

Chapter 17

Visiting Turkey and the Holy Land



I won the Holy Land trip on a bet. Tom thought taking Montmedy Road home to our flat in Lorraine was faster than going by way of Verdun Road. It wasn't. I had visited the Holy Land with girlfriends and hoped to return with my husband. But Tom worried about safety and refused to go. After winning the bet I contacted Fun For Less Tours who had a trip leaving in October, about the time we were to be released from our mission. Our plane fare from Cape Town to Istanbul was a little under \$400. As the church would be covering our plane fare from Tel Aviv to Salt Lake, it was the perfect time to go. Since we were traveling on the church's dime, President Wood instructed us to wear our badges and mission attire which we did. Until I bent over at the airport in Dubai and two young Arabs whistled at me. Then I changed from my knee length skirt into black slacks. However we continued to wear our mission badges until tour directors, John and Karen Miller, said it was not appropriate to wear them on the tour.

Istanbul

Hello Everyone:

Greetings from Istanbul. I am sitting here in our hotel room composing this email thanks to the assistance of personnel at the main desk in the lobby - a very helpful young lady.

Well, today was tour day #1 and a very busy day. We jumped aboard our tour bus at 9 am and drove to the Hagia Sophia, a famous historical place of worship in the past for both Christianity and Islam, now a museum. We were there with perhaps 700 -1,000 others, tourists from all over the world. It was a huge edifice with domes, mosaics and ancient decor dating back some 2500 years or so. Sister Stokoe was so emotionally touched by the history and religious ambiance that she bought a very expensive plaque (an Icon.)



Hagia Sophia

By the way, I can now refer to her as Diane as we are no longer on a mission and were released by the Area two days ago. We have yet to be released by our Willow Creek stake president. It was a tiring day. In fact, we arrived close to the Hagia Sophia about 9:45 am and commenced our walking tour which also included neighboring sights. After Hagia Sophia and more walking we went to a cafe for lunch - 45 minutes, then onto the bus and to visit the Blue Mosque where Muslim men outside were washing their feet, face, hands, ears, and nostrils as part of a cleansing ritual prior to entering the mosque to pray.

The Mosque was huge, again filled with hundreds of tourists. They outnumbered the total praying. This is a beautiful mosque inlaid with tile in the Arabesque design or style. Then more walking, onto the bus, and off to the Istanbul Bazaar which is phenomenal - a modern day market with fingers of streets in north, south, east, west direction that seemed to run at least a

hundred yards in all directions. All kinds of vendors. It was an overwhelming shopping experience though we bought nothing.

Our day was from 9am - 7:30 pm and it was a day of walking. Walking along cobblestone streets, upstairs, through alleyways, main streets teeming with people, down stairs, up ramps, and down more stairs, and mingling shoulder to shoulder at times with hundreds of people.

We had prepared for this trip by walking 45 minutes to an hour, 6 days a week, for almost two months and found out today that physical preparation was not enough. We both had pain in our lower backs as did others in our party, and as we were constantly walking and standing, walking and standing and listening to the guide's commentary over our headsets, and not always having a place handy to sit, it was taxing on the lower back.

The sights, however, were remarkable historically, architecturally and religiously with the Islamic call to prayer the loudest voice in the environment. We all enjoyed the day. Most of our fellow Fun for Less members are from Utah and we were surprised to see a couple, Howard and Kay Ellison, that we had toured with in China and Thailand. They were equally surprised to see us. There are also two wives that were born and raised in New Zealand. There is also another missionary couple en route home like us. He's a medical doctor and served at the Area level covering several countries.

He told me in Spain, at the annual "Running of the Bulls", which is internationally famous, four of the missionaries decided they were going to run the streets with the bulls. So without getting permission from their mission president they did so. Unfortunately, one got gored in the posterior in a most delicate place and tossed in the air and had to have extra delicate repair work by a surgeon. So it pays to ask permission of a mission president as opposed to assuming you can out run the bulls in Spain.

We saw a lot today that I have not mentioned, but we really enjoyed the day, though tiring, and look forward to tomorrow to sailing on the Bosphorous Sea and other activities.

Best wishes from the Marriot Istanbul Asia hotel until next you hear from us. *(As we left the power cord to our lap top at the Gardner's flat in George where we stayed overnight en route to Cape Town, we ran out of battery power—this is the only e-mail we sent during the entire trip.)*

Tom (I don't have to sign Elder anymore)

Trip Itinerary

Day 1: Oct. 17 – Fly from Cape Town to Istanbul via Dubai.

Day 2: Oct. 18 – Arrive Istanbul. Stay three nights at Marriott hotel.

Day 3 Oct. 19 - Tour begins: Hagia Sophia, Hippodrome, Egyptian Obelisk, bronze sculpture entwined serpents of Delphi, Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace.

Day 4: Oct. 20 - Boat ride on the Bosphorus, the water separating Asia from Europe; on to the Black Sea. Afternoon finish our tour of Istanbul.

Day 5: Oct. 21 - Istanbul – Kusadasi: Fly from Istanbul to Izmir near Ephesus. Visit Ephesus and surrounding areas. The house of the Virgin Mary atop of Bulbul Mountain, then explore best preserved theaters, fountains and buildings. Sleep in Kusadasi.



At Ephesus

Day 6: Oct. 22 – Visit other cities Paul wrote about in Revelations. See ancient ruins in Philadelphia, Sardis, Smyrna and more. Return to Kusadai.



On the Isle of Patmos

Day 7: Oct. 23 - Kusadasi – Isle of Patmos: Ship to Patmos, Greece; explore island of John the Revelator. Dr. Michael Wilcox will talk to us on book of Revelations in New Testament.

Day 8: Oct. 24 – Kusadasi – Istanbul: Free day, enjoy beach resort hotel. Late afternoon flight back to Istanbul.

Day 9: Oct. 25 – Istanbul – Amman, Jordan: Today fly to Amman, Jordan. Spend the night in our 5 star hotel.



Petra - center of trade in the ancient world

Day 10: Oct. 26 – Amman – Petra – Amman: Travel to Petra newly voted “Wonder of the World.” Walk down narrow canyon to view of the Treasury – a city carved from cliffs of the canyon. Sleep in Amman.



Jordan side of river where Christ was baptized.



Israel's side where people of many different faiths were being baptized at dusk in the river.

Day 11: Oct. 27 – Amman – Galilee: Visit Christ's Baptismal site on the Jordan side of the river, swim in the Dead Sea before crossing into Israel. Afternoon visit Masada. Rising above the desert floor is Herod the Great's fortress of Masada which we will visit via cable car. Stop at the Qumran caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found then continue on to Galilee to overnight.

Day 12: Oct. 28 – Nazareth – Galilee: Travel to Elin Harod where Gideon chose his 300 men before routing the Midianites. On to Mount Carmel where Elijah had his historic confrontation with the priests of Baal. To Nazareth, home of the Savior for 30 years of his life. Day ends with a sweeping view of the Jezreel Valley from Nazareth dominated by Mt. Tabor. We will discuss the transfiguration of the Savior.

Deborah and Barak gathered their forces at Mt. Tabor and defeated Sisera's iron chariots. On to Arbel cliff for an overview of the Sea of Galilee. Then a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee where we discuss Jesus walking on the water and stilling the storm.



Dr. Michael Wilcox describing historical events in the Jezreel Valley below

Day 13: Oct. 29 – Galilee: Journey to the north of the Sea of Galilee and visit Capernaum where many wonderful events and teachings of the Savior took place. Stop at Mount of Beatitudes and ponder the great truths delivered by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Drive far north of Israel to the Canaanite city of Hazor and on to Tel Dan where Jeroboam erected a golden calf for the Israelites to worship, marking the beginning of a road that would end with the “lost ten tribes.”



Sea of Galilee at twilight

The restored walls and gates give us an excellent idea of the fortifications Joshua would have faced as he conquered the land. Visit Banias, known as Caesarea Philippi in the days of Jesus when he asked his disciples, “Whom do ye say I am?” End of day return to hotel in Galilee.



Singing Carols in the Church of the Nativity

Day 14: Oct. 30 – Caesarea – Bethlehem – Jerusalem: Focus shifts now to the West of the Mediterranean Sea and Apostles Peter and Paul as we discover Caesarea. Here the Roman centurion, Cornelius, became the first gentile convert to Christianity and Paul related his account of his vision on the road to Damascus to King Agrippa. Visit a picturesque Roman aqueduct and wade in the Mediterranean Sea. Conclude visit to Caesarea with visit to the Roman theatre, and Hippodrome where chariot races were held. Continue on to Bethlehem and recall the Savior’s birth, Walk through the Church of the Nativity and sing Christmas carols. Have time to shop at the best Olive Wood store in Israel, Nissan Brother in Bethlehem. Sleep overnight in Jerusalem.

Day 15: October 31 – Jerusalem: Explore ruins south of the Temple Mount and walk the sidewalks and stairs of Jesus’ time. Climb the Temple Mount where both Solomon’s and Herod’s temples once stood and where the magnificent Dome of the Rock and Al Aksa Mosques now stand. Stop at the Western Wall, the most sacred site of the Jewish faith, and write a prayer on a piece of paper and place it into the cracks of the wall as millions have done before. Travel to the new city of Jerusalem and visit the Shrine of the Book where the Dead Sea Scrolls are located, and the model City, a reproduction of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. Visit the Jerusalem Museum. Sleep in Jerusalem.



Day 16: November 1 – Jerusalem – Be it Lehi: Walk through Hezekiah’s tunnel, built over 2500 years ago to secure the water supply of Jerusalem during the Assyrian siege. Will need a flashlight. At end of tunnel find the Pool of Siloam where the man born blind washed as instructed by Jesus and came away seeing.



Exiting Hezekiah's tunnel

Head to Beit Lehi to experience firsthand an archeological dig. Observe early Christian mosaics, oil presses, a mikvah (a ritual bath) and the recently discovered Columbarium where doves were raised by the thousands to be sacrificed at the temple. See a New Testament period stable giving an idea of the one Jesus was born. Stop at the Valley of Elah where David fought Goliath. Then back to Jerusalem.

Day 17: November 2 – Jerusalem: Today the spiritual pinnacle of our pilgrimage. We retrace the footsteps of our Savior during the last hours of his life and feel the deep appreciation these places create for the sacrifice of the Son of God.



We begin at Mt. Zion at the traditional site of the Upper Room where the Last Supper was shared with devoted apostles. We visit St. Peter in Gallicantu, the possible site of the cock's crowing and the Palace of Caiaphas where Jesus was tried. From there we descend into the Kidron Valley to visit Gethsemane, the Garden of the Savior's deepest prayers. The afternoon we enter the Old City and continue the last hours of the Savior's life. We visit the Church of St. Anne where the Pools of Bethesda were located. Here Jesus commanded the impotent man to take up his bed and walk. We visit the Convent of the Sisters of Zion, the location of the Antonia fortress where Pilate tried the Savior. Our highlight day concludes at Golgotha and the Garden Tomb where we will have time to ponder the Resurrection and final triumph of Christ.

Day: 18; November 3 – Fly home from Tel Aviv to the U.S.

We couldn't have had a better grand finale to our mission than to follow in the steps of Christ and the apostles as we walked where they had walked.



Garden Tomb

Tom's Talk in Sacrament Meeting - Dec. 15th - on the atonement entitled, "Joyful for us today. . . Agonizing for the Saviour at the time of endurance."

Sitting in the Jerusalem Center in a sacrament meeting on Saturday, for that is when sacrament meeting is held, Saturday, one sees an inspiring sight. The seats of the auditorium slope downward as in a Greek amphitheatre, and as the floor levels out, a huge rectangular wall of glass reveals a sweeping view of the city of Jerusalem on a hillside. The buildings are white in colour, stacked row upon row, layer upon layer, top to bottom and side to side. It is a marvellous sight to behold — this city, rich in biblical history, a city dear to the Jews, Christians and Muslims alike.

Historically, Jerusalem was destroyed twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times. The oldest part of the city was settled around 4,500-3,400 BC making Jerusalem one of the oldest cities in the world.

Leaving the Jerusalem Center, you weave through streets till you arrive at the secluded foot of the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. A tall wall surrounds the garden ensuring isolation from surroundings.

Forty-four days ago I entered the Garden of Gethsemane, entered the Garden Tomb where Christ's body once did lay, and stood beneath Golgotha—enroute home after serving a mission in South Africa. As I entered the Garden of Gethsemane, I walked upon the path that encircles the 8 ancient olive trees growing there. A low rectangular barrier prevents anyone from walking among them.



The original trees at the time of Christ are gone. However, when an olive tree is cut down roots can grow a new tree. The trees there today are around 900 years old. Through regeneration the location of each olive tree in the garden today, could be the location of each tree at the time Jesus was there with his disciples. I gazed at the 8 olive trees and wondered where Jesus may have knelt and prayed. Was it by that tree, that tree, or this tree.

And as storytellers of oral history pass on the tales of past event, likewise I wondered if the roots of the trees at the time of Christ, passed on to the succeeding generations of trees, what the original trees witness and felt, the night Jesus knelt and prayed unto the Father, and assumed the sins of the world.

And as I gazed, studying and pondering the olive trees, this is the story they symbolised to me. The tree trunks are gnarled, with slanting grooves descending the trunk from top to bottom—as though wave after wave of pain grooved the trunk through which great drops of sap oozed and dropped to the ground.

Along side of the grooves, are thick crusts of bark, knotted and buckled, as though forced upward due to extreme agony from within.

The lower boughs outstretched and dangling like drooping arms bearing the weight of tremendous burden, symbolised the cry (Matthew 26:39) "Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." At this moment a scripture comes to mind (D&C 81:5) ". . .Succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees." This is what Jesus needs at this very moment. (Luk 22:43, 44) "And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him." And being in an

agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."



The Atonement of the Saviour in the Garden of Gethsemane culminating on the Cross at Gologtha and "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,"

And the Resurrection of the Saviour culminating in the angels' declaration "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" He is not here but he is risen" are the greatest triumphs of the Saviour on behalf of mankind during his 33 years on earth.

Gazing at the green leaves of the olive trees, as they peacefully rustled in a gentle breeze beneath the blue sky and the radiant sun of Jerusalem, they suggested that final triumph.

People from all over the world visit the Garden of Gethsemane, and undoubtedly, each person may see, think and feel differently, and take from it what impression he or she may. As for me on that day, standing in the Garden of Gethsemane —that is what those special moments with the olive trees suggested to me. . . "

Holy Land Pilgrimage

In 2013 a cry went out from near the great Salt Lake
To join a pilgrimage of sorts, despite some risks to take.
To a land far away of ancient mien, they would fly
and ride and hike,
led by a band of merry souls named Karen and Ron and Mike.
An Aussie came, a Kiwi or two, some Canadians and a Brit

A bunch of Americans, of course, and two sets of sisters, to wit.
They were lawyers and doctors and writers and sages
And realtors and bankers and jacks of all traders.
But in one important aspect they did all agree
To Jerusalem they must go, and the Sea of Galilee.

Turkey

Sadat took the reins when they landed in Turkey
With blue Aegean skies and the ocean not murky.
The lands round about lay in ancient ruins galore,
So they snapped and they clicked till they couldn't anymore.
Then off to the heart of old Constantinople they journeyed,
To view the Blue Mosque and the palace next door, they hurried.
The Spice Market and Grand Bazaar were next on the docket
Where money of all kinds flew out of their pocket.
With leather and rugs and spices in tow,
The fabled isle of Patmos was the next place to go.
They hiked up the hill to the alleged address,
Where ancient John the Beloved put quill to papyrus.
And in his poetical symbolic way
Prepared those who would read it for a far better day.

Jordan

Then with feet turned toward Jerusalem into Jordan they crossed,
And walked ancient Petra which the Nabataeans lost.
The carvers who labored there to worship and memorialize,
Would be rolling in their graves if allowed to realize,
That their beautiful and sacred cherished mausoleum
Was teeming with hawkers and vendors ad nauseum.
The Bedouin tents dot the hills with their camels so touching,
Till up with their diet cokes and cell phones come rushing.

Galilee

From the depths of the Dead to the Galilee Seas
We followed the Jordan midst date palms and trees.
Near the river so verdant we beheld with our eyes
Water so sacred where The Son was baptized.
Tiberius and Carmel, Tabgha, Tel Dan
Were places next seen, where travelled The Man.
From Beautitudes heights, to calm Galilees banks,
We boated in darkness, in awe and with thanks.

Nazareth

Next on to Nazareth, they trekked through the land
And followed His footsteps, and learned of his commands.
Capernaum, so favored, where the Savior did teach,
His disciples to love God, and broaden their reach.
In Bethlehem singing brought joy to the earth,
At Nativities centre, the place of his birth.

Jerusalem

Finally, at Jerusalem, the pilgrims arrived to
See old city and Temple Mount (the place of some strife)
The western walls prayers and Solomon's Porch
To Antonia's cells, sit of Jesus's cruel scourge.
St Annes' church so lovely, which held a surprise
French Mormons heard us singing, that Mike had baptized.
Next, our intrepid travelers, their courage to test,
Donned shorts and some sandals, Hezekiahs tunnel to best.
For the feelings they felt, their hearts barely had room,
As they visited Golgotha and the garden tomb.

Epilogue

With money, time and energy blown,
Soon hearts and feet turned toward home.
In many directions, each one did return
To family and loved ones, for whom they did yearn.
And with them they carried deep in their heart
A greater love for the Savior, that would not depart.
And oft in their thoughts as they lived through a day,
Their minds would wander Jerusalem way.
And oft times for the cool breeze of Galilee yearn
And hoped against hope that someday they'd return.
But maybe some will, and maybe some not,
Yet each of them harbored this singular thought:
That their time in the Holy Land had changed them a lot.

Written by Denise Murray with Assistance from Jay Rush