

Top 7 Reasons for a Trip to Israel

This summer marks our 30th year as pastors at King of Kings in Jerusalem. Ann and I still pinch ourselves that we get to do this!

From time to time, I've toured the Israel with newbies—and often they're pastors. It's fascinating to get a fresh look at Israel through their eyes and to watch their childlike excitement.

I've heard them ask, "Why I didn't come years ago?" A few have even confessed they'd unwittingly told some lies in their sermons because of ignorance about the land of the Bible.

I'm going to give you my top seven reasons you really need to visit Israel, especially if you're a pastor and/or Bible teacher.

1. The pages of your Bible will be even more alive and real. This is where Abraham trekked, Joshua battled, David reigned and the Son of God lived, died, rose and ascended.

After seeing the land and people of Israel, you'll teach the Bible with more accuracy and confidence. Well-known pastor Mark Batterson from Washington, D.C., came to Israel for the first time this year. He tweeted, "One revelation from our trip to Israel? I read the Bible wrong! Just knowing the geography adds nuances of meaning. Text + context = aha!"

After you've scanned the topography, heard the sounds, breathed the air and smelled the scents, you'll paint the backdrop of a biblical narrative with more vivid colors.

As a serious Bible teacher, you've probably spent thousands of dollars on theological education. You've invested in building

your library. And you continue to spend money on resources to keep you current. So you know the value of investing money in the best tools of your trade. Here's a thought: Amortize the cost of this trip over 50 years of ministry, and it's peanuts!

George O. Wood, the general superintendent of the Assemblies of God, just preached for us at King of Kings. He's been to Israel more than 40 times! He's initiated a program to enable every Bible student in the denomination to get to Israel at least once in their lives.

2. A visit to Israel will enable you to pray more intelligently for the Middle East. Israel is the epicenter of a conflict as old as the patriarchs. CNN and Fox can't convey the whole picture. But coming to this land will enable you to better understand the realities.

A visit to Israel will enable you to meet with Jews and Arabs. Coming to know the faces and names, as well as their stories, will inspire you to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Ps. 122:6).

3. If you make a point of visiting the local believers, you will hear fresh and exciting testimonies of God at work in Israel today. Many will tell you how the Lord revealed Himself in a dream or vision. Local ministry leaders can share how the body has grown tenfold in the last 20 years.

Getting to know the body in this land will introduce you to ways you and your church can partner with local ministries—and in turn receive blessings (see Gen. 12:3).

4. A trip to Israel will inspire you and increase your level of faith for your nation. The blessing of God is on Israel. Its very existence is a miracle you've got to see with your eyes to believe. Friends who return to Israel every few years marvel at the progress since their last visit.

Israel is a shining example not only of how to *survive*, but

also *thrive* against all odds. With limited natural resources, a microscopic piece of real estate and the existential threats of war and terrorism, the only explanation of Israel's success is God.

5. Israel is teeming with history and culture. Whether visiting archaeological sites, roaming the museums or spending an evening with the Israel Philharmonic, you will be enriched.

6. Israel is a great place for a vacation. You're going to spend money on a vacation anyway, right? We have one of the most ideal climates in the world. If you come in the winter, it's possible to ski the snow-peaked Mount Hermon in the morning and swim with dolphins along the coral beaches of the Red Sea in the afternoon. We have three remarkable seas—the Med, the Red, the Dead—and, of course, the Sea of Galilee, around which the Lord did much of his public ministry.

7. You could even visit Israel for free. Yes, I said free. Most travel companies offer a free trip for every seven to 10 people you bring with you. Now what's your excuse? I am convinced that a visit to Israel is a wise investment in your ministry and those you serve.

Have you been to Israel yet? What were some highlights? Did it enhance the quality of your ministry? If so, how? I'd love to hear from you.

*Along with his wife, Ann, **Wayne Hilsden** has served as lead pastor of King of Kings Community in Jerusalem, Israel, since 1983.*

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