

MennoJerusalem Bible Lands Tour of Israel & Palestine, May 3-19, 2010

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*Outline of Itinerary and Daily Activities**



CALENDAR

DAY 1, Monday May 3rd

Check in at Toronto airport by 9:00pm.
Departure on Air Canada at 11:55 pm.

DAY 2, Tuesday 4th

Arrive Ben Gurion airport at 5:50pm (near Tel Aviv, seven hours ahead of EST). Clear immigration to Israel, bus transfer to Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem, (my home in Jerusalem, and ours for seven nights) for check-in and dinner.



[To preview, click on:
<http://www.tantur.org/>]

DAY 3, Wednesday 5th

Depart 8:00 am. Bus tour of city panoramas,

Abraham's lookout, [Genesis 22] views of the **Hinnom Valley** and the **Mount of Olives**, the **Old City** and **Dome of the Rock**. **Knesset** and **Shrine of the Book** drive-by, to **Ein Kerem** [John the Baptist's birthplace]...

The opening panoramas that we see as we circle the Old City already suggest the sweeping panoramas of the biblical story —from Abraham's encounter with the faith-testing God, to the views of the Holy City from the Mount of Olives as Jesus approached it so many times.

He would have recalled the many prophecies about future events anticipated for that location, and would himself figure large in the dramatic events of the salvation story, some of whose key scenes were played out on its slopes.

Return to Tantur for LUNCH

Visit to the Garden Tomb, and Herod's family burial site (best example of a rolling stone tomb in Israel),

followed by General Orientation session at Tantur Ecumenical Institute.

Dinner at 6:00 pm, nightly.

DAY 4, Thursday 6th

To the **Western Wall** where bar mitzvahs and family celebrations will be in progress.

Enter the **Ophel** excavations of the south Temple Mount area, to the **Davidson Center** exhibits near the first-century Roman street of Jesus' time; **ritual baths/miqva'ot**.

Climb to the **Temple Mount**, with the **Golden Dome of the Rock** and **Al-Aqsa Mosque**.

The Temple was central to Jewish life and faith. It remained so also for Jesus who often came into conflict with its inner circle of religious Jewish leaders because of what they had let it become. We visit one of the two possible sites for Jesus' encounter with the Roman authorities after having been found 'guilty of blasphemy' by the religious leaders. We will walk the sites of the Temple compound and discuss its role and importance through that period of history, including its destruction that Jesus had spoken about — in tears — 40 years earlier.

Exit Temple Mount area, proceed through **Muslim Quarter**, along part of the Via Dolorosa to "**Ecce Homo Convent**" to visit the **Lithostratos**/pavements of Jesus' trial before Pilate.

Picnic LUNCH

Visit **St. Anne's Church** and the archaeological site of **Bethesda Pools at Sheep's Gate** [see St. John 5 for story of Jesus' experience and miracle here].

3:30 Exit city from **Lions Gate** through Kidron Valley, to Tantur.

4:30 Speaker on the political situation in Israel/Palestine: ICAHD [Israel Committee on House Demolitions/Rabbis for Human Rights]

6:00 Dinner. Debriefing and discussion.

DAY 5, Friday 7th

Depart 8:30 for **Yad Vashem**, Holocaust Memorial...including Hall of Remembrance and Children's Memorial.

(Cont'd)

Twenty-five percent of the victims were children. The new holocaust memorial is a vivid display of the horrors of humanity that seemed to draw us to the rock-bed lowest of our history—as people, as Christians. 'Holocaust' means 'totally consumed' and is the word in the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to the sacrifice for sin. For that reason, Jews refer to that horrible period of 20th-century history as the Shoah [catastrophe]. By being exposed to their story, we have a better base to understand the Palestinian situation, and hear current stories from a new perspective.

LUNCH at Tantur

2:00 Meet with Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman for an introduction to Jewish spirituality and worship, preparing for Shabbat celebrations.

4:00 Preparation session for visit to **Kol Haneshama** synagogue, then to service at 6:15 pm.

Shabbat dinner with Jewish families (tentative)

DAY 6, Saturday 8th

The **Passion Route**, from **Bethphage** by Bethany, down the **Mount of Olives** to **Dominus Flevit** Tear-Drop church, **Gethsemane** and **Church of all Nations**.

Cross the **Kidron Valley** to St. Peter in Gallicantu and **High Priest Caiaphas' house**, **Upper Room on Mount Zion**, via **Herod's palace** ruins (trial of Jesus).

Picnic LUNCH on site.

The Jewish people longed for a messiah, the person who would finally free them from the oppressive Roman occupiers, set up an independent political rule and kingdom, and begin the time of peace and prosperity that was promised with the messiah's arrival. But Jesus began on the wrong beast, it seemed—a donkey instead of a stallion! Other things too would 'go wrong' for the followers who started to realize that the messiah they were following would not reach his goal.

We will deal with the poignant moments of Peter, realizing the 'failure' of his leader, when he begins to separate himself from Jesus—"following at a distance," and then denying any

knowledge of him during the crisis of being a religious and political prisoner.

Dinner at Tantur.

DAY 7, Sunday 9th

Morning: Individual choices for community worship in local churches near Old City.

LUNCH on rooftop of Papa Andrea's overlooking old city and Holy Sepulchre Church.

2:00 Tour of **Holy Sepulchre/Church of the Resurrection: Golgotha and tomb of Jesus**.

5:00 To Tantur for community hymn-sing in the chapel.

6:00 pm Sunday community dinner!

DAY 8, Monday 10th

Depart for **Judean Desert**. Panorama in **Wadi Qelt** (Good Samaritan parable)—story of early Christian monasticism in the desert; on to **Jericho**, the oldest city on earth.

Cable car up Mount of Temptation [unless anyone is tempted to climb] to visit the **Orthodox Monastery of the Shrine of Temptation/Quruntul**.

A day around these sites at the lowest point on earth will also let us pick up the stories of Moses, who died just across the Jordan River from the place we will stop. We look at the stories of Joshua, whose name means 'the LORD saves' and which can also be rendered Yehoshua/Yeshua ['Jesus' in the Greek form we commonly use].

Joshua passed through the waters of the Jordan in a triumphal 'completion' of the salvation journey of his people since they left Egypt to reach the Promised Land. Jesus would also enter the Jordan River to open another chapter of the salvation story for his people—the people of the world, having already been identified in the Temple as being a light to the nations/Gentiles.

LUNCH in Jericho

2:30 to **Bethany**, grotto of **Lazarus' tomb**.

Return to Jerusalem, Tantur for DINNER.

DAY 9, Tuesday 11th —Check out of Tantur

Ecumenical Institute

8:00 Depart for **Efrat**, a Jewish settlement in the west Bank next to Bethlehem for discussion time with an Israeli settler. Continue our drive southwards by

Hebron (location of the Tomb of the Patriarchs), then continue south toward the Negev to the **Arab Village of At-Tuwani** with Christian Peacemakers Team.

LUNCH prepared by the local Arab women's village cooperative.

Pass through *The Wall* checkpoint into the city of **Bethlehem** and neighbouring **Beit Sahour**. Meet our Palestinian hosts, divide up for the home-stay and dinner with our families.

Free evening for relaxation and conversation.

DAY 10, Wednesday 12th

8:00 Bus to **Herodion**, fortress, palace ruins, burial site of King Herod the Great outside of Beit Sahour. Return across the **Fields of Boaz** [Ruth chapter 4] to **Shepherds Fields**—readings and carol singing in the caves.

"Let us go straight to Bethlehem to see this thing that has come to pass" –Luke 2:15.

Bethlehem first figures in the biblical story in Genesis with the death of Rachel, who tradition holds is buried at the entrance to the town—today a disputed political area surrounded by the Wall. Muslims and Christians have their own stories through the ages, but we will focus on the time of Herod, friend of the Roman Emperor, whose 'occupation' of the Land was to be challenged by angels singing to shepherds nearby, and visits by Oriental wise people. Herod would try to kill any competitors; he himself was buried near the town.

To **Bethlehem's Nativity Square** and Basilica, Jesus' birth **grotto**, caves of **St. Jerome**; **St. Catherine's Church** [world-wide Christmas Eve TV service originates here].

LUNCH at Lutheran Center/Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb [author of *"I am a Palestinian Christian"*];

View **Deheisha** refugee camp, security barrier at **Har Homa**.

7:00 Dinner in Bedouin tent-style restaurant overlooking Shepherds Fields. Our hosts will join us for coffee, dessert, and Arab entertainment.

DAY 11, Thursday 13th—check out of Beit Sahour **Qumran/Dead Sea Scrolls** for lunch; visit site of the excavations at the home of the **Essenes**; brief time for specialty shopping—Dead Sea black mud, artifacts, books, etc.

LUNCH by the Dead Sea Beach—a misnomer since it is not a sandy beach; plastic flip-flops are good for the stones to enter the **Dead Sea** for a famous float!

Our bus heads northward through the Jordan Valley to Galilee where we check into the Kibbutz **Ma'agan Holiday Village** on the Sea of Galilee for five days.

[To preview, click on: <http://www.maagan.co.il/en/> then *Virtual Tour on the Toolbar*.]

DAY 12, Friday 14th

8:00 Bus climbs the **Golan Heights** for broad panoramas over the Sea and region of Galilee, views of "the Evangelical Triangle" of Jesus; to **Mitzpe Ofir** overlooking the site of the **Kursi/Gerasenes** story of the demoniac and swine (Mark 5).

North through Upper Galilee to the **Lebanese border** and the cliffs of **Banyas/Caesarea Philippi** at the base of **Mount Hermon**—the source of the Jordan.

Lunch at Lebanese Restaurant, on the **Jordan River**.

We begin the day with an overview of the region—Golan/Bashan to Mount Hermon and Banyas, where Jesus takes his students [the Greek form is 'disciples'] to confront the dual powers of his day: the Roman political machine, and the religious shrine of the gods at 'the gates of Hades' in that cliff. This is a major teaching site for Jesus, and Peter learns a bitter lesson.

DAY 13, Saturday 15th

8:00 **Nazareth Mount of the Precipice**—overview of the **Jezreel valley** toward **Megiddo, Nain**, and view **Mount Tabor** with its stories from Judges chapter 4; traditional site of the transfiguration. To **First-century Nazareth Village** [see www.nazarethvillage.com].

LUNCH is a first-century-style meal of foods typical of what Jesus would have had.

Visit this reconstructed village and synagogue of Jesus' time, see a working farm and animals, workers in first-century dress.



Understanding the Jewishness of Jesus, his upbringing in an orthodox Jewish family, his being raised in a Hasmonean Jewish 'settlement,' and being immersed as a youth in the history and stories of the Israelite people through the ages—all helps us understand both the contextual settings of his teaching and the way those around him heard him teach—and the present-day significance of Jewish spirituality and worship for Christians.

Afternoon visit to the **Basilica of the Annunciation**, over the village **cave home of Mary** and Joseph. Museum of artifacts from first-century period. Walk to the Orthodox Church over **Mary's well**, in downtown Nazareth. Return to base via the traditional site of Cana.

DAY 14, Sunday 16th

9:00 Departure from **Kibbutz Ein Gev** for boat ride and worship on the Sea of Galilee. Dock at **Kibbutz Ginossar** for exhibit of the ancient 'Jesus' boat; video of its discovery. Drive to the base of **Mount Arbel** for photo opportunities of the first-century **zealot caves**. To **Tiberias** [built up as a regional capital by Herod's son when Jesus was a teenager]. Baptismal story at **Yardenit**, Jordan River.

We now become more familiar with the Galilee locations where Jesus settled for his teaching ministry after being harshly expelled from his home town of Nazareth. We hear the text in context!
To Ma'agan for relaxation in their gardens and/or swimming in the pool or the sea.

7:30 Sunset dinner in **Tiberias** on the promenade by the **Sea of Galilee**. We recommend their famous St. Peter's Fish plate with roasted potatoes and an array of Palestinian salads.

DAY 15, Monday 17th

9:00 Archaeological site of **Beitsaida**, home of several disciples, location of Jesus' miracle. **Visit the Capernaum** site of Jesus' synagogue, Peter's house, and Jesus' second home.

LUNCH by the Sea of Galilee.

Sing in the chapel on the **Mount of Beatitudes**, read the story, followed by rest and meditation time in the gardens overlooking the sea.

To the seashore at **Tabgha** (the seven springs) and the site of several biblical accounts with the disciples, including the "Feeding of the five thousand."

To **Peter's Primacy**, story of Peter's reconciliation with Jesus, from John 21.

Dinner at Ma'agan followed by our tour debriefing time on the lawn by the seashore.

DAY 16, Tuesday 18th—Check out of Ma'agan

Cross the **Jezeel Valley** to **Mt. Carmel** and the site of the story of Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al.

To **Haifa** for an audience (tentative) with Archbishop Elias Chacour (*Blood Brothers*), head of the largest Christian denomination (Melkite Catholic) in Israel.

View the gardens of the **Baha'i Temple**; head south along the Mediterranean coast to the seashore setting of Herod's **Roman aqueduct**—time for a swim in the sea or a stroll in the sand by **Caesarea Maritima**, Herod's seaport. Here we "see Paul off to Rome"—Acts 27:1-2.

To **Tel Aviv** and Jaffa [ancient **Joppa**]—stories of Peter and others who were here.

6:30 Farewell dinner by the sea, in Old City of Jaffa/Joppa.

8:00 To **Ben Gurion** airport for check in at 9:00 pm.

Depart on Air Canada at 11:55 pm for overnight flight home.



DAY 17, Wednesday May 19th

Arrive in Toronto at 5:20 am.

** Subject to revision.*

*Prepared by Glenn Edward Witmer,
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*"Come and See!" & Expect a Blessing!
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