

My Israel Adventure

We were honored to experience the faith and culture of the Israeli people.

I just returned from Jerusalem, where I traveled with 100 Christian women for the purpose of bringing together Western Christians, Orthodox Jews and Arab Christians for a time of friendship and sharing that might possibly be the first get-together of its kind.

Yes, we saw the sites—Bethlehem, Masada, the Western Wall, the Garden Tomb. We even sat on the steps where Jesus threw out the money-changers and stood in the Upper Room. But this was much more than just another tour of the Holy Land—this “full-immersion” cultural experience changed us.

It all began last September when I traveled to Israel just days after the ceasefire with Hezbollah. What I had seen on TV before this trip did not begin to convey the tragic circumstances the Israeli people were facing. We stopped in a small town close to the Lebanese border that was hit by more than 1,000 missiles in 32 days.

When I observed the horrific conditions resulting from the war with Hezbollah, I felt compelled to send aid and financial support. And I resolved not only to return to Israel myself but also to bring 100 Christian women with me.

God quickly began to open doors, and I received invitations to be part of the Israeli-Jewish community for a week. Our group of 101 travelers arrived in Jerusalem with high expectations. Among them were women from Australia, South Africa and the United States.

Through a series of contacts we made arrangements for four prominent Jewish women to address our team. Annie, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor who grew up in the United

States, shared how God had called her to migrate from New York with her husband and the radical adjustments she had to make. Adena and her husband founded The Jaffa Institute, an organization in Israel that helps at-risk youth.

Elana shared her mission to raise up women in Israel to be peacemakers and a positive force for change. Rachel and her friend Anan, an Arab Christian, shared the joy of living peaceably together despite religious differences.

During my previous trip to Israel, I met Rabbi Fendel, who serves the town of Sderot. This vulnerable town is located just a half-mile from the Gaza Strip and has experienced almost daily bombings since the ceasefire.

This is the reality Jews in the Holy Land live with every day, one I wanted our women to see firsthand. More importantly, I wanted them to see the determined spirit our Jewish brothers and sisters possess in the face of imminent danger.

The philosophy in Sderot—and throughout Israel—is to rebuild what their enemies destroy. The day we arrived in Sderot, Fendel and his students were planting trees for a new playground. As head of the yeshiva (Jewish school) and a prominent leader in the community, Fendel wields much influence among the 24,000 residents.

It was an honor to spend a day with him in his town. When we left Sderot, we took more than memories with us; we left changed by the sobering reality of what we'd seen and moved by compassion and a desire to do something.

Each woman who traveled with me agreed that this trip instilled a deep respect for the Israeli women and for the commitment and courage it takes to live as a Jew in Israel today. We offered comfort and encouragement in the form of friendship—and in return were inspired by the determination of those we met. We felt honored to make the pilgrimage, to walk on Israeli soil, and to soak in all we could of the faith,

culture and fortitude of the people of the Holy Land.

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