

The Holy Land Continues to Surprise and Amaze Me

My sixth trip to Israel, which ended Monday, proved to be the most enjoyable I've had. It was full of surprises as I toured with Perry Stone from Dan on the Lebanese border in the north to the Dead Sea in the south.

If you read my previous Strang Report, you know I flew in early to meet with Christian and Jewish leaders. Prior to leaving, the agreement with Iran was announced—which greatly upset the Israelis. I interviewed Perry Stone on the prophetic significance of that news, which you can read [here](#).

It was a wonderful tour with many new experiences as I traveled with my wife, Joy, and Tessie DeVore, the executive vice president of our book group, and her husband, David. Since I had been to Israel five other times and already had seen many sites, I thought I knew what to expect. But with every day came new experiences and many surprises.

I hosted a small tour to Israel back in the 1980s. It was mostly a tour of Catholic churches and Israeli museums. I also spent a lot of time on that trip in the Hadassah hospital since one of the ladies on my tour broke her leg! By contrast, my trip this year was about places in the Bible that have been excavated or are much as they were when the Bible was written—instead of covered with Byzantine-era churches.

It's almost humorous that in some places, two churches will claim to be the real site of a biblical event—as is the case about the place in Nazareth where the angel appeared to Mary.

I don't have space to give a detailed account of every stop. We made five or six stops every day for seven days! Although I did try to post something on Facebook at every stop (you can "like" me on [Facebook](#)). Here's what I enjoyed most:

- I was fascinated seeing the ruins of Ancient Greek-Roman culture at places like Banias, where there was a temple to the half-man, half-goat Greek god Pan (where we get the words *panic* and *pandemonium*) at what the Bible calls Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus asked Peter, “Who do you say I am?”
- The recently discovered ruins of Beit She’an, created by Alexander the Great, reminded me of what I saw in Pompeii, Italy. Our guide told us homosexuality flourished with other pagan behavior in Jesus’ day alongside Orthodox Judaism. I had never seen the parallel in Jesus’ day and the early church in how they existed side by side with gross paganism as similar to the new secular paganism we see in our own society that is often at odds with the biblical standards we value.
- I enjoyed walking the extensive tunnels along the Western Wall of the Temple Mount. These weren’t open when I first came in 1979 with Jamie Buckingham. Back then, however, we were allowed to go in some digs on the south end of the temple that had just begun. To go back last week and see what’s been done since then was astounding to me.
- The tunnel that was dug many feet deep at Megiddo through solid rock to a spring to save the city during a siege was unbelievable engineering for ancient times. I enjoyed walking through them, even though it was exhausting exercise. And to think this is the prophesied site of the Battle of Armageddon!
- I didn’t expect to be so impressed with the digs at Tel Dan that show the oldest city gates in the world. Certainly Abraham stopped here on his way from Haran, north of there, to the Promised Land. It was near here that God made His covenant with Abraham. It’s also the headwaters of the Jordan. In fact, the name *Jordan* means “out of Dan.” And since we were also at Beer Sheva in the Judean Desert, it gave new meaning to the biblical phrase “from Dan to Beer Sheva,” describing the extent

of the country, like we might say “from Maine to California.” Many such expressions come alive when you visit the land of the Bible.

- The new digs at Migdal, the home of Mary Magdalene on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, were only begun in 2009. Archeologists found a first-century synagogue where undoubtedly Jesus taught very close to Nazareth, where He grew up, and Capernaum, His home as an adult. They also found a first-century carving of a menorah—one of only four found in Israel, our guide told us. And they found *mikvas*, the ritual baths the Jews used, which was the pattern for our baptismal tanks we use in churches today.
- The newly discovered Pool of Siloam, where Jesus healed the blind man by putting mud on his eyes and telling him to wash in the pool, was discovered by accident only 10 years ago. Another place had been assumed to be the Pool of Siloam until then. It meant a lot to me to visit there, since our health book imprint for Charisma House is called Siloam.
- I enjoyed the re-enactments of life in biblical times, especially at Genesis Land near Beer Sheva, where Abraham lived. In a desert setting in what is called the West Bank, there are big tents set up somewhat like the time of Abraham, and an actor playing Abraham describes what life was like while we sat in the cool of the tent and ate dates and apricots. I even had my first camel ride back to the bus!
- Later, in the modern city of Nazareth, the YMCA has recreated Nazareth village to represent what it was like in the day of Jesus. This makes it easy to visualize life back then—watching a woman spin wool into yarn, seeing a man making wooden utensils like Joseph must have done. We also learned about agriculture and animal husbandry in the time of Christ. A man playing a shepherd even called a flock of sheep with an odd clucking sound, and the sheep came running! I had never

seen a shepherd caring for sheep up close.

- My first trip to Israel in 1979 was to the Sinai Peninsula to climb Mount Sinai with Jamie Buckingham. We lived in the desert for nine nights without even the convenience of outhouses! That helped me understand what life is like for the Bedouins who still live in the area. We also swam in the waterfalls at En Gedi, just off the Dead Sea!
- In the process of that trip with Jamie, I didn't experience what most tourists or pilgrims experience. Three other trips have been to attend conferences. So this time, it was important to me to experience things I had never experienced. One example is swimming in the Dead Sea, which was a weird experience, due to it being impossible to sink in it. On a more spiritual note, I decided to be baptized in the Jordan River. I feel my baptism at age 8 is still valid, and I avoided being baptized when I was at the Jordan before. But this time, I understood it was simply a reaffirmation of my following Christ in baptism.

What else can I say? I left out visiting the Mount of Olives and the Upper Room, the Jezreel Valley, Jericho, the oldest city on earth or Shepherds' Field near Bethlehem. Or did I mention the 2,000 year old boat preserved in mud in the Sea of Galilee and now preserved and on display? We visited *kibbutzim*, where strategic battles were fought for Israel's independence and where the output for agriculture is astounding. We saw dairy cows that give much more milk than cows anywhere else in the world. One of the reasons is the Israelis found the cows give more milk if they listen to classical music!

Listening to Perry Stone teach was a highlight too. He did nearly 20 telecasts on location. Each was different, and the insights were incredible. Each one seemed better than the one before. When it comes to understanding Bible prophecy,

insights from the Bible or interesting customs of the day that help us understand what the Bible means, Perry is without equal. Be sure to check out his website to see when these telecasts are airing on *Manna-Fest* in the next year.

There were also humorous moments. We had a lot of fun joking around with the tour guides and the others on the trip. That's part of the experience of visiting the Holy Land! And they had fun when, in Bethlehem, our host presented me with a special white goat meat no one else would eat. I enjoyed it and then realized at home we call it "Rocky Mountain oysters." Another time they presented me with veal tongue. Not bad tasting.

I'm going home feeling full, and it's more than all the food they fed us. I feel I understand the land of the Bible. I felt my times of prayer and Bible study last week were significant. And I came away feeling more of a connection with the Israelis, whom I so admire.

But don't take my word for it. Decide to visit Israel. The touring company tried to persuade me to try taking another tour after the disastrous experience I had in the 1980s. Stayed tuned. Maybe I will someday.

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