

Promise Keepers Heads to Israel With 'Jesus Reigns: Firstfruits' Tour

Seeing too many mainline denominations and other groups in America turning their back on Israel, Promise Keepers (PK) President Raleigh Washington is setting out to generate support for Christian outreach in the key Middle East nation.

In mid-September, PK will launch an initiative to eventually gather 1,000 pastors in Israel by sponsoring its "Jesus Reigns: Firstfruits" tour. The event will see some 300 Americans (including 100 pastors) tour Jerusalem, Bethlehem and other sites.

Washington's goal: to return in August of 2016 with 1,000 pastors in tow.

"Basically, Jesus Reigns is based on our feeling and commitment that God wants to do something unique in Israel—especially in the believing community," says Washington, who succeeded founder Bill McCartney. "It's all about connecting Gentile-believing pastors with Jewish pastors in Israel."

The Sept. 14-23 tour will start in Jerusalem and move to Bethlehem, where on the evening of Sept. 17, PK plans to host a major event that will be broadcast across the world.

The next day some in the PK group will visit the Dead Sea Basin and such sites as the springs of Ein Gedi, where King David hid from Saul; and Masada, Herod's palace retreat. Others will head outside Jerusalem to pick fruit and vegetables to help feed the needy through the Project Leket organization.

Among other stops on the tour is retracing the steps of Jesus at many biblical sites along the Sea of Galilee, such as Capernaum, the Mount of Beatitudes and Magdala.

Washington says the One Message emphasis that spawned the "Jesus Reigns" event originates with Christ's prayer in John 17:20-21, when He told the Father He wasn't praying for *these alone* but *those also* who believed in Him.

"So, *these* and *those* represent both Jew and Gentile: that the two would be one, just as we are one," Washington says. "He gives a model for the oneness that really is the Trinity: 'I and You, You and Me, they and Us, that the world might believe that You sent us.'"

This spring, PK had to adjust its original plans after a major financial backer failed to meet his pledge to provide enough funding to send 1,000 pastors to Israel this year.

Washington says the ministry had adequate backing to take 100, so it chose to plan another gathering in Israel in August 2016.

Despite the revised approach, its original goal remains the same: a global event centered in Israel in which this message will be communicated.

The message to be delivered by various speakers: Hear and obey the power of God and the Holy Spirit. This year's event will include a seminar for leaders, designed to create lasting relationships between the 100 pastors and Messianic leaders in Israel.

Indeed, several pastors in Israel have said that nothing has a more profound impact than to know that Gentile pastors from America and elsewhere love them, support them and pray for them.

"That encourages them beyond measure," Washington says. "A

good combination of this would be 50 different pastors in Israel connected with two pastors from America, and they will establish lifelong relationships.”

PK’s president says such a step will be highly symbolic at a time when many in the church fail to comprehend their biblical requirement to support Israel. He sees such unity as a step toward all of Israel’s salvation and the Lord’s return.

The pastor of a Louisiana megachurch who will be part of the tour says his congregation wanted to align itself with a group helping equip Christians to reach nonbelieving Jews in Israel.

“A lot of times churches will get behind groups that are helping Israel’s government, which persecutes a lot of Jewish Christians,” says Mark Stermer, pastor of The Church in St. Amant.

“We wanted to make sure our sponsorship was going to an organization actually helping churches in Israel,” he says. “One of the goals of the Firstfruits trip is not just to see what’s going on, but to connect with local churches in Israel.”

Those churches include one pastored by Evan Levine, whose work is sponsored by Stermer’s church and others. Last year, when Levine visited Louisiana, the congregation decided to give that weekend’s offering to the work in Israel. Those funds helped launch an outreach to Messianics and poor people in the Middle East country.

The pastor says any time he has discussed Israel from the pulpit or brought in other speakers to address the country’s significance, it has stirred a hearty reception from members.

A midweek One Message event in March at The Church in St. Amant attracted 700 people, with an appearance by best-selling author Jonathan Cahn (*The Harbinger*) stirring additional excitement.

A veteran of PK's sold-out stadium days in the 1990s, Stermer still connects to the ministry through one of his church's members. Lee Dominique is a PK board member and frequent speaker at events (three are scheduled in June and July).

Although the season of standing-room-only events is over, Stermer sees PK entering a season of rebuilding. He bases that view partially on a high-energy rally he attended last year in Florida.

"It had the intensity of what Coach McCartney and Raleigh started," the pastor says. "They're kicking it back off to what they do best, which is to rally men and challenge them, not only to get saved, but to disciple others and rise up to be the men God has called them to be. I think that mission is taking hold."

Washington hopes more Christians embrace the opportunity to get involved with PK, particularly One Message. He is seeking both financial and prayer support for Promise Keepers, One Message and the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America.

The devil will do everything in his power to prevent this from happening because of the depth of the spiritual impact this will have, including hastening Christ's return, says PK's president.

"We're asking all saints to stand with us, pray for us and contact us if God is leading them to sponsor a pastor," Washington says. "That way they can be a part of what I think is a cataclysmic impact on the Christian community of Israel—the greatest and most profound since 1948, when they became a state."