

Our recent midweek meditations have focused on the disciples of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. We have reflected on what perhaps their thought would have been as they remember their friend Jesus. This gave us a reason, to look at some of the places where Jesus ministry took place. And so we had an opportunity to share pictures from a trip to Israel that a group from our community took several years ago. So far, in the context of these meditations you have seen about half of the places that we visited. So, I am going to use the next several Mid-week meditations to tell you the rest of the story. And so we get started along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. In the south section of Tel Aviv is a place called Jaffa. In Biblical times it was called Joppa. Picture is the Joppa Harbor. Joppa is the oldest harbor in the world. In 1000 B.C. Solomon had the materials for his grand temple delivered to this harbor and then they were transferred over land to Jerusalem. Joppa also was a place that Jonah fled to as he avoided the call that was before him, which was to preach to the people of Nineveh. Also in Jaffa is a place called Peter's Church which commemorates the fact that Peter came from Lydia to Joppa and when he arrived he raised Tabitha from the dead.



The next stop on our tour is Caesarea by the sea. It is about 40 miles north of Jaffa along the coast of the Mediterranean. This was a huge city built by King Herod. The city had a huge harbor that was said to accommodate 1000 ships. The footings of the harbor are still visible by air under the waters of the sea. We know Paul was imprisoned for two year in Caesarea, and that he defended his faith in the theater there according to Acts 24-26. The theater still stands and is pictured below. In among the ruins of Caesarea, there is archeological evidence of Pontius Pilate holding the office of governor, the know physical evidence of his place in the Biblical narrative. Also, in Caesarea is an aqueduct that carried water from Mt. Carmel to this large city. The only water in Caesarea was salt water, so this city could not have survived without this aqueduct. And 2000 years later is stand over 90 percent intact.



The next stop is a monastery on the top of Mt. Carmel. A place that commemorates the works of the prophet Elijah. He lived in a time and place where he was associated with one of the kings of Israel who married a Phoenician Princess named Jezebel. She worshiped the God of Baal. So, the king worshiped the God of Baal. Elijah's job was to speak out against the false teachings of the God of Baal and to teach people about the miracle of Yahweh, the God of Abraham. On the top of this monastery there is an excellent view of the Jezreel Valley. The Jezreel Valley in Biblical time provided great agricultural opportunities and also a flat and easy trade route so that goods that come into the sea ports could be carried into the cities throughout the Middle East.



Our next stop is also on the top of Mt. Carmel but about 20 miles further inland. It is a place called Megiddo. The word Megiddo has its roots in the word Armageddon. And so, the Biblical significance of this place is the battles that were fought here. Megiddo is what is known as a Tel. That is a hill that has layers of history that tell a story about the communities that lived there. In Megiddo, between 6000 B.C and 500 B.C. there were 20 different communities that occupied this land. The reason for all of the creation and destruction is that Megiddo is at the narrowest place along the Jezreel Valley. So, the owner of this parcel could control who passed by and gain power and wealth by controlling the trade that happened further inland. That is why it was so contested. The battles fought at Megiddo are mentioned numerous times in the Old Testament. From the top of Megiddo, you can see a village on the other side of the valley called Jenin. This town is where Joseph, the guy with the fancy coat, Jacob's son, was sold into slavery by his brother.



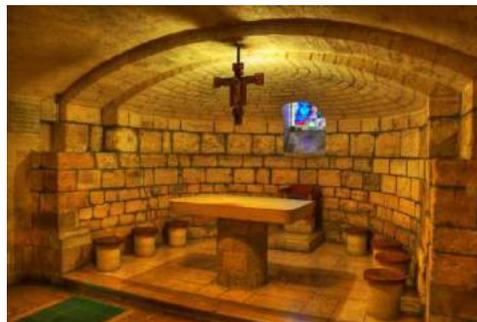
On the east edge of the Jezreel Valley is Mt. Tabor which is the site of the transfiguration of Jesus.



On the Northeast corner of the Jezreel Valley is Nazareth. It is hard to picture first Century Nazareth, because now Nazareth has about 250,000 people. First century Nazareth had about 30 to 50 families. Our next tour stop is in the area of first century Nazareth. Pictured is the Basilica of the Annunciation. This basilica commemorates the angel telling Mary that she was expecting a child. In the lowest place in the basilica is a first century Nazarene home thought to be the home of Mary's family. Another church in Nazareth is Joseph's Church in the lower level of that church is a place called Joseph's workshop which is said to be the home of Joseph's family. And a third church in the area of ancient Nazareth is the church of St. Gabriel. It houses a spring that feeds the well that provided water to the town of Mary and Joseph. On the edge of Nazareth is a hill that is referred to in the gospel of Luke. It is said in that account that Jesus preached in the synagogue and the people of his home town did not accept his teaching, and so they chased him to the top of this hill with the intention of throwing him off. But Jesus escaped and continued to preach the word of God.



Basilica of Annunciation, Nazareth



Joseph's Church Nazareth



St. Gabriel's Church Nazareth



Mt.. of Precipice



Cana

The next stop on our tour is Caesarea Philippi. This is an area way to the north of Israel where Peter made his bold profession of his faith. Jesus asked his disciples who do you say that I am. Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Caesarea Philippi is named, so that it would be distinguished from Caesarea by the Sea. Caesarea is to honor Caesar and Philippi recognizes that one of King Herod's sons was Philip and was ruling over this area. Caesarea Philippi is where the source of the Jordan River is. And is at the foot of Mt. Hermon. And a shrine to the pagan god of Pan is also right in this area.



Our next stop was at the very southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. This place where we stopped is called Yardenit. Yardenit is a place along the Jordan River where people can safely and conveniently celebrate the sacrament of Baptism in the Jordan River. A number of the folks in our group celebrated their baptism on our visit to Yardenit.



After our stop at Yardenit we continued south to Jericho. We saw the Mt. of temptations from just outside of Jericho. The Mt. of Temptations is a mountain peak that commemorates the Biblical narrative that says that Satan a Jesus when to a high mountain and Satan offers all of the kingdoms to Jesus if only Jesus would worship him. Jesus responds by saying that we must worship God and God alone. There was also stretch of the ancient wall of Jericho dating back to Joshua.



About a mile east of Jericho we visited the Biblical site, Bethany beyond the Jordan. This is the place where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Also, at this site is where Joshua would have cross the Jordan river on his way from Mt. Nebo to Jericho in preparation for the Battle of Jericho, the first step in the process of the Canaanites returning to the promised land. When the Canaanites reached the shores of the Jordan at this site, God parted the Jordan River so that Joshua and his armies could cross.



The next stop was a place called Qumran. Qumran was the home of a reclusive sect called the Essenes. This was a sect that John the Baptist was a part of. Qumran is at the very northern tip of the dead sea. In the center of the archaeological remains of Qumran is a room called the Script room. This was a room where a scholar would read a text and a number of scribes would write down what they heard the scholar read. So it was like a first century copy machine. But there is at least on occasion where they would have a reason to have copies of writings of their scripture and about their culture. In the mid to late 60's a.d., Israel rebelled against Rome, and the people of Israel, including Qumran, knew that Rome was coming to make them pay for their rebellion. The people of Qumran knew that Rome was going to destroy their community as they had done in Jerusalem. So, they pack all their important writings and things of their culture into clay pots and put them into caves. 2000 years later in 1947 these clay pots were discovered. The writings are called the Dead Sea Scrolls. And then have given us some of our oldest and most authentic copies of scripture, most of which came from the script room.



From Qumran, we traveled south to the other end of the Dead Sea. The destination was Masada. Masada is a fortress built by King Herod. You can see from the picture it is almost a mile long. On the north end of this mountain fortress is the living quarters, and the southern 2/3 was used for military and agricultural purposes. We will focus on the north end. It has a lot of stone storage bins to stock pile supplies, because, if the fortress was going to be used for protection, that protection would not do much good if the supplies ran out. There was also a luxurious living quarters with everything that a king would need to hole up in defense of what every threat might face him. One part of this living quarters was a luxurious bath house. Pictured is the hot room. Heat would be forced in under the floor and behind the walls as well as in the room itself to keep the king comfortable. The north point of the fortress has three levels. On top a lookout, and the next two levels had two luxurious dining areas with a glorious view of the Dead Sea. Around the edges of the fortress are the remains of Roman encampment areas that were built in about 70 a.d. to house Roman soldiers while they spent three years figuring out how to break into Masada. They finally penetrated the west entrance by building a large ramp to the west entrance and attacking it with a battering ram. When they entered Masada, they found about 1000 people who chose to die rather than be taken into Roman captivity





About half way between Qumran and Masada is Ein Gedi which is simple a desert oasis that is mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament.



Our final stop for today's meditation is a place called St. George's Monastery. As you can see it is a unique building that is built into the mountainside about half way between Jericho and Jerusalem. It is one of the oldest monasteries in the world and has been occupied since about the second century.

Up the hill from the monastery is a place where it is easy to reflect on the Judean wilderness that Jesus wandered in after his baptism. A stone like on in the picture could be the one that Satan challenged Jesus to change into bread if he was hungry. And of course Jesus responded by saying, "Thou Shalt not temp the Lord your God." In the picture of the wilderness, you can see a place where there are some green plants growing. That is where an aqueduct was build, perhaps to provide water to the Monastery. The last thing that we will look at today is the road that passes by St. George's. It is built over the remains of the road that stretched between Jericho and Jerusalem in Jesus time. So, according to scripture, if your walk on this road, you are walking in the footsteps of Jesus. Also, somewhere along this old ancient highway is where the parable of the Good Samaritan happened.



That is the end of the story for today. Next week we will investigate Bethlehem, and another fortress of King Herod, and the birthplace of John the Baptist, So stay tuned until then.

May God Bless you through this difficult time we share.

Pastor Tim