

10 Ways to Bless Israel

Going to Israel is not just about visiting old buildings. The most important thing you can do is to connect with the people.

Many Christians have a love for Israel and are eager to visit the nation. But often their dreams don't stretch beyond touring the sites that have biblical significance for both Jews and Christians and perhaps taking photographs of them. However, there are numerous ways visitors can be a blessing to Israel, interact with the people and leave something of themselves behind when they travel there. Here are 10 of them.

1. Pray for Israel in Israel with Succat Hallel.

Facing Mount Zion from across the Valley of Hinnom, Succat Hallel, a 24/7 praise and worship center, faces the very place where King David began round-the-clock worship in the tabernacle. Succat Hallel, which means "tabernacle of praise," was established in 1999 by Rick and Patti Ridings. The ministry grew from meetings in their apartment a few times a week to full-time worship and intercession at its new location. Worship and prayer leaders intercede on behalf of Israel and the people of the land—both Jewish and Arab.

When traveling in Jerusalem, you can play an active part in calling forth the nation's destiny.

"Prayer can change a nation. Isaiah 62:6 says that the Lord has posted watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem who cry out day and night," Patti says. "Since we went 24/7, terror attacks have gone down significantly. We pray protection for Israel as we cry out day and night."

Indeed, the second *intifada* (Arab uprising) began to ebb about that time.

Worship watches are open to the public during the day and

evening. Volunteering opportunities include three-month, short-term positions; long-term up to five years; and internships. Staffers are required to spend 30 hours in the prayer room—some take the six-hour night watch—and five hours serving with a local compassion ministry.

Although many talented musicians come to volunteer, the main requirement is a heart of prayer. The Ridings say that praying on-site in Jerusalem helps visitors intercede for the nation and the issues there more knowledgeably.

“We desire to pray to see the purposes of heaven come down to earth,” Patti says. “We are preparing the way of the Lord.”

Contact: ; info@

2. Feed the poor with Living Bread Ministries.

Living Bread Ministries puts a new twist in adventure vacations. A stint with Living Bread, whether just one day or a couple months, will put you in places where few will ever tread: the Palestinian refugee camps known for extreme poverty, violence and now a deep hunger for the gospel.

The personality of Living Bread matches that of its founder, Karen Dunham, who actually prefers to run toward, not away from, danger. Because of Dunham’s persistence her work has expanded from one refugee camp in Jericho to several more in Bethlehem, Ramallah and Hebron, one of the most contentious hotbeds outside the Gaza Strip.

“The people are illiterate and poor, and the children are sick and hungry,” Dunham says. “We bring gifts. We bring the love of Jesus.”

Living Bread needs English teachers, workers to help “rebuild the ruins” of homes in dire need of repair, and teams to bring boxes of humanitarian aid, visit the sick in the hospitals and

nurture those already turning to Jesus. Another specific program is a photography course for youth in Bethlehem. In the office, the ministry has administrative and media needs.

“There’s something for everybody,” Dunham says. “Even one day for teams and tour groups—they can feed the poor, pray for the sick, paint a house, work a Bible table in Jerusalem.”

Dunham has earned favor among both Palestinians and the Israeli army, which controls access in and out of the territories. She also leads trips off the beaten path to the ancient biblical “high places” and the crossing at the Jordan River.

Dunham’s strategy is to counter the “giant” in each camp through the love of God, then win the city.

“Run after the giants, and all of heaven will come with you,” she says. “Come, let us chase the giants together!”

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3. Bring hope to Ethiopian Jews through Project Sheba.

After wandering for many generations disconnected from their own people, Jewish Ethiopians are finally coming home to the land of Israel. But when they arrive, they come in at the bottom rung of a cruel economy and they’re vastly unfamiliar with the society. Jennifer Kaplan founded Project Sheba to reach out to “this quiet, dignified and respectful people, to help them reach their God-given destiny.”

Today Israel is home to approximately 120,000 Ethiopian Jewish immigrants. They often come illiterate and penniless and must transition from Third World conditions to a developed nation with modern plumbing, electricity and a different culture. It costs the Israeli government three times as much to absorb an

Ethiopian Jew as it does a Jew from any other nation.

Their transition also involves learning Hebrew, integrating into schools and finding jobs, which are difficult to obtain until you've mastered the language.

Project Sheba assists Ethiopians in the assimilation process by providing tutors for schoolchildren; adopt-a-student programs to pay for vocational training; home visits; seminars on specialized, self-help topics including financial planning and classes for women who are suddenly faced with opportunities to work.

"The idea is not just to give somebody money, which is important, being the lowest socioeconomic level, but we want to teach them to be financially independent," Kaplan says.

Foreign volunteers at Project Sheba work alongside local Ethiopian-Israeli workers, make home visits, collect information on the communities' needs and have a chance to impart hope into their situation.

"The families just need to know that somebody cares," Kaplan says.

Kaplan is concerned with the struggles not only of the Ethiopian Jews already in Israel, but also of those still trying to get there. Part of her mission is to raise awareness for the approximate 20,000 Jews still in Ethiopia waiting for permission from Israel to immigrate.

Contact: ; info@

4. Take Grafted's Hands On Tour for young adults.

Grafted's Hands On Tour to Israel was specifically designed *by* young people *for* young people. In other words, it's jam-packed with hard-core, challenging activities.

From the time young recruits deplane, they are whisked into physically demanding projects such as painting and repairing homes, cleaning up city streets and orchestrating a one-day camp for children in the Old City's Arab Quarter. They also spend emotionally challenging times with Holocaust survivors and assist at a soup kitchen. For one day, the young people don an Israeli army uniform and help out at a military base.

"Young people have the time, and they have a lot of zeal and energy," says Liesl Maas, Grafted director. "This tour facilitates something for young adult Christians to pour their zeal and passion into. And it's an opportunity to meet with other young Christians from around the world."

Grafted, based on Romans 11—Christians grafted into the Jewish olive tree—is a department of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) specifically targeted at college-age Christians interested in Israel. Grafted's calling, like that of ICEJ, is to comfort the Lord's people, as described in Isaiah 40:1.

The 10-day, hands-on tour includes some sightseeing, as well as lectures on God's purposes for Israel and the political climate.

"For our generation it is important for us to understand what God is doing in the world and what God is doing in Israel," Maas says.

Maas has noted an emerging interest in Israel among younger generations in recent years and says that the hands-on tour provides an outlet for this phenomenon.

"It gives young adults the opportunity to be Jesus' hands and feet here in the land," Maas says.

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5. Visit Israelis at their settlements in the heartland.

Never has there been a more poignant time to stand with Israelis who live in the heartland of the Jewish state. With talk of Israel ceding 91 percent of the land in the West Bank to the Palestinians, the Jewish pioneers who have settled this land feel abandoned by their own politicians as well as the international community.

Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CF0IC) was established in response to calls for Israel to give land to the Palestinian Authority in what is commonly known as the West Bank—the region that was referred to in the Bible as Judea and Samaria. The organization links Christians with these Israeli communities both through financial support and visits.

Sondra Oster Baras, director of CF0IC in Israel and a Jewish Israeli resident of the heartland, points out that a tour of biblical places would naturally include Hebron and Shiloh in addition to Jerusalem and Galilee. But due to sticky politics, a border crossing and the fact that few tour companies venture there, these places are omitted from the typical circuit.

“It is off the beaten track because it’s a controversial area. ‘West Bank’ is a scary word; ‘Judea and Samaria’ is good,” Baras says. “There is no better way to understand the complexity of these issues than to come and visit and see for yourself.”

CF0IC arranges visits to these places for Christian tourists in Israel, whether for a couple hours or a few days, to show the Jewish settlers they’re not alone.

“In an international atmosphere where people do not understand the biblical connection between Jews and the land of Israel, you can well imagine how it is for Jews sitting in these communities, feeling condemned, to have people come visit

them,” Baras says. “It’s an incredible statement of encouragement.”

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6. Volunteer to be a bridge for Jewish and Arab believers.

Creating a safe environment for two sometimes antagonistic sides to meet is the intention of Musalaha, an organization that seeks to reconcile Messianic Israelis and Christian Palestinians who are equally affected by hostility between their societies. Salim Munayer, a Palestinian Christian, founded the organization in 1990 to allay growing tensions between Arab and Jewish believers in Israel at a time when reconciliation was not a major focus.

Politicians have yet to stamp out a peace agreement, yet thousands of young Israeli and Palestinian believers have made peace with one another through Musalaha’s programs. Munayer has long reckoned that sometimes it takes a trip into the stark Israeli desert to lower one’s defenses, initiate dialogue and ultimately conclude that both sides need each other and the Lord.

Some of the activities sponsored by Musalaha are desert trips, summer camps, sports camps and women’s meetings. During these activities, believing Jews and Christian Arabs dialogue and share experiences that force them to rely on one another, breaking down barriers and instilling trust.

“The distinctive aspect for people who volunteer here is they will be exposed to both sides,” Munayer says. “Most organizations work on this side or that side, but at Musalaha you see the difficulties and complexities of both sides, and how Jesus is the answer for both sides.”

Musalaha, Arabic for “reconciliation,” attracts some 1,000 participants during the summer activities. The high season for volunteers is from April to September, when several summer camps for children are taking place. Camp counselors and long-term volunteers are needed. Office help is needed year-round.

The goal of the organization is not only to bring reconciliation among individual believers but also to bring healing and forgiveness on a wider scale to the communities they represent.

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7. Reach out to the needy with Christian Friends of Israel.

When Israel’s northern border was being pummeled by enemy rockets in 2006, Christian Friends of Israel (CFI) raced up to the war zone to provide relief to Israelis. When the rockets stopped there, CFI volunteers headed to the city of Sderot in the south to carry on a weekly outreach to communities under attack.

Established in 1985, CFI’s priority has always been for its volunteers to be personally involved in the lives of the local people.

“The big picture of this ministry is how it gets involved in people’s lives directly, reaching the people of Israel one person at a time,” said Kevin Howard, director of media at CFI.

CFI has a long-term volunteer staff of 40 and facilitates short-term volunteers who want to spend from one day to three months in Israel. All volunteers, even if they have an office job, will have a chance to make periodic personal visits to Israelis who are recipients of CFI aid.

Volunteers on short-term trips get to help out in one of the ministry's nine departments. They might do repairs in someone's home, visit lone soldiers at an army base, take medicine and food to Holocaust survivors or help out members of the Ethiopian Jewish community.

The ministry works in conjunction with the local municipalities in identifying people the government cannot afford to help.

In addition to its outreaches, CFI has a distribution center where the poor can collect clothing, household items and furniture. A bridal salon lends wedding gowns to brides who cannot afford a pricey dress for her special day.

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8. Evangelize in Tel Aviv with Trumpet of Salvation.

Not content with just teaching his "To the Jew First" evangelistic campaign, Yaakov Damkani also runs a working seminar for volunteers with Trumpet of Salvation ministries.

Damkani models his ministry after the first 10 chapters of Matthew. In Matthew's account, Jesus' disciples at first heard His teachings and saw His miracles; but then Jesus sent them out on their own to put into practice what they had learned from Him.

"We refuse to bring people here and only let them accumulate knowledge," Damkani says. "We teach the volunteers, and then we take them to the streets."

Damkani, a consummate evangelist, leads the charge himself—whether he takes volunteers to an army base, a market or the beach.

A Jewish Israeli, Damkani was saved while reading the New Testament and coming to the realization it is a Jewish, not just Christian, book. He now teaches from that experience how to present the gospel to Jews, which he believes should be done differently from a presentation to gentiles.

An animated and passionate character, Damkani is based in Tel Aviv, a primarily secular city on the Mediterranean.

As an extension of the ministry, Damkani now owns and runs Gilgal, a hotel about one minute from the beach, which houses volunteers, tourists and conferences for up to 250 people. The conference center is open to locals and foreigners for seminars, and a modern cafe in the hotel lobby attracts passersby and beachgoers.

“We have really, as a body, neglected the ‘normal’ people—average middle-class Israelis,” he says. “This building gives us a facility for having people come and get the gospel in a nice environment.”

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9. Build lasting connections through Bridges of Peace.

With massive food distribution, home repair and office work on its agenda, the Israeli organization Bridges for Peace offers many long- and short-term volunteer opportunities, all of which are concentrated on the final goal of building relationships between Christians and Jews.

“We are not trying to meet all the food needs in Israel,” says Rebecca Brimmer, president of Bridges for Peace. “We are trying to change attitudes toward Christianity. We are showing God’s love to people who have never seen it before.”

Full-time, long-term volunteers at Bridges for Peace, based in

Jerusalem, are integrated into the staff and, in addition to working office jobs, they help two food banks distribute 55 tons of provisions to individual families, welfare organizations and municipalities.

Bridges also hosts tour groups made up of people who undergo a few sessions of sensitivity training and then spend a week doing hands-on work in a Jewish community. This activity builds upon another one of Bridges' goals: education of Christians about Israel, the Jewish feasts and Israeli society.

Staffers all pitch in during emergencies. After the Lebanon War in 2006, volunteers headed to the rocket-battered North to help in whatever ways they could. They harvested fruit and collected 30,000 eggs a day for a farmer whose workers had fled during the fighting.

Bridges also set up a warehouse in northern Israel after the war, in addition to its Jerusalem center, in which to store food for times of crisis. Brimmer says the goal is to store at least three months' worth of food to be used in the event of a war or other emergency.

"If there really is a crisis in this country, money in the bank may not be good," Brimmer says. "Food is real."

Contact:

10. Serve at Christ Church, the crossroads of the Middle East.

During the rule of the Ottoman Empire in the mid-1800s, a delegation of British Christians sojourned in Jerusalem to care for the needs of the Jewish community. They built a clinic, the first school for Jewish children and, in 1849, the first and oldest Protestant church in the Middle East, Christ

Church.

Standing at a cultural and geographic crossroads, the guesthouse and church complex remain today as a convergence point for Christians from around the world and for Israeli schoolchildren, soldiers and police on official tours of the Old City.

“Any volunteer that comes here is going to end up interacting with all of these people,” says Paul Hames, guesthouse manager.

Operated by The Church’s Ministry Among Jewish People (CMJ), the center includes the 19th-century church, a guesthouse, a coffee shop, a heritage center and a cistern dating back to King Herod’s time.

CMJ played an integral part in modern Israeli history, beginning with two major public institutions—education and hospitals—and sparking Jewish philanthropy to compete with Christian largesse. Because of that, Christ Church is on Israel’s public education national curriculum tours in the Old City.

And just as when it was founded, the Christ Church center is still considered a place for Christians to share their beliefs.

“You may be making beds or chopping vegetables, but our primary focus is creating opportunities for sharing the gospel,” Hames says of the volunteer work.

Located near Jaffa Gate, the Christ Church garden is famous for being the quietest place in the Old City, providing a place of respite, shade and recharging for weary wanderers.

CMJ operates two other guesthouses in Israel also in need of volunteers: Beit Immanuel in Tel Aviv-Jaffa and Beit Bracha in Migdal near Tiberias.

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