was North America, where I was born and have always lived, the second was Asia, which I visited for the first time just a week and a half ago when we landed in Tel Aviv. I will be going to my fourth continent in just a few days when we change planes in Frankfurt, Germany on our way home.

Cairo

Cairo is the capital of Egypt and the largest city in Africa and one of the largest cities in the world. Cairo had its start in the 4th century AD as a Roman fortress on the Nile River. In 641 the Muslims moved their capital here from Alexandria. The area started to be called by the name Cairo in 969.

By the time we got to Cairo it was dark. But we could still see quite a bit because it is a well-lit city. The photo below was taken in the morning from the Citadel. You can see the smog that was hanging over the city every day that we were here. But that was only a part of the filth of the city. As we drove along the highways we could see that two or three feet of the inside lane was filled with dirt and trash (but don't think that anyone paid any attention to lane stripes – they didn't). This was true of almost every street we saw in and around Cairo. Where they had water canals these too were covered with trash. In Jerusalem we were disturbed to see small trash piles scattered around even the nicer parts of the city. In Cairo this was multiplied by a thousand! They have a lot of work to



do in order to clean up this city – but there are 22 million people in Cairo – they could do it if they decided to all pitch in.

The Nile River

The Nile is the longest river in the world. It rises south of the Equator and flows northward through northeastern Africa to drain into the Mediterranean Sea. It has a length of about 4,132 miles and drains an area estimated at 1,293,000 square miles. Its basin includes parts of Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Sudan, and the cultivated part of Egypt. Its most distant source is the Kagera River in Burundi.

In Egypt the Nile is the source of all life – without its water the entire country would look like the desert plateau that is never more than a few miles from the river.



Sailing through downtown Cairo on the Nile River.

Southern Egypt is called Upper Egypt because it is upstream while northern Egypt, including the Delta is called Lower Egypt because it is downstream. In addition to the Valley and the Delta the Nile also divides Egypt into the Western and Eastern Deserts. Today the Nile flows through the Delta in only two principal branches, the Damietta and the Rosetta.

This has been another long day of traveling but I am so excited to be in Cairo!

Day 12 – Monday, January 19

The Citadel of Cairo

The Citadel is one of the world's greatest monuments to medieval warfare, as well as Cairo's most popular non-pharaohonic site. It is a highly visible landmark on Cairo's east side and is built on a spur of limestone that had been detached from its parent Mogattam Hills by quarrying. This area began its life not as a great military base of operations, but as the "Dome of the Wind," a pavilion created in 810 AD by Hatim Ibn Hartama, who was then governor. The



governors who followed also enjoyed the site's cool breeze and view of Cairo for the next three hundred years. Between 1176 and 1183 Salah ad-Din Yusuf Ibn al Ayyubi (Saladin) fortified the area to protect it against attacks by the Crusaders, and since then it has never been without a military garrison. Originally it served as both a fortress and a royal city. Salah ad-Din had come from Syria (a Tikrit born Kurd) where each town had some sort of fortress to act as a stronghold for the local ruler. So it was only natural that he would carry this custom to Egypt. Most of the fortification you see today was built after Salah ad-Din's rule, being added to by almost every invader since, some of whom destroyed much of what existed before them.

The Mohammed Ali Mosque (Alabaster Mosque)

Mohammed Ali Pasha al Mas'ud ibn Agha was the ruler of Egypt and founder of the country's last dynasty of Khedives and Kings. He had this mosque designed by the Greek architect Yussuf Bushnaq and built in the Citadel of Cairo beginning in 1830. The mosque is his tomb and is known as the Alabaster Mosque because of the extensive use of this material.



Two architectural features stand out: first, the fifty-four full or partial gray domes of the mosque including the 170 feet high and 69 feet wide main dome. The second feature that stands out is the two minarets. Each slender minaret is 270 feet tall and yet they are each built on a foundation less than ten feet wide.

On the west wall of the courtyard is an iron clock, a gift of the French king, with a tea salon on the upper level. It has never worked, and probably never will. Before we entered the mosque we removed our shoes or bought shoe covers – we are asked to do this in order to protect the expensive carpets that cover the floor. The inside is awesome – for its sheer size and its cavernous beauty. Particularly striking was the interplay of the morning sunbeams coming through the eastern windows and the lights suspended from the ceilings. We also enjoyed the parapet of the fortress to which we exited from the mosque. From the top of the Citadel wall we had great views of Cairo to the west.

The Egyptian Museum of Antiquities

The Egyptian Museum of Antiquities is situated at Tahrir square in Cairo. It was built during the reign of Khedive Abbass Helmi II beginning in 1897, and opened on November 15, 1902. It has 107 halls. At the ground floor there are the huge statues. The upper floor houses small statues, jewels, Tutankhamon treasures and the mummies. The Museum also comprises a photography section and a large library.



I'm waving "Hi!" to you from the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities

The Egyptian museum comprises many sections arranged in chronological order: The first section houses Tutankhamon's treasures. The second section houses the pre-dynasty and the Old Kingdom monuments. The third section houses the first intermediate period and the Middle Kingdom monuments. The fourth section houses the monuments of the Modern Kingdom. The fifth section houses the monuments of the late period and the Greek and Roman periods. The sixth section houses coins and papyrus. The seventh section houses sarcophagi and scarabs.

More than a million and half tourists visit the museum annually, in addition to half a million Egyptians. This was a fantastic museum with so many incredible items – a lot of them were over 4,000 years old! In one stairwell we saw some papyrus documents that were 3,000 years old displayed in simple frames you might buy at Walmart. Our last stop here was the Tutankhamon room – the artistry and skill of the people who created these items easily matches or surpasses what we can do today.

The Egyptians are building a new museum in Giza, not far from the Great Pyramids and our hotel. The Grand Egyptian Museum will have more than 258,000 square feet of permanent exhibit space on a 123 acre campus and will open in August of 2015.

The Nile River

From the earliest times, the waters of the Nile, swollen by monsoon rains in Ethiopia, flooded over the surrounding valley every year between June and September of the modern calendar. A nilometer was used to measure the height of the Nile in ancient times. It usually consisted of a series of steps against which the increasing height of the inundation, as well as the

general level of the river, could be measured. Seven of these ancient nilometers still exist including the best-known on the island of Elephantine at Aswan.

The annual floods no longer occur below the dams at Aswan but this benefit has to be weighed against the ill-effects of the dams – a controversy which continues today.

Lunch

We had lunch on a boat that was moored along the river. It was pleasant to sit



and watch the river flow by as we ate, talked, and relaxed. The food was good and the company was interesting – I am getting to know the people that were not a part of our maroon bus in Israel.

Sailing

Many travelers to Egypt take a Nile cruise as part of their tour. To see the land as it was seen of old, one must journey on the river. A felucca is often the water vehicle of choice. Feluccas are the traditional sailboats of Egypt's Nile. It has remained, over the centuries, the primary transportation of the Nile. Its ancient form still graces the river as it has done since the time of the Pharaohs.

Motorized barges transport bulk materials and modern cruise ships transport tourists, but the felucca remains despite modern alternatives. The felucca rarely has any form of engine and relies entirely on the breeze and the Nile River's current. Egypt is blessed with a predominant southerly wind that pushes sailboats upriver, while allowing them to return on its current downstream.

We pushed off from shore and drifted down the river about a mile. Our guide pointed out many of the sites and told us about our boat. Then our captain set our sail and we headed back upstream. He guided us directly into the tight spot we had left better than I could have done it with a motor boat.

Coptic Churches – Old Cairo

The term Copt is an English word taken from the Arabic word *Gibt*. It literally means Egyptian. The Arabs, after their conquest of Egypt in 641 AD, called the population of Egypt *Gibt*, from the Greek word *Egyptos*. The Greek word *Egyptos* came from the ancient Egyptian words *Hut-Ka-Ptah*, one of the names for Memphis, the first capital of Ancient Egypt. In contemporary usage, the term “Coptic” refers to Egyptian Christians who were first evangelized by Saint Mark the Apostle in the 1st century. Today, Copts form 13 – 15% of Egypt’s population.

Old Cairo is so named because it is the oldest part of Cairo, and in fact, predates what is now Cairo. Some historians believe that there was a settlement here as far back as the 6th century BC. Later, the Romans built a fortress here which today is called Babylon. Some of these Roman walls still exist. Later, it became a Christian stronghold, with as many as twenty churches built within an area of one square mile. There are only five of these churches remaining today: the Church of Saint Sergius and Saint Bacchus, the Church of the Virgin Mary, the Church of Saint George, the Church of Saint Barbara, and the Church of Saint George (Greek Orthodox). Also in the area are the oldest Mosque in Egypt, the Mosque of Amr Ibn al-As, and the oldest synagogue in Egypt, the Ben Ezra Synagogue.

The Cavern Church – Abu Sarga

Abu Sarga, the Church of Saint Sergius and Saint Bacchus, also called the Cavern Church, is the oldest church in Egypt and dates back to the 5th century AD. The church owes its fame to having been constructed upon the cavern where the Holy Family stayed for three weeks during their sojourn in Egypt. According to Coptic tradition Joseph, Mary, and Jesus stayed here on their way back to Israel.



This church is dedicated to the two saints, Sergius and Bacchus, who served as soldiers in the Roman Army. They were faithful followers of the Lord Jesus and refused to worship the Roman gods. For their Christian belief, Sergius and Bacchus eventually suffered martyrdom in Syria in 296 during the reign

of the Roman Emperor Maximinus.

Abu Sarga is based on a basilican structure with a nave and two side aisles. Twelve columns are set between the nave and the aisles, eleven of which are made of white marble and one is of red granite (representing the eleven faithful Apostles and

Judas). The old altar is now in the Coptic Museum nearby. On the east side of the church a tripartite sanctuary is separated from the nave by an impressive wooden screen which is beautifully decorated with ebony and ivory and whose oldest part dates to the 13th century. The north (left) sanctuary encloses a stairway down to the cavern used by the Holy Family.

Flight of the Holy Family Courtyard

The courtyard that leads from the street into the Hanging Church is dedicated to the Flight of the Holy Family from Bethlehem to Egypt. The courtyard is decorated with seven beautiful mosaics that depict scenes from the Holy Family's sojourn in Egypt.



Joseph, Mary & Jesus traveling to Egypt.

The Hanging Church – The Church of the Virgin Mary

It is called the Hanging Church because it was built on the southern gate of the Roman Fortress. Logs of palm trees and layers of stones were constructed with the ruins of the fortress as the foundation. From the 7th to the 13th centuries the Hanging Church served as the residence of the Coptic Patriarch.

The wooden screen is a unique piece of art and richly decorated with geometric patterns and crosses in ebony and ivory. The screen is crowned by precious icons: in the



center the enthroned Jesus, on the left side the Virgin Mary, Archangel Gabriel and Saint Peter, on the right side John the Baptist, Archangel Michael and Saint Paul. Fifteen icons describe the life and torture of Saint George and seven icons give an insight into the life of John the Baptist. A total of 110 icons are kept in the Hanging Church, the oldest of which is the “Coptic Mona Lisa” dating back to the 8th century and representing the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, and John the Baptist.

The wood work and the icons of this church are most impressive. The ceiling inside the church is built as a representation of the inside of Noah’s Ark. This was also done in the Cavern Church.

These two churches and the courtyard are proof positive that the Christians of Egypt put a high value on the artistic expression of their faith. And in my opinion we are all blessed to have these churches and these people as part of the Body of Christ.

Papyrus

Though the art of writing was probably first invented in Mesopotamia (ancient Iraq), and later developed by the Egyptians in the 4th Millennium BC, initially a good portable medium was not available. The ancients began writing on stones, bones, the barks of trees and textiles, but with the expanding practice of writing, more practical materials were needed. Thus, from the stalks of the papyrus plant, a triangular reed, that grew wild in marshy areas of the Nile, the Egyptians developed papyrus paper. It was light, strong, thin, durable and easy to carry, and for thousands of years, there was nothing better for the purpose of writing. Papyrus was effectively an Egyptian monopoly and its manufacture was a guarded secret. Indeed, the papyrus plant became a symbol of Lower Egypt, and was regarded as so typically Egyptian that it could be regarded as a metaphor for the entire country.

Under the best conditions, the stem of the Egyptian papyrus could reach the height of sixteen feet and the thickness of about three inches. However, under more normal circumstances, the plants would yield stems of only modest thickness, which were not useful for making writing material. Therefore it was used for making many things, including baskets, ropes and boats, yet from about 3000 BC, its most important use was as a writing medium. The earliest surviving example is a blank papyrus roll found in the tomb of Hemaka, an official of the

1st Dynasty (2925-2775 BC) at Saqqara. The quality of manufacture was by this time already so fine that Egyptians must have been making papyrus rolls for some time.

Our English word "paper" is derived from the word "papyrus," an Egyptian word that originally meant "that which belongs to the house" (the bureaucracy of ancient Egypt). However, with the invention of pulp paper, papyrus slowly disappeared from use, even in Egypt. Because it was no longer a viable commercial product, as farming came to the Nile Delta, papyrus even disappeared from the Egyptian landscape.

Papyrus making was not revived until around 1969. At that time, an Egyptian scientist named Dr. Hassan Ragab reintroduced the papyrus plant to Egypt from the Sudan and started a papyrus plantation near Cairo on Jacob Island. He also had to research the method of production. Unfortunately, the ancient Egyptians left little evidence about the manufacturing process. There are no existing texts or wall paintings that describe how to make papyrus and archaeologists have failed to uncover any manufacturing centers. Most of our knowledge about the actual manufacturing process is derived from its description in Pliny the elder's *Natural History* and modern experimentation. Dr. Ragab finally figured out how it was done, and now papyrus making is back in Egypt after a very long absence.



← My iconic "Last Supper" on papyrus.

Today, papyrus is mostly used for decorative art, and though most of it is sold to tourists, it is even somewhat popular in Egyptian homes. However, rarely do we find what might be termed "museum replica" papyrus. We might find an example of an early medical papyrus hanging on the walls of a doctor's office, but for the most part, the extant ancient papyri found in museums and specific

papyrus collections is not very decorative or interesting in and of itself. Hence, modern papyri are usually adorned with more colorful subject matter.

We got to visit the Abu Simbel Papyrus shop in Giza. They demonstrated how papyrus is manufactured starting with a papyrus stalk to the finished product they use to produce artwork. They also showed us a good number of their art pieces including some really fascinating glow-in-the-dark pieces. I was looking for something religious which would tie together my visits to Israel and Egypt. I settled on a version of the "Last Supper" which has a definite eastern orthodox feel to it. I am very happy with this purchase.

It was a good first day in Africa: see a lot - learn a lot - sail on the Nile!

Memphis

The Greek name “Memphis” derives from the pyramid of Pepy I in Saqqara which is “*Men-nefer*” (Established and Beautiful). The city was originally known as *Ineb-Hedj* or “The White Wall.” Some sources indicate that other versions of the name may have even translated to our modern name for the country, Egypt. During the Middle Kingdom it was Ankh-Tawy or “That Which Binds the Two Lands.” In fact, the location of Memphis lies approximately between Upper and Lower Egypt. The importance of this location is demonstrated by the persistent tendency of Memphis to be the Capital of Egypt as Cairo, just to the north, is today.

Memphis had no rivals as the capital of the united kingdom of Upper and Lower Egypt for over a thousand years (3000 -1938 BC). Originating as a fortress whose strength was the dikes which kept it safe from the Nile, Memphis quickly became the administrative and religious center of Egypt. The city must have been huge, judging from the size of its necropolises which extended for some 19 miles along the west plateau of the Nile. These include Dahshure, Saqqara, Abusir, Zawyet el-Aryan, Giza, and Abu Rawash, whose name derive not from their origins, but from modern nearby communities.

Memphis continued to be an important part of Egypt’s culture through the takeover by Alexander the Great and his building of Alexandria as the new capital. Memphis took another shot when Christianity came to Egypt and reduced Memphis’ religious influence. But the death blow did not come until the 7th century AD when the Muslims took over Egypt and built their capital just north of Memphis at Cairo.



Remarkably little survives of Memphis largely because the ruins were quarried in the Middle Ages for stone to build Cairo's churches and mosques. Today, other than the scattered ruins, most of the city is gone, or lies beneath cultivated fields, Nile silt, and local villages. What we do know of Memphis comes to us from its necropolises, text and papyrus from other parts of Egypt, and Herodotus (5th century BC) and Strabo (1st century AD), who visited the city.

The fraction we can see of Memphis today is located principally around the small village of Mit Rahina. The remains of Ptah's Temple bordering the village were at one time probably one of the grandest temples in Egypt. Today, only a fraction of the temple remains. Ramses II is well represented here, with a colossus of himself near the Alabaster Sphinx along the southern enclosure wall. Other remains include an enclosure with a ruined palace of Apries to the north of the Temple of Ptah.

It is hard to imagine what Memphis was for almost four thousand years. Our oldest cities in America are not much over five hundred years old! There is so little left of Memphis today but what they have is magnificent. The colossus of Ramses II is awesome even lying down. The Alabaster Sphinx was having some work done on it while we were there but we could still appreciate its beauty. One thing I missed seeing in Memphis was an Elvis impersonator.

Saqqara

Saqqara is one section of the great necropolis of Memphis which stretches for nearly twenty miles along the Nile. Saqqara is best known for the Step Pyramid of Djoser, the oldest known of Egypt's 97 pyramids. There are tombs from the 1st Dynasty through the New Kingdom. It is also known for the famous "Pyramid Texts," spells written to help the king ascend to the heavens and descend again, which reveal the relationship of the king to the gods.

Saqqara is also famous for its private Old Kingdom tombs which contain beautiful and revealing scenes in their decorations. During the New Kingdom Memphis took second place to Thebes as Egypt's capital. Yet even with the government established at Thebes, officials who ruled Upper Egypt lived in Memphis and were buried at Saqqara.

The Pyramid of Teti-

The small hill in the main Saqqara pyramid field with a panoramic view of the whole necropolis is actually the pyramid of Teti, the first ruler of Egypt's 6th Dynasty. It is called "The Place of Teti Endure," though this pyramid has not endured very well. This pyramid was originally 175 feet tall and had a base of 262 feet square.



← This pile of dirt is actually the Pyramid of Teti.

Teti's valley temple and the three hundred meter long causeway leading to the mortuary temple have not been archaeologically investigated,

but are located not to the east but to the southwest of the pyramid. Part of the causeway is visible however, as it meets the mortuary temple.

Teti faithfully reproduced the entrance, the arrangement of the rooms, and especially the decorations of the Pyramid Texts from Unas' pyramid. Rather than in the wall, the entrance was in the pavement of the courtyard of the mortuary temple dug into the pavement along the pyramid's north wall. The entrance corridor had a barrier made up of three granite plugging blocks in the middle of its level section, and both the beginning and the end of the corridor was sheathed with pink granite. The corridor connects with an antechamber with a right 90 degree turn towards the burial chamber. Both of these rooms had gabled ceilings made from three layers of huge limestone blocks. The top of the lowest level of the three layers was slightly above the base of the pyramid. The walls of the burial chamber are covered with limestone. Both the walls of the burial chamber and the antechamber are inscribed with the pyramid text and have astronomical ceilings (with stars).

Of pre-dynastic origin, the Pyramid Texts are the oldest complete collection of religious writings, spells, ritual chants, and all else that was necessary to ensure the protection of the other world for the dead pharaoh. The 228 inscriptions, painted in blue and written in hieroglyphs, were intended to facilitate the pharaoh's journey into eternity and cover all the walls of the chamber except at the far end where the façade of the royal palace was painted.

We were all a little leery of going inside/under this pyramid. The outside looks completely degenerated but the corridor leading down to the burial chambers was in excellent condition as were the interior chambers themselves. The Pyramid Texts were everywhere. Hieroglyphs covered all of the walls and on the outside and inside of the sarcophagus. They were beautifully carved and I was impressed with how neatly they were arranged.

Djoser's Pyramid – The Step Pyramid

Although the 3rd Dynasty actually began with the pharaoh Sanakht, of whom little is known despite a reign of eighteen years, the real founder is considered to be Djoser. The name "Djoser" is derived from "geser" in Egyptian meaning "sacred." Djoser was considered of such importance that his name is written in red ink in the Turin Canon of Kings. Perhaps only in the case of Abu Simbel and Ramses II has a pharaoh been so closely identified with his architectural monument as is Djoser with Saqqara.

The majestic Step Pyramid of Djoser, at the center of the funerary complex of Saqqara, is the oldest structure in the world entirely built of stone and the oldest pyramid yet found in Egypt. Originally it was constructed in the form of a normal mastaba. The mastaba (Arabic for "bench" or "shelf") was the tomb of nobility and court dignitaries, rectangular in shape with slightly inward leaning walls. A second mastaba was added on top of the first, then a third and several more until a pyramid of six gradually diminishing layers existed.

As it stands today, the pyramid is 203 feet in height and the base measures 358 by 410 feet. The burial chamber of the pharaoh was located almost at the center of the

pyramid, at the bottom of a large vertical shaft 92 feet deep. From here a labyrinth of rooms, corridors, chambers, and passageways protecting the eternal rest of the sovereign spreads outwards over a length of more than three miles. The funerary complex of



The Step Pyramid of Djoser and its southern courtyard.

Djoser is enclosed by a rectangular limestone wall 30 feet high with fourteen false doorways creating recesses and reliefs in imitation of the façade of the royal palace of Memphis.

The single real entrance to Djoser's funerary complex was on the southeast. Inside, instead of the courtyard one would normally expect, was a gallery formed by two rows of twenty columns twenty feet high, each ribbed to appear like wood, and joined to the side wall by a 'tongue' wall. The visual effect must have been striking as one passed from the relative dark of the gallery to the brilliant light of the southern courtyard.

Before we went through the entrance into the gallery we could look to the south and see the Bent Pyramid and the Red Pyramid. The Bent Pyramid is considered to be the next step in pyramid building after the Step Pyramid.

Imhotep

The architect behind the innovations of the Step Pyramid and its funerary complex was Imhotep. One of the great geniuses in the history of humankind, Imhotep was a priest, magician, architect, so great a doctor that the Greeks identified him with Asclepius their god of medicine, and author of a book of knowledge.

Imhotep followed in the family tradition: his father, Kanofer, was appointed by the pharaoh to be in charge of all the kingdom's buildings. The son learned in his father's workshops (probably in Memphis) carving stone vases, then becoming a sculptor and architect, and subsequently rising to assume the highest offices of the state, both religious and administrative. Imhotep was the high priest of Heliopolis as well as grand vizier. On the base of a statue erected in honor of Djoser an engraving describes Imhotep as "first after the king."

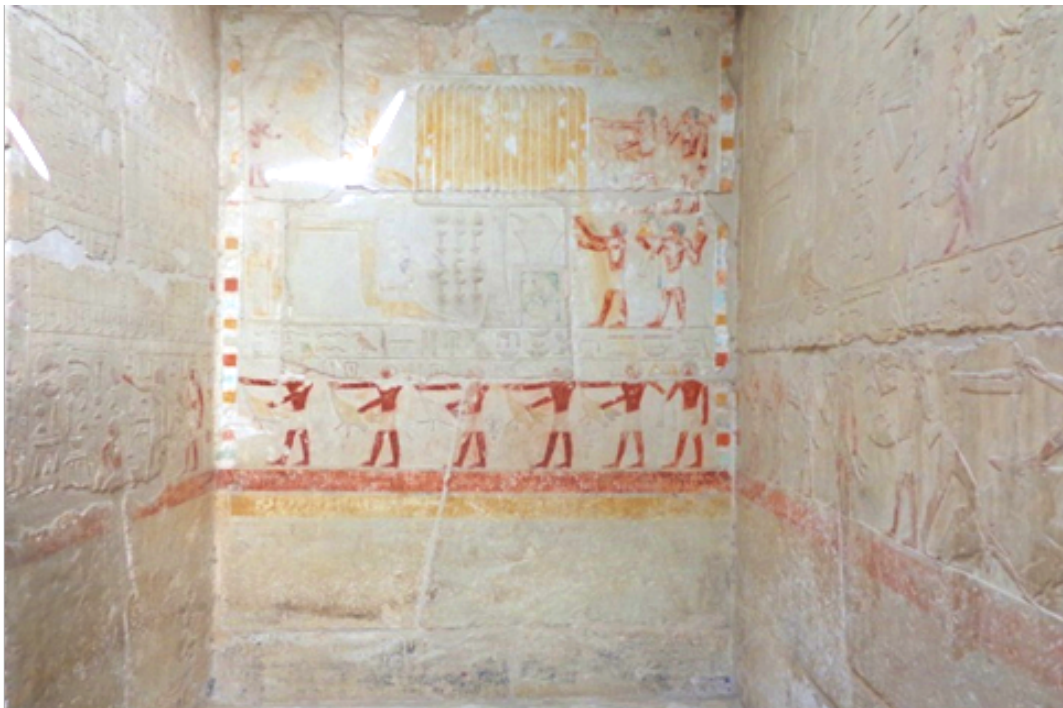
Look for his statue in the entranceway of the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities.

The Mastaba of Idut

Discovered in 1927 by the English archeologist Cecil Firth, this tomb was actually built for a vizier who lived at the time of pharaoh Unas at the end of the 5th Dynasty. At the time of the 6th Dynasty, princess Seshseshet, better known as Idut, took over the burial chambers and entirely altered the original decorations.

Idut's mastaba has ten chambers – only five of which are decorated. As well as the usual scenes of offerings, hunting, and fishing, the tomb contains numerous scenes of everyday life. One such scene shows the process of butchering a bull. The relief shows two men using long knives to cut the various sections of the bull. Another interesting relief shows a hippo hunt. All of these reliefs are of good quality and are in good condition.

For me, it was much more interesting to see the carved reliefs of this mastaba where they belong instead of in a museum. I am so grateful that we are allowed to enter these places and see these wonderful works of art that are over four thousand years old! As with the hieroglyphs of Teti's Pyramid, I was very impressed with how well these engravings were planned and executed. I have seen on the History Channel how they would have many different people work on these carvings: first someone would develop



The last chamber of Idut's mastaba.

a plan of what they wanted on the walls; then they would sketch what they wanted on the flat wall; rough carving would then be done followed by the finish carvers and then the painters. It is simply amazing to me that some of that paint is still on these walls today. Though you will not find the Mastaba of Idut on any list of major tourist sites in Egypt, I highly recommend it for your viewing pleasure.

The Oriental Carpet School

The Egyptian craftsman throughout the Pharaonic, Roman, Byzantine, Coptic, and Islamic eras would spend days and nights operating his loom in order to fashion a small ornate piece, a wedding-dress, or a carpet. All of these articles testify to the craftsman's genius and love of perfection. Less than a few miles from Memphis, the 5,000-year-old capital city of Pharaonic Egypt, modern day Egyptians strive to keep alive a fast dying tradition, that is nearly 1500-years old — the legendary art of weaving 'magic' carpets.

The magic carpets of Asia, which have found mention everywhere from ancient texts to Uderzo and Goscinny's Asterix comics have long been the hallmark of Persians and Arabs who took over the reigns of Egypt in 640 AD. But today this art is facing the danger of dying out with the younger generation, much like in Kashmir, more interested in 'proper jobs' than in learning to make carpets. But Egypt, it seems, is not willing to give up just yet.

Because of the population explosion, the school systems can't handle the quantity of children and run two sessions a day. Therefore, children go to school for just a half-day and the other half day learn a craft such as carpet weaving. There are more than 200 carpet schools, each of them training some 40-odd school children this ancient art. All of these children go to school and are getting a proper education.

It has to be seen to be believed, the way a design or a picture takes shape — woven purely by hand, as children sitting in front of different boards — weave with their small fingers



— intricate and identical designs on huge silk and woolen carpets. It takes weeks, often months to make a single carpet. Imagine the kind of patience and dedication one must have to make carpets for a living. Each design has to be identical on a carpet. So the children must be excellent artists and good with their hands. Their small and flexible fingers, can be the best weavers.

The children go to these schools either every summer vacation which lasts three months, or after finishing their school day and homework. It takes four summers for each of them to emerge as 'graduates' after which they can go in for higher training. To create a simple design like that of a peacock or a flower on one single square meter of a woolen or silk carpet, one needs to tie an amazing one million knots. The scheme has been very successful. We are confident now that the art of the magic carpet will not die in Egypt.

On our way out of Saqqara we stopped at the Oriental Carpet School. The school and workshop were on the first floor and their sales room was on the second floor. The carpets were made from cotton, wool, or silk. They had thousands of sizes and designs and prices ranging from "quite a bit" to "you've got to be kidding!"

Giza

Though the three Great Pyramids are the most famous and prominent monuments at Giza, the site has actually been a Necropolis almost since the beginning of Pharaonic Egypt. A tomb just on the outskirts of the Giza site dates from the reign of the 1st Dynasty Pharaoh Wadj, and jar sealings discovered in a tomb in the southern part of Giza mention the 2nd Dynasty Pharaoh Ninetjer. But it was the 4th Dynasty Pharaoh Khufu who placed Giza forever at the heart of funerary devotion, a city of the dead that dwarfed the cities of the living nearby.

Giza can be subdivided into two groupings of monuments, clearly defined and separated by a wadi. The larger grouping consists of the three "Great" pyramids of Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure; the Sphinx, the pyramids of the queens, attendant temples and outbuildings, and the private mastabas of the nobility. The second grouping, located on the ridge to the southeast, contains a number of private tombs of citizens of various classes. While the majority of the monuments of the larger grouping are made from limestone that was quarried and transported to the site, the tombs of the smaller grouping are simply carved out of the native living rock.

The advantages of Giza for a burial site are numerous, and it is fairly easy to see why it was chosen. It is high and flat ground overlooking everything. Any monument placed there would be seen from far away, especially if traveling via the Nile. It also has a ready supply of limestone on-site, eliminating the need to transport the blocks over a protracted distance.



Our group photo in front of the Great Pyramid of Giza

Since around the 5th Century BC, and up until recently, stone from the monuments were taken and used to build buildings in nearby Cairo. First the polished white limestone "casing" was taken, then the softer core stones. Many of Cairo's oldest buildings are built partly from stones from the pyramids. This destruction continued well into the 19th Century until preservation efforts and a resurgence of national pride put a stop to it. It is believed that had the pyramids not been vandalized, that they would still remain to this day much as they were when they were built. As the saying goes, "Man fears Time, but Time fears the Pyramids."

Exactly how big Giza is may never be known. Excavations have continued to find new tombs and artifacts since the first systematic study of Giza in the early 1800s. It has been explored and excavated more thoroughly than any other site in Egypt, possibly more than any other site in the world, yet no one believes it is anywhere near completion.

The Great Pyramids

There are no more famous ancient sites within Egypt, or for that matter elsewhere in the world, than the Great Pyramids at Giza. They are, without question, the icon most associated with the Egypt. They have been both the main destination for tourists, and a source of imaginative thought to the world for over three thousand years.

How the Great Pyramid of Khufu was built is a question that may never be answered. Herodotus said that it would have taken 30 years and 100,000 slaves to have built it. Another theory is that it was built by peasants who were unable to work the land while the Nile flooded between July and November. They may have been paid with food for their labor. The flooded waters would have also aided in the moving of the casing stones. These stones were brought from Aswan and Tura and the water would have brought the stones right to the pyramid.

This pyramid is thought to have been built between 2589 - 2566 BC. It would have taken over 2,300,000 blocks of stone with an average weight of 2.5 tons each. The

total weight would have been 12 billion pounds and a height of 482 feet. It is the largest and the oldest of the Pyramids of Giza. The encasing marble which covered the outside of the pyramid has eroded or been removed over time. With this casing off, the pyramid lost 33 feet off all of its dimensions. The top platform is over 1,000 square feet. The base of the pyramid is 754 feet square and covers 13 acres.



At the base of the south face of the Great Pyramid, sits the Boat Pits and Museum. The five boat pits were discovered in 1982. One boat is located at the site and can be seen at the museum. The boat, which is encased in stones, has no nails. It was held together with ropes and pegs, but not nails, and is amazingly intact. The purpose of these boats may have been for travel to the after-life or to accompany the Sun-God on his journey.

We only got to spend about twenty minutes of free time at the base of the Great Pyramid. That allowed us to climb up to where some folks were entering the pyramid. We also got to go look at the West and East sides and take a few photos. We did not stop at the other two pyramids but went up to a place above all three where we could get some good photos or ride a camel.

On the Great Pyramid's southwest diagonal is the pyramid of Khufu's son, Khafre. Although it is smaller, a steeper angle results in the illusion that they are the same size. In fact, Khafre's pyramid appears taller since it is on higher ground. The notion that this was done on purpose to out-do his father is without question. As it occupies the central point, has the illusion of greater size, and still has some of its casing stones intact, it is frequently mistaken as the Great Pyramid, something that would no doubt please Khafre were he to know about it.

Further along the southwest diagonal is the smallest of the three, the pyramid of Khafre's son, Menkaure. It is also the most unusual. First of all, it is not entirely limestone. The uppermost portions are brick, much like the several Pyramids at Dahshur, though separated from them by several centuries. One theory is that Menkaure died before his pyramid could be completed, and the remaining construction was hastily done to finish in time for the burial. It is also not along the diagonal line that runs through the Great Pyramid and the Second Pyramid, but instead is nearly a 320 feet to the southeast. This error, if error it is, is of a magnitude not in keeping with the mathematical skill known to have been possessed by the ancient Egyptians. However, an idea has emerged

in the last few years that the three large pyramids of Giza are actually meant to be in an alignment resembling that of the three "belt" stars in the constellation Orion: Alnitak, Alnilam, and Mintaka. This theory is largely discounted by the majority of Egyptologists, but some do believe it is a point to ponder.

The Great Sphinx

In a depression to the southwest of Khufu's pyramid sits a creature with a human head and a lion's body. The name 'sphinx' which means 'strangler' was first given by the



Greeks to a fabulous creature which had the head of a woman and the body of a lion and the wings of a bird. The sphinx appears to have started in Egypt in the form of a sun god. The Egyptian sphinx is usually a head of a king wearing his headdress and the body of a lion. There are, however, sphinxes with ram heads that are associated with the God Amun.

The Great Sphinx is to the northeast of Khafre's Valley Temple. Where it sits was once a quarry. Khafre's workers shaped the stone into the lion and gave it their king's face over 4,500 years ago. The sphinx faces the rising sun with a temple to the front which resembles the sun temples which were built later by the pharaohs of the 5th Dynasty. The figure was buried for most of its life in the sand. Pharaoh Thutmose IV (1425 - 1417 BC) placed a stela between the front paws of the figure. It describes when Thutmose, while still a prince, had gone hunting and fell asleep in the shade of the sphinx. During a dream, the sphinx spoke to Thutmose and told him to clear away the sand because it was choking the sphinx. The sphinx told him that if he did this, he would be rewarded with a kingship. Thutmose carried out this request and the sphinx held up his end of the deal.

We had about forty-five minutes to check out the Sphinx and vicinity. That seemed to be plenty of time to get the photos we wanted and do a little exploring. From

here we went into the city of Giza to a perfume shop. They gave us a short presentation on their products and then we could buy what we wanted. We went back to our hotel to pack and have supper and get a couple of hours of sleep before leaving for our 3am flight.

The Cairo airport was a typical international airport – spacious and proficient.

We had a good extension to Egypt. We got to see all the wonderful sites we had always wanted to see and experience the warmth of the people – truly a visitor friendly country!

There is no way that I could have anticipated a better experience than what I have had during these thirteen days. Coming to Israel and Egypt is the best trip of my life – and that is saying something. If you have an opportunity to make this pilgrimage – do it! You will be blessed!



“Come see us! We’ll be here.”