

Why Neil Armstrong Was More Excited to Visit Israel Than to Visit the Moon

This week in 1969, American astronaut Neil Armstrong made history by becoming the first person to set foot on the moon. His timeless and famous remark at the time, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind," will go down as one of the most iconic phrases of all time.

Yet, when Armstrong visited Israel in 1994 he was brought to a place in the Old City of Jerusalem and asked Meir Ben Dov, his host and noted archeologist, if Jesus himself actually would have walked there.

"I told him, 'Look, Jesus was a Jew,'" recalled Ben-Dov. These are the steps that lead to the temple, so he must have walked here many times."

Armstrong asked if these were the original steps, and Ben-Dov said that they were.

"So Jesus stepped right here?" asked Armstrong.

"That's right," answered Ben-Dov.

"I have to tell you," Armstrong said to the Israeli archaeologist, "I am more excited stepping on these stones than I was stepping on the moon."

Indeed we know that for a Christian visiting Israel is a life-changing and faith building experience. This is played out in numerous ways including visits to the Old City and specifically the Temple Mount where Jesus preached and worshipped, to the sites where He was crucified and buried, to the Jordan River where he was baptized, and of course to the Galilee and Nazareth, his hometown.

There are countless affirmations of Christians visiting Israel and having divine experiences, and Neil Armstrong's comments and frame of reference, considering that he was the first man to step on the moon, affirm this reality. But, ask any Christian who has been to Israel and at least 9 out of 10 times, you'll hear a similar affirmation and the desire to visit Israel again. And again.

Run for Zion Was conceived in order to provide such an opportunity for Christians to have this same experience, albeit in a unique and boutique way.

More than simply a tour of the Land, Run for Zion provides a series of meaningful and hands-on experiences, one might even say a "feet-on" experience. At its core, Run for Zion has the special privilege of promoting unique opportunities for Christians to run in Jerusalem, anywhere from a full to a half-marathon or 10K. For non-runners wishing the same experience, there's also the opportunity to walk through Jerusalem's historic streets and experience the same things, albeit more slowly.

Although it's common for runners to listen to music to pass the time and motivate them along, in Jerusalem, runners often run with no music, in order to avoid distractions from the views and experiences. Running through the Old City itself is powerful, but one gets to run around the Old City and appreciate its view from the south and from the east, which is the view Jesus would have seen in approaching the holy city from the Mount of Olives.

Affirming that Jesus was a Jew in the land and was very clear to reiterate God's promise of Genesis 12:3, obligating his disciples to bless Israel, Run for Zion also provides meaningful and tangible opportunities for all participants to bless Israel and its people. Participants will have the opportunity to have friends and family sponsor their participation, the proceeds of which will go to a wide range

of services that help millions of Israelis of all different backgrounds.

And because God's promise of Genesis 12:3 is a reciprocal formula, Run for Zion will also play an important role, not just by being the beneficiary of the financial blessing, but in blessing those who bless Israel by providing significant subsidies to participants. This will reduce financial barriers that might prevent somebody from being able to travel to Israel and increase the total number of people who are able to share this experience.

Running through Jerusalem's ancient streets will certainly be the anchor and main draw, whether it be for athletes who run regularly, or for students to middle-aged people who may run or walk briskly a few times a week for exercise. Maybe even some mall walkers will take the leap of faith and come to Jerusalem. However, more than the run itself, there will also be meaningful and interactive tourist experiences along with unique programs, worship, speakers and an opportunity to interact directly with the people and programs that are the recipients of the financial blessing.

If you're a runner, walker or aspire to be one, and you're a Christian who wants to visit and experience Israel, Run for Zion may be for you and provides an easy way to participate. If your church, college or other group wants to bring a team to participate together, Run for Zion offers that seamlessly.

If you're neither but want to bless Israel and stand alongside Run for Zion in its ability to maximize the blessings for Israel and all participants, there is a special need. There are Christians living in Muslim countries for whom life is not easy, and many of the countries in which they live do not recognize Israel and its right to exist, much less that Jerusalem is its capital. For most of these, visiting Israel is only a fantasy. Run for Zion has been approached to help Christians in these countries participate and has taken on the

responsibility to offer additional subsidies to such people as well as to help secure visas. On their own, these tasks would not only be impossible but dangerous.

Please visit to find out details, inquire about participating or make a donation so others can.

And like Neil Armstrong, more than “one small step for man,” let this be your one big leap for faith. {eo}

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