

My Visit Reminds Me Christians Must Pray for and Support Israel

JERUSALEM, Israel—My sixth trip to Israel makes me realize more than ever the importance of Bible-believing Christians standing with Israel.

Nearly all my adult life, I've supported Israel by raising money to help the Jewish people, sponsoring events that foster support for Israel with other leaders such as John Hagee or encouraging people to travel to Israel, as my wife and I are doing this week with our friend and author Perry Stone.

I flew to Israel early, before the tour, to network with key leaders in a whirlwind couple of days of nonstop meetings that will provide story ideas for our print magazines or online. As soon as I have time to digest all I saw and learned, I will write articles about the interesting people I met.

But now I want to give an overview of who I met and what I learned, much of which is important not only for me but for each of us.

1. We must stand with other Christian believers in the land.

I met with Dan Juster, one of the apostolic leaders that is also one of the deepest thinkers in the modern Messianic movement. He helped me understand spiritually what's going on in the land and how believers need prayer and support.

I then attended the exciting King of Kings congregation in downtown Jerusalem, pastored by my friend Wayne Hilsden. I had time to only attend one service while in Israel. While I would have enjoyed being at a service in Hebrew, I was more comfortable in Wayne's English service that had the same

spirit and style I'm used to in my own church. You can see their worship here.

I also learned firsthand of the opposition and persecution some believers face in Israel. Wayne pointed out an "anti-missionary" standing outside the service to urge young Jewish believers in Yeshua to turn away.

2. We must pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for a spiritual awakening in the land.

King of Kings has prayer 16 hours a day atop a 17-story building. The view over the city was magnificent. What a strategic location! The next day, I visited another 24/7 prayer ministry in a mixed Jewish and Arab area south of the Old City. To avoid attention, this group posts only small signs that say "24/7," which the initiated know means intercessory prayer is offered there around the clock.

The prayer room is located in the TBN building and has a view of the Dome of the Rock. I didn't interview anyone there. Instead, I joined the prayers for the peace of Jerusalem for strengthening believers, for nations standing with Israel and for ways to reach the Arab community with the gospel.

3. The Arab Christian community needs our support.

It is well known that at one time, the majority of the population in Bethlehem was Christian. According to a 2012 article in *Israel Hayom*, the municipality says that 40 percent of the 32,000 residents of Bethlehem are Christian. But, unofficial data suggests the percentage is actually lower. While many Arab Christians are nominal Christians whose families have been Christians for generations, there is a small and struggling evangelical Christian Arab community there.

One of the most impressive meetings I had was with a young Arab pastor named Steven Khoury, whose Calvary Church reaches

about 400 people a week in the part of Jerusalem around the Mount of Olives. It is the only evangelical church in that area. They have a hard time even finding a place to meet. Members of his church have been killed by radicals, and he has had trouble raising the funds he needs to operate and buy property. I was impressed by this passionate young man, and I plan to write more about his church later.

4. There is a new era of understanding between evangelicals and some Orthodox Jews.

Steven Khoury is a good friend to a young Orthodox rabbi named David Nekrutman, the executive director of the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation. In the biblical town of Efrat, it is the first example I've seen of the Orthodox community reaching out to evangelicals. That impressed me as well, and I will also write about it later.

My personal experience with the Orthodox has been no cooperation and often hostility. So I'm encouraged to hear about the breakthroughs between the two groups and to hear that at least at this center, the Orthodox seem to value the support that Christian Zionists give Israel.

5. It's good to know a networker in a foreign land.

The friend who set up most of my appointments is Anne Ayalon, the wife of Danny Ayalon, who has served as an Israeli ambassador to the United States, in the Knesset and in many other important posts. Anne is a humble woman who has done as much as anyone I know to bridge the evangelical Christian and Jewish communities. Born an American, she converted to Judaism when she got married but describes herself only as a "woman of faith." She declined to be interviewed because she prefers to be behind the scenes, where she is a connector and influencer.

I had many other wonderful meetings, including one with Chris Mitchell, bureau chief of the CBN Jerusalem bureau, who recently wrote an important new book called *Dateline*

Jerusalem, which he calls an “eyewitness account of prophecies unfolding in the Middle East.” I also met some Israeli intellectuals who teach leadership principles from Bible characters to officers in the Israeli Defense Forces. And I got a very quick tour of the Bible Lands Museum by its director and saw the “Book of Books” display. I plan to go back to spend hours learning more about this wonderful land that gave us the Bible, which is God’s revelation to man.

My meetings have not ended. Later, I’m meeting with leaders of Magen David Adom—the Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross which is the first responder in disasters—and with leaders of Operation Lifeshield. Both are charities for which we’ve raised money in the past. I also am meeting the head of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem and a local publisher.

As I process what I’ve learned and do more research, I’ll write more. And I’ll tell you about this amazing tour with Perry Stone. My head is spinning after the first day of visiting the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Church of the Ascension, the Hill of Ill Counsel, the recently discovered Pool of Siloam, a kibbutz where a pivotal battle was won in the war of 1948, and some archeological digs south of the Temple Mount with actual pavement where Jesus would have walked. I can’t wait until tomorrow. I have six more days before the trip ends!

If you stand with Israel, if you’ve had a life-changing trip to Israel or if you learned anything from this column, leave your comments below.

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