

From the Desert to the Great Sea: A Comprehensive Study Tour of the Land of the Bible

14 days / 12 nights

The land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end. (Deuteronomy 11:11-12)

The Land of the Bible is part of the Fertile Crescent, bounded by the Mediterranean on the west and the Syrian Desert on the east. In this narrow strip of territory, the bridge between the great civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, traders traveled plying their wares and the great armies of the world marched through. The lives of the peoples who lived in this land – Canaanites and Israelites, Philistines and Samaritans, Greeks and Romans – were shaped by the mountains and valleys, rocky or sandy soils, temperate climates or arid deserts. The images in the Bible that describe God and His relation to His people are grounded in nature and in the realities of daily life close to nature – flinty rock, living water, high places, voices crying out in the desert, fishers of men. By studying maps, digging at archaeological sites, leaving the beaten path and taking the Bible as our guide we will understand why Biblical events took place where they did. We will return with new insights into geography, history and the Word of God.

Day 1: Departure from the USA

Our adventure begins with an overnight flight to Tel Aviv.

Day 2: Arrival in Israel, transfer to Tel-Aviv (D)

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." (Psalm 122:1).

After passport control and baggage claim we will meet our guide, board our bus, and transfer to Tel Aviv.



Day 3: Joppa, Shephela, Dig for a Day (B,D)

Cornelius said: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us." (Acts 10:30-33)

We begin our tour of the Holy Land at the ancient port of Joppa. Here Peter had a vision that led him to convert Cornelius and initiate the church's mission to the Gentiles. We continue by way of the Shephela to Beit Guvrin to join the Dig for a Day Experience, excavating on an ancient tel and crawling through the caves of Maresha. In the late afternoon we drive to Beersheba and our guest house at Kibbutz Mashabei Sadeh. This evening, hear from a kibbutz spokesman on the challenges of raising crops and building a community in the desert.



Day 4: The Negev and the Wilderness of Zin (B,D)

In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The LORD alone led him; no foreign god was with him. (Deuteronomy 32:10-12)

This morning, we drive south to view the stupendous wilderness of Zin. We begin at the ruins of Avdat, the city Aretas the Nabatean built up from a camel station at the time of Paul (see 2 Corinthians 11:32-33). We continue south to the observatory of Mitzpe Ramon to view the eerie lunar landscape of the crater and learn of the geology of the area and the path of the Nabatean Spice Route. Continuing south, we stop at Timna Park, 20 miles north



of Eilat in the Arava Valley. It is a region of startling beauty, including ancient copper mines, odd rock formations, and the remains of a Midianite tent-sanctuary related to that of the exodus. We then drive to the Arava Border with Jordan and cross into Jordan. We pick up our Jordanian bus and guide and drive to the Jordanian Red Sea city of Aqaba and our hotel.

Day 5: Wadi Rum and Petra (B,D)

Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD. (Isaiah 60:6)

Early in the morning, we proceed along the Exodus route to Wadi Rum, made famous by Lawrence of Arabia. This is the heartland of Midian, which played a crucial part in early Israel's faith (Exodus 3: 1-18). We drive up to Petra, in the heart of the Seir Mountains, where Aaron brother of Moses was buried. Walk through the Siq, the main entrance to Petra and the Treasury (the one in the Indiana Jones movie!). We continue past tombs and burial chambers to one of the largest theaters in Jordan, carved into the sandstone mountains. Apparently some sacrificial rituals used to take place here. Then we walk uphill to the Royal Tombs for the view of the lower part of Petra and its Roman remains. Some may want to continue to the church of Petra and the Palace of Pharaoh's Daughter, which is really a Nabatean tomb.

Day 6: King's Highway and the Dead Sea (B,D)

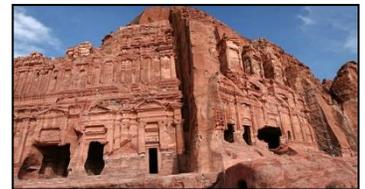
"Please let us pass through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king's highway and not turn to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory." (Numbers 20:17)

This morning we continue on the Exodus route, driving north along the historical King's Highway, passing by the well conserved Crusader city of Kerak. Drive through Wadi Mujeb to Umm al Rassas, whose churches offer more examples of Mosaic art. From there we go to Madaba, with its 6th century mosaic map depicting the Holy Land as Christian pilgrims knew it then. We end the day at Mt. Nebo, from which God showed Moses the Promised Land. We then drive to the salty Dead Sea to float and relax. Dinner and overnight at the hotel on the Dead Sea.

Day 7: Baptismal site, Jericho, Mount Gerizim, Jacob's Well, Sea of Galilee (B,D)

When the LORD your God has brought you into the land you are entering to possess, you are to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses. (Deuteronomy 27:32)

First thing in the morning we take a short drive to the baptismal site of "Bethany beyond the Jordan" (John 1: 28). The recently discovered site, known in Arabic as al-Maghtas, is located at the head of a lush valley just east of the Jordan River. Then we cross over the Allenby Bridge, near Beit Abara, where Joshua, Elijah and Elisha crossed the river. After we finish the border proceedings, we rejoin our bus and guide from the Holy Land and drive to Jericho. We climb Tel Jericho to view the ancient walls and towers, as well as the Mount of Temptation (Luke 3) and Mount Nebo, where Moses looked out over the promised land he could not enter. Continue up the Jordan Valley, turning west into the dry river bed opposite Penuel, where Jacob wrestled with the angel and was renamed 'Israel'. We ascend the winding road to Mount Gerizim, the Hill of Blessing (Deuteronomy 27) for the breathtaking view of Mount Ebal, the hill of curses, Shechem and all of Samaria. Visit the Passover altar, where all 600 Samaritans still gather each year for the Passover sacrifice. Descend to the standing stone of Joshua (Joshua 24:26) and to Jacob's Well at Sychar, where Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman (John 4). Continue through the rugged hill country of Samaria and the En Harod Valley to the Sea of Galilee. Overnight at the Sea of Galilee for three nights.



Day 8: Sea of Galilee: Boat Ride, Mount of Beatitudes, Tabgha, Capernaum, Mount Arbel (B,D)

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". (Matthew 5:1-3).

We begin our day boarding a wooden boat for Ginnosar – sailing in the footsteps of Jesus! We drive to the Mount of Beatitudes, where we view the areas of Jesus' lakeside mission - Galilee and the Decapolis - and reflect on the new commandment Jesus taught here. We then descend the hillside (twenty minutes by foot or by bus) to Tabgha (Heptapagon – Greek for seven springs), visiting the Church of Loaves and Fishes marking Jesus' miraculous feeding of the Five Thousand (Mark 6:30-44) as well as the Church of Mensa Christi, where, after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples on the lakeshore (John 21). After lunch (those who wish can savor “St. Peter's Fish” native to the Sea of Galilee), we proceed to Capernaum to see the house of Peter and the synagogue where Jesus preached and cast out demons (Mark 1). Finally, we drive up to the cliff of Mount Arbel for the eagles' nest view of the Sea of Galilee. The more adventurous may want to hike down the (scary but safe) cliff face, while others return to hotel to bathe in the Sea of Galilee or relax.

Day 9: Upper Jordan Valley: Hazor, Huleh Valley, Caesarea Philippi, Golan Heights, Gergesa, Jordan River baptismal site (B,D)

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:13-16).

Our day begins with a drive to Tel Hazor. From the top, we can appreciate how this 4000-year-old town dominated the trade routes and earned its reputation as "the head of all kingdoms" (Joshua 11:10), before it was destroyed by Joshua. We then stop at the Huleh nature reserve, last remnant of the large swamp around which the Via Maris would detour on its way to Damascus. From the wooden walkway we will see nutria, water buffalo and perhaps wild boars, as well as catfish and pelicans in the lake. Onward to the foothills of Mount Hermon and the headwaters of the Jordan at Banias – Caesarea Philippi, where Peter acknowledged Jesus as Messiah (Matthew 16:13-28). Climb to the cave and the remains of the pagan temples of Roman times. We continue to the top of the Golan Heights, where we will stop atop Mount Bental, a former Israeli military outpost. We will hear of the strategic importance of the Golan in Israel's wars and, looking out on the road to Damascus, be reminded of the conversion of Paul (Acts 9). We descend towards the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee, to the remains of the church at Gergesa in the province of the Decapolis, where Jesus drove the evil spirits out of the possessed man into the swine (Matthew 8:28-34). We end our day with baptism or the renewal of baptismal vows at the site for baptism developed on the upper Jordan River. This evening, we will hear a talk on the current situation in Israel/Palestine and the prospects for peace.

Day 10: Lower Galilee and the Mediterranean Coast: Nazareth, Megiddo, Mount Carmel, Caesarea, Jerusalem (B,D)

"As surely as I live," declares the King, whose name is the LORD Almighty, "one will come who is like Tabor among the mountains, like Carmel by the sea. (Jeremiah 46:18)

Reluctantly, we must take leave of the Sea of Galilee, ascending to the city of Nazareth. We look out from the Hill of Precipitation (Luke 4:14-30). As we look across at Mount Tabor, Mount Carmel, Mount Gilboa, the Hill of Moreh, and the Gilead, we reflect on how Jesus, as a young man in Nazareth, was inspired by the acts of God that occurred here as



he prepared himself for his mission. We can only imagine the clouds of dust raised by the tramp of Roman boots along the Via Maris below! We descend to visit the Church of Mary's Well in town. Next, we cross the Valley of Jezreel to the ancient Har-Megiddo or Ar-mageddon, dominating the vital crossroads where so many battles have taken place. This afternoon, we continue through the narrow pass to the Mediterranean Sea at Caesarea, visiting the aqueduct, the ancient Herodian harbor, the remains of the seaside palace of Pontius Pilate and the theater. With the conversion of Cornelius by St. Paul (Acts 10), this impressive Roman harbor became the beachhead of the Christian mission to the Gentiles. We then continue through the Sharon Plain and ascend to the Holy City of Jerusalem. We catch our first glimpse of the city from Mount Scopus, where your guide will welcome you with a short ceremony of bread and salt (Genesis 14).

Day 11:

Mount of Olives, Ophel Ridge, Mount Zion, City of David, Hezekiah's Tunnel (B,D)

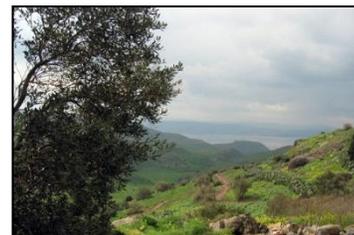
When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and that he intended to make war on Jerusalem, he consulted with his officials and military staff about blocking off the water from the springs outside the city, and they helped him. A large force of men assembled, and they blocked all the springs and the stream that flowed through the land. "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find plenty of water?" (2 Chronicles 32:2-4)

We begin our tour of Jerusalem at the Mount of Olives, with its breath-taking view of the Old City. At first glance we comprehend that Jerusalem has no good natural reason to be a great city – no harbor, no river, and no natural resources. Yet it is the place God has chosen. We descend the traditional Palm Sunday Road, to the Church of Dominus Flevit (Luke 19). As we gaze out on the magnificent walls and domes, we reflect on Jesus' weeping over the city that has yet to know peace. We continue to the Garden of Gethsemane (Aramaic for 'oil press'), meditating on the sorrow of Jesus the night preceding his judgment. We marvel at the ancient olive trees in the garden. Drive to the Ophel Ridge, where Jesus and his disciples must have walked often entering and leaving the Temple. This afternoon, we drive to Mount Zion to visit the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, where Jesus may have been questioned before the High Priest Caiaphas. The terrace offers a magnificent view of the City of David and the Terrapeaon, as well as access to the stepped road to the Mount of Olives of Jesus' day. We continue to the City of David, site of the earliest buildings of Jerusalem. Explore Warren's Shaft and the system of water tunnels. Walk through knee-high water at Hezekiah's Tunnel, built 2,700 years ago to resist the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 32) – an amazing feat of engineering! This evening we have a special treat, walking through underground tunnels to see the remnants of the Temple Mount of Jesus' day including hewn stones weighing over 400 tons!

Day 12: Western Wall, Temple Mount, Herodion, Shepherd's Field, Bethlehem(B,D)

I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11).

We begin at the Western (Wailing) Wall, remnant of the Temple in which Jesus preached and a sacred place of prayer for Jews from all over the world. If we are fortunate, we may see Bar Mitzvah services in progress! We continue to the Temple Mount, viewing the Dome of the Rock, built on Mount Moriah, on the site of the Second Temple. We then cross into the West Bank, traveling south into the Hills of Judea to the fortress of Herodion, built by King Herod as part of his escape network. Climb the spiral path to the cone-shaped top to view the frontier between desert and farmland, and identify the towers of Jerusalem and Bethlehem from afar. Return to Bethlehem to visit the 5th-century Church of the Nativity. Conclude with a stop to shop for the famous olive wood and mother-of-pearl crafts that have been produced by the Christians of Bethlehem for centuries. This evening we will meet with a prominent member of the Palestinian Catholic community, to hear of the struggles of Christians to maintain their faith in difficult times.



Day 13: Old City Ramparts, Bethesda, Holy Sepulcher, Garden Tomb (B,D)

Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. (Psalm 48:12-13)

We conclude our tour of Jerusalem by walking the ramparts from Jaffa Gate to Lions' Gate and "counting her towers" (Psalms 48:12). The four quarters finally fit together as we view magnificent religious monuments and humble courtyards of the Old City. Descending at Lions' Gate, we visit the Pools of Bethesda, where Jesus healed the man paralyzed for 38 years (John 5) and sing in the adjoining Crusader Church of St. Anne. Hymns never sounded this good! We then proceed up the Via Dolorosa to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We conclude our voyage with a communion celebration at Golgotha and the Garden Tomb.

Day 14: Depart for Home (B)

Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies. (Joshua 10:12-13)

We leave Jerusalem, passing Gibeon and descending the Beth-Horon road and view the lush Valley of Ayalon below us. Here, Joshua made the sun stand still in his battle against the Canaanites (Joshua 10:12). We arrive at Ben Gurion airport for our flight home.

© Faith Journeys LLC

