

Jonathan Feldstein: Take a Unique Tour of Israel With Me

When you visit Jerusalem, I look forward to showing you the sites. There are many, so make sure you've got the time. You'll visit unique places with biblical significance as well as sites relevant to the history of modern Israel and the centuries in between.

One site I might show you has no marker. Nobody has written about it (until now) and nobody knows about it except me. I can take you to the place where, as a new immigrant, an ambulance raced passed me with lights flashing and sirens blaring. At that moment, long before I conceived of Heart to Heart, I had the presence of mind to realize that, as an Israeli, I was grateful to know that if there were ever a need, Israel's national ambulance and EMS service was there to help. I can take you to the exact spot and then to my favorite falafel restaurant.

This week, ambulances have been in the news quite a bit but not necessarily in the way that you'd imagine. Yes, Israeli ambulances responded to treat heart attacks, broken bones, women in labor and car accidents. In fact, I was in a six-car accident recently and was impressed how quickly the ambulances arrived, even before the police. The woman driving the sixth car was six months pregnant and the first ambulance that arrived took her right to the hospital. She seemed OK, according to her husband, but the paramedics didn't want to risk it. After all, they were treating two lives.

The second ambulance arrived a minute later. The medics treated and took away the man in the fifth car who looked to be in pretty bad shape. Fortunately, I walked and then drove away. But, before that, I was excited to see that the second ambulance was one that I helped raise the money for in

conjunction with my friends at Bridges for Peace.

In the past week, Israeli ambulances also treated two soldiers attacked by terrorists with knives. The first soldier was badly injured and early news reports were that he wouldn't survive. Thank God, he's recovering. The second soldier, a 20-year-old woman, was attacked while guarding Rachel's Tomb. Both were treated and saved by EMS teams aboard ambulances donated by people from abroad. These "only in Israel" experiences remind us about the important work we do.

Also in the news this week, two ambulances came under attack. This is not normal in any place but, sadly, something for which we need to be prepared in Israel all the time. The first vehicle was a military ambulance transporting injured victims of Syria's civil war to an Israeli hospital. It's impressive enough that Israel treats Syrians in Israeli ambulances and hospitals, in fact, thousands so far.

Of course, that's not surprising because in Israel we sanctify life. But, the ambulance was attacked by Druze who were concerned that Israel was treating fighters from one of the competing militias that are threatening their fellow Druze in Syria.

Another ambulance was attacked while driving in Samaria, north of Jerusalem. Anywhere from 15-19 rounds were fired at this life saving vehicle by a Palestinian Arab terrorist. Israeli ambulances operate under the red Star of David, the symbol of the State of Israel. That makes it a "legitimate" target by terrorists.

It's not the first time that this has happened, so precautions are taken to ensure that Israeli ambulances, their staff and the patients inside are kept safe. In this case, four bullets hit the ambulance. It is nothing short of a miracle that nobody was injured.

The irony is that of the two Israeli ambulances that were

attacked, one was treating a Syrian Arab and the other could easily have been treating a Palestinian Arab.

When I host guests to see Israeli sights, I often take them to the main ambulance dispatch center. No, it's not your typical tourist site. However, one quickly realizes that, in Israel, we simply cannot live without it. When visitors have a medical background, I tip my hat to them and acknowledge that saving lives is a hard and demanding job as it is.

However, in Israel, EMS personnel need to work while looking over their shoulders. They need to not only prepare for typical emergency medical needs that any country has, but also treat wounded soldiers and civilians attacked by terrorists. We have to protect the staff of our ambulances along with the patients being treated from the heartlessness of terrorists.

In Jewish tradition, there's a special thanksgiving prayer, *Birkat Hagomel*, said to thank God for the kindness He has done for one who recovers from a serious illness or overcomes a life-threatening situation.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who bestows kindness upon the culpable, for He has bestowed goodness to me.

It's obvious that one treated aboard an ambulance from an illness or life-threatening situation would say this prayer. But this week, senior paramedics whose lives were threatened had the opportunity to say it as well.

Let us pray that all the staff of all Israel's ambulances remain safe as they heal, save and protect others and that none ever come under threats like these again.

Finally, in keeping with my invitation to come visit, a number of people have expressed interest in touring Israel this coming year. I have the opportunity to put together such a trip for the winter. Please let me know if that might be of

interest and I will share the details. Together we can save lives and see the sights. Email me at firstpersonisrael@.

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He writes a regular column for 's Standing With Israel. You can contact Jonathan at firstpersonisrael@.