

12 Stops on a Virtual Tour through Israel to Better Understand the Old Testament

Are your times with the Lord growing stale? Would you like to ratchet up your Quiet Times? Put some zest in your Bible study?

Well, for an instant jolt to your spiritual life consider this...a trip to the Holy Land! It will completely change the way you read your Bible.

Instead of thinking, *“This is a long time ago and far, far away,”* you'll think, *“I've been there!”* and *“I remember where that happened!”*

You'll view the Sea of Galilee as a real lake that splashed over your feet. You'll read the story of Jesus' birth and remember what the hills around Bethlehem look like. You'll consider the accounts of Jesus' last week and know that you also walked from the Old City to the Mount of Olives. The story of the Good Samaritan will come alive to you as you walk along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

A journey to Israel also builds your confidence in Scripture. You'll understand as never before that the characters of the Bible were real people who left their mark in history. You'll see buildings Herod built, an inscription that proves Pontius Pilate lived in Judea, dip your toes in the waters of En Gedi where David hid from Saul, and peek in the stalls where money changers worked at the Temple Mount.

Unfortunately you cannot see everything in a single trip, but if you do go to Israel, these are the 12 Old Testament spots you simply must see.

Acre (Judges 1:31, Acts 21:7)

Located just north of Haifa, Acre is an ancient city mentioned by the Pharaohs as far back as 1500 BC, and more “recently” as a medieval port-city for the Crusades, rivaled only by Jerusalem in historical significance and continual habitation. As a natural port, unlike the man-made Caesarea to the south that eventually supplanted it, it was the best harbor on the entire coast of Israel for centuries.

Also known as “Akko,” Acre has had several name changes over the centuries. Named after Egypt's King Ptolemy it became known as Ptolemais and Luke records Ptolemy's namesake city in Acts 21:7 when Paul the Apostle arrived here from Tyre on his third missionary journey. It literally drips with antiquity and grandeur.

Acre sits on the Mediterranean in northern Israel, originally a Canaanite city, although it was ruled by the tribe of Asher when they did not drive out the Canaanites as God commanded. It eventually became a Phoenician trading port where glassmaking was invented and its importance is seen by its spectacular guest book of visitors—Alexander

the Great, Julius Caesar, King Richard the Lionhearted, Marco Polo, St. Francis of Assisi and even Napoleon Bonaparte! In fact, over 20 sunken ships have been found offshore and one of them was from Napoleon's failed siege in 1799! His cannonballs peppered the walled city and are still being found in the waters today.

As Caesarea increased, Acre's role diminished until silt deposits in Caesarea made Acre once more the prime Palestinian port, and it became a favored entry point for the Crusaders en route to Jerusalem. In 1187, Saladin put an end to this practice when he conquered it without a fight. Acre then lapsed into ruins for almost 450 years.

The city changed hands many times over the next 600 years and has become an archeological wonderland of Templar Knight tunnels, Turkish baths, ancient walls, mosques, synagogues, and Crusader era buildings, many under excavation with fabulous dungeons, halls, citadels, and Gothic churches.

Typically overlooked by tourists (a big mistake), recent excavations have revealed an underground Crusader city that rivals Pompeii in its preservation and archaeological importance. Truly a fabulous time travel experience that will take your breath away.

To fully appreciate this ancient fortress, be sure to take a boat ride around the Old City. You may not want to leave this stunning fortress-city, but fight the temptation because there's still plenty more to see.

Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18; Song of Solomon 7:5; Isaiah 35:1-2; Jeremiah 46:18)

This is the site of God's great victory over the prophets of Baal during the ministry of Elijah. Carmel means "God's vineyard" or "God's garden," and you'll know why when you see the lush vegetation on the slopes of this beautiful mountain. What a gorgeous spot for a spiritual reminder of God's power over false religions!

Elijah overcame great odds, loneliness, and isolation to pull off one of the greatest upsets of all time. It was the classic "against all odds" story with 450 to 1 odds that ended up with the victorious cry of his name, which also means, "*The Lord He is God!*"

Along with a stunning statue of Elijah flashing his knife, there is also a spectacular view from the Stella Maris (Star of the Sea) Monastery that takes in the Jezreel Valley, Mount Gilboa, the hills of Galilee, and the home territory of Jesus. This monastery is the home of the Roman Catholic order known as the Carmelites, founded by a French Crusader in the 12th century named St Berthold. He built up a community of hermits who imitated Elijah by living in the surrounding caves with him.

These caves are one of the lesser-known facts about this fertile mountain range. There are a lot of hidden caves that dot the hillside and some of the more popular prehistoric ones are the Tabun Cave, the Skhul Cave, and the El-Wad Cave. The lesser caves are mere slits that open into surprisingly wide grottoes, suitable for hiding a criminal or a

prophet on the run (Amos 9:3). One of the most famous caves is associated with Elijah (there are two of them) and located inside the monastery. To reach Elijah's Grotto, the smaller cave of the two caves and believed to be where he lived, one must descend a steep set of stairs to a small cave with an altar.

Opposite the monastery is a path that leads to the Mediterranean Sea and a second Elijah cave, supposedly where he prepared himself before facing the prophets of Baal. This is where Elisha and the "school of prophets" were trained to take the mantle from Elijah. Compared to the Stella Maris grotto, it is large enough for groups (14 meters) and frequently hosts celebrations like Bar Mitzvahs. Be careful, as the path is very steep. An easier route is available from the base of the mountain by the Maritime Museum (Allenby Street near the Bat-Galim cable car stop).

This lofty experience will flood your mind every time you read this remarkable story of what Elijah went through in his stand for God.

Megiddo or Armageddon (Deuteronomy 17:16; Joshua 12:21; 1 Kings 4:12, 9:15; 2 Kings 9:27, 23:29-30; Revelation 14:20, 16:16, 19:11-20)

The crown jewel of biblical archaeology in Israel, Megiddo, is situated on the site of the world's most renowned battlefield, 35 meters south of Haifa. This most famous tel, which is an archaeological mound of ancient human occupation layers now abandoned, covers the remains of over 23 cities built since 4000 B.C. that sits along the primary roadway, the *Via Maris*. It protected a strategic pass that was considered the key to possession of Canaan.

Megiddo isn't just known for its famous future battle in the Book of Revelation. It has always been important as a critical point of control for military and trade routes, and the scene of several battles that decided the fate of all Asia west of the Euphrates. Over the centuries, Megiddo has been destroyed and rebuilt many times. When you exit the eating and gift shop area you come face to face with a mountain of a tel that was Megiddo. When you see its height, try to imagine what Joshua thought when he saw it rising up before him!

The famous Solomon's Stables that once housed 12,000 horses and 4,000 chariots for war are located here. Despite the attribution to Solomon, some think they may have actually belonged to King Ahab or his father, King Omri. One of the most famous battles took the life of King Josiah in 609 B.C. when he led his troops here in an attempt to stop the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho from joining the crumbling Assyrian army in its last ditch efforts against the Babylonians.

Near the stables is a massive aqueduct that descends 25 meters into solid bedrock via some very steep stairs that you'll want to take slowly. At the bottom is an impressive testimony to the most important part for any city in the desert...water. Below are more stairs that lead into the water tunnels that date 150 years before Hezekiah's Tunnel in

Jerusalem and stretch another 70 meters. During a siege this aqueduct would have been disguised with stones and buried to prevent the enemy from finding it. It is an engineering feat that continues to impress even today.

As ancient as Megiddo is, and for all her centuries of history from Joshua to Revelation, a reminder of her New Testament history came to light in 2005 in surprising fashion. During the excavation of a nearby prison, the earliest church foundation in Israel to date, perhaps in the whole world, was discovered! The well-preserved mosaic floor says, “*to God Jesus Christ as a memorial.*” This is the earliest inscription to Jesus as the Christ ever found in all of Israel, dating to the middle of the 3rd century (before Rome made Christianity legal in 313 A.D.).

Some other inscriptions there name a Roman officer named Gaianus who gave money to build the now famous mosaic floor, which fits with the known historical record that Roman legions were stationed here. Also corroborating the time period is the floor’s design of two fishes, and not a cross, as was the custom in the early Church.

And perhaps most famous of all, John’s Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation has this as the site where at the end of days, the armies of darkness will be defeated by the forces of God Almighty in one final battle. As you climb the heights of Megiddo, try to envision that terrible moment from the spectacular view of the plain below, a view where the end of our world begins.

Gideon's Spring (Judges 7:1-8, Judges 8:10; Leviticus 26:7-8)

Before the time of the Kings, there were Judges in Israel, and one of the most famous of these was the “warrior” Gideon. Although he may not have been much of a warrior when the angel found him hiding in a winepress threshing wheat (Judges 6:11) and making excuses like Moses (Judges 6:13-17), he did eventually fulfill the angel’s greeting as a “mighty warrior.”

Today, at the bottom of Mount Gilboa is Ein Harod, or the Spring of Harod, where Gideon chose his 300 warriors to do battle with the Midianites...selected by how they drank water from the pool. Those who lapped the water like dogs were left behind in historical obscurity.

Before this famous drink, God ordered him to send away most of his 32,000 troops, which may have started the confusion of the Midianites into thinking they were being flanked or surrounded. Whatever the result, this spring is the beginning of a great story.

Is Gideon’s famous victory a story about jars and torches as tactical weapons, or the command benefits of downsizing your army, or maybe a unique water test to create the first real Special Forces?

Actually the answer to Gideon’s success is in Judges 7:2 where God explains that, just

like today, He is the source of Israel's power over impossible odds. In this case, it was 135,000 Midianites who were soundly defeated.

The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.'

A valuable lesson that is still relevant for all of us today.

At the mouth of this same cave, where the spring originates and pours into a beautiful nature reserve, you'll be transported back to that magic moment of God's selection of the 300 warriors. Imagine drinking from the same "testing waters" that Gideon's men drank from so long ago...and it is still possible to do just that. Just be careful to drink with the correct method!

Beth Shan (1 Samuel 31:8-13; 2 Samuel 21:12; Joshua 17:11; Judges 1:27-28; 1 Kings 4:7-12; 7:29, 10:8-12; 1 Chronicles 10:1-10)

Located just south of the Sea of Galilee, and once the center of Egyptian rule in northern Israel as evidenced by statues and inscriptions of Seti I, Ramses II, and Ramses III, Beth Shan is still most famous for where the Philistine's hung King Saul's headless corpse on the walls of the city.

Look at how 1 Samuel 31:8-10 records that sad day:

The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. They cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and they sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news in the temple of their idols and among their people. They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.

Despite that headless horror, one can see why this city's site was so valuable for 6,000 years...she sits in some of the most fertile and well-watered land in all of Israel, at the juncture of the Harod and Jordan Valley trade routes. Even far off Egypt laid claim to this valuable real estate.

In 1928, an Egyptian stone was discovered here that commemorates their military victory over a rebellion of cities during the reign of Seti I (a late Bronze Age Pharaoh). Discoveries are still being made. In 2014, an Egyptian-styled coffin was found with a gold ring inside that had Seti's name on it!

A great city, given originally to the tribe of Manasseh during Joshua's time, the Israelites failed to drive out the Canaanites completely and had to deal with their societal influence. Eventually King Solomon ruled it as part of his kingdom, but it was rebuilt later by Pompey as the capital of the Greco-Roman Decapolis (10 cities) in 63 B.C. and re-named Scythopolis.

Today you can see the fabulous remnants of Rome's glory in the best preserved Roman city in Israel (before the Jewish Revolt in the first century) with a Roman coliseum, colonnaded streets, an amphitheater for 7,000, tiled rooms, paved roadways, ruins of shops, temples, bathhouses, brothels, and the largest tel in the country with the remains of 18 superimposed cities.

These treasured ruins are the result of a massive earthquake that hit the city in 749 A.D. and left the area uninhabited for fear of future quakes. A previous quake hit in 363 A.D. and together they gave us one of the most preserved Roman city ruins in all of Israel, virtually untouched since its demise.

Standing on the main colonnaded "Palladius Street" looking up at the huge tel is an eerie feeling when you think that this city was once ruled by Pharaohs, the administrative center for Solomon's kingdom, and later the imperialistic pleasures of Rome. If you have time, and even if you do not you should make the time, climb to the top of the tel for a magnificent view of the collapsed city. It's simply breathtaking!

After Caesarea, this was the most significant Roman city in Israel and it may have the most significant impact on you as well. A definite top five stop on your tour that should not be missed.

Jericho (Joshua 5:10-6:27; 1 Kings 16:34; Hebrews 11:30)

Jericho is centrally located near the Jordan River and sits between Mount Nebo, the Central Mountains, and the Dead Sea on a perfect trade route. Known as the oldest city in the world, dating to around 8500 B.C., and founded near a fresh water spring, Jericho was the ideal entry point into the Promised Land after the 40 years of desert wandering by the Jews.

The city actually has three sites, but the most famous is the ancient city made famous by Joshua's attack called Tel es-Sultan (a *tel* being layers of civilizations on top of each other, and there are 23 of them on the Jericho site).

Did the walls really come down and the city destroyed by fire as the Bible says? Since 1907, multiple excavation evidences have proven the Bible's amazing story of the walls crashing down in every detail.

Consider these facts:

These multiple digs have revealed collapsed mud brick walls that "fell out" and made a ramp at the base retaining wall that allowed the conquering Israelites to go "up" into the city as the Book of Joshua says (6:20), burned jars of wheat (6:24) corroborated that the harvest had already taken place in the spring (3:15, 5:10-11), and that they didn't plunder this valuable grain as it was left behind as commanded for us to find (6:18).

The large amount of grain unearthed also indicated a short siege, as Joshua had only seven days of encircling the city, and a remarkable discovery since grain was costly and should not have been left at all.

Shards of imported red and black decorated pottery in use during the 15th century B.C. found by Dr. Gerstang in the 1930's also verified the date of the Israelite attack in the Bible's timeline.

According to the German dig in 1907, on the north side of the city where Rahab the Canaanite harlot lived, a portion of the wall remained standing (almost 8 feet), and it even had houses attached to it as Joshua 2:15 says! Both of these are strong evidences to corroborate the Bible's claim of her involvement with the Jewish spies.

Jericho also fell later to the Babylonians and was rebuilt when the Jewish exiles returned to Israel. Nearby is the Sultan's Spring where Elisha sweetened the water (2 Kings 2:19-22) after taking Elijah's place as the prophet of Israel.

Today you can see the ruins of the city, pottery, stairs, the moat, and a round tower. A visit to the oldest city in the world will make a definite impression on your reading of Joshua's first victory in the Promised Land.

The Jordan River (Genesis 13:11; Deuteronomy 31:2; Joshua 3:12-16; 5:1, 2 Kings 2:1-8, 5:1-15; Matthew 3:5-6, 28:18-20; Mark 1:5)

The Jordan River (*Yarden*), a sacred and magical waterway that the Jews famously passed over with Joshua into the Promised Land, means "going down," as it is the lowest river in the world, and drops to almost 1300 feet below sea level!

Cited innumerable times in the Old Testament—as Lot's choice, a boundary for the Promised Land that Moses could not cross, Naaman's healing water, Elijah and Elisha's dry crossing, and even parted miraculously for the 12 Priests to carry the Ark into the Promised Land that broke the spirit of the inhabitants—the Jordan is not to be missed under any circumstance.

It's over 200 miles long and yet very narrow, more like a creek in some parts, gently flowing from Mount Hermon into the Sea of Galilee, and eventually spilling into the Dead Sea. It is a gorgeous journey by kayak, inner tube, or a perfect place to obey Jesus' baptism command near Kibbutz Deganya as many tourists still do today.

If you do decide to get baptized there, you'll need your bathing suit and you have to rent a white robe to participate. The Yardenit Gift Shop will have a DVD of your baptism available immediately afterward (for a small fee). The gift shop also has a large selection of interesting souvenirs from rare ancient coins to Dead Sea creams, books, maps, jewelry, and clothing.

If you choose not to be baptized in the Jordan, you may change your mind when you witness a baptism in these magical waters (be sure to stick around and watch one). It's a very moving experience even as a spectator.

The City of David (2 Samuel 5:4-10; Psalm 122:6, 125:1-2, 137:5-6; Nehemiah 12:37)

The crown jewel of Israel, Jerusalem (the City of Peace) will forever leave an imprint on your heart as the most renowned city ever! The city in Genesis (Salem) where Abraham met Milchezidek, which recent underground excavations have confirmed here, is an ancient marvel steeped in so much history it's really hard to fathom.

Originally captured by David from the Jebusites to become the capital of a united Israel and crowned with Solomon's first Temple, you'll need more than one day to take it all in.

Some of the Old Testament "must see" stops include:

1. The Eastern Gate (Ezekiel 43:1-5)
2. Tomb of David (I Kings 2:10)
3. David's Palace (2 Samuel 5:11)
4. Gihon Spring (1 Kings 1:33, 38; 2 Chronicles 32:30)
5. The Ophel (2 Chronicles 27:3; 33:14; Nehemiah 3:26-27)
6. The Pool of Siloam (2 Kings 20:20)
7. The Temple Mount (Psalm 48:12-14, Genesis 22)
-Western Wall, The Gates, Robinson's Arch, The Tunnels

There are so many sites to see that you should plan your time well, and plan on several days to just hit the main spots. You could easily spend a week in Jerusalem and still miss a lot. The Tower of David and The Citadel are a glorious remnant of Herod's Jerusalem (where Pontius Pilate probably judged Jesus), and the only thing left standing by Titus in 70 A.D. as a monument to the valor of his conquering troops (besides the Wailing Wall).

Seeing the ruins of David's Palace in the Old City will leave you speechless. There are two parts: the Stepped Stone Structure (the Millo) and the Large Stone Structure (2 Samuel 5:7-9, 16:22). Both of these areas are together in the same spot, as one would expect them to be according to Nehemiah.

When Nehemiah returned from Babylon many years after David's reign, after he restored the city wall, he organized a dedication procession. One group went "up the steps of the City of David, on the ascent to the wall, past the House of David, and up to the Water Gate on the east" (Nehemiah 12:37). If Nehemiah is true, then King David's Palace must be at the top of the city's northeastern slope, just above the Stepped Stone Structure that allowed for an ascent to the eastern summit. The site of the Large Stone Structure matches the descriptions of King David's Palace perfectly.

Today the *Museum of History* in the Tower of David is a crucial stop to appreciate Jerusalem's history where time is measured in centuries, not minutes. As you walk about the fortress, various mini-museums are inside the walls tracking Israel's history. You'll see actual water pipes used by the Romans, arrowheads, catapult stones, and a hologram of Solomon's Temple. The view from on top of the main gate gives you one of the best shots of the Temple Mount and the Dome of the Rock. It's worth the climb just for that picture opportunity!

To truly appreciate what was here, visit the model of ancient Jerusalem at *The Holyland Hotel*. This remarkable Second Temple model of the city is 1:50 scale made with authentic construction materials and updated as archaeological digs reveal more of Jerusalem's treasured past from 2,000 years ago. The scope and detail is a stunning reminder of this great edifice.

Hezekiah's Tunnel – Jerusalem (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:1-4, 30-32; Isaiah 8:6, 22:9)

On a hot day, this is a definite relief, going deep underground where cool water still gushes for the visitor with an adventurous spirit... in the dark and in the water! Bring a flashlight to see the pick marks on the wall where the two teams of diggers met, north and south. It will take you about an hour to slosh through this impressive shaft, but well worth the soggy 533-meter trek.

Hezekiah's tunnel, dug in 701 BC during the Assyrian invasion of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, is always wet as it brought water from the Gihon Spring into Jerusalem to the Pool of Siloam, one-third of a mile long, and a primary reason for David's choice (being on a defensible mount also being a major consideration). Although a remarkable walk, it's definitely not a good option for the claustrophobic tourist.

It is a fascinating stroll back in time when water meant life and Hezekiah's tunnel saved the city. The Gihon Spring is also where Solomon was anointed King of Israel, while Adonijah, his brother, was planning to take it from him with his own coronation at En Rogel (1 Kings 1:5). Standing in the very spot where this coronation took place, and you can actually do this as part of the underground dry tunnel walk, is a little unnerving. Like the Dead Sea Scroll discoveries, it all came about because of a youth.

In 1880, a boy discovered an inscription in the Gihon Spring that explained the rare feat of engineering (for that time period) that came at each digging team from opposite directions, "*And when the tunnel was driven through...the hewers wielded the ax, each man toward his fellow...there was heard a man's voice calling to his fellow...the hewers hacked each toward the other, ax against ax, and the water flowed from the spring to the pool, a distance of 1,200 cubits....*"

In 1867, Charles Warren conducted the first excavations of the Temple Mount and is

credited with the discovery of the water shaft and his attribution of it to King Hezekiah. In honor of his work it is also referred to as Warren's Shaft.

If you don't care to get wet, or it's a winter visit, you can take the dry Canaanite Tunnel to the immediate left that was used for irrigation of crops. It's a tight fit, but not difficult at all (even NFL players have gone through easily), especially when you consider all that there is to see underground.

You can walk on the impressive Herodian street (underground) that the Jews used three times a year to go up to the Temple for festivals, most assuredly the same walk Jesus made too. The tunnel helped storm water and sewage get out of the city and eventually leads you up and out to the Western Wall's southern edge. After you come out into the sunshine you're met with huge piles of rubble cast down by the Romans when they destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D.

According to Josephus, these tunnels were the last hiding place of women and children during that destruction, exposed by a captured rebel's confession:

"Every man who showed himself was either killed or captured by the Romans, and then those trapped in the sewers were ferreted out, the ground was torn up, and all who were trapped were killed."

The whole tunnel system exposes an aspect of Jerusalem that leaves you astounded at the engineering skill involved. When you consider what it took to complete the construction above that is so revered, what is beneath it only adds to the marvel of Jerusalem!

Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31:1-6, 38:8; 2 Samuel 1:6, 21)

Don't be intimidated by the rocky climb. It is well worth the view and a great place for a picnic lunch, although it was anything but a picnic when the Philistine army came against Israel. Imagine having to fight on this terrain!

Located on the southeastern edge of the Jezreel Valley, this spot is most noted for where King Saul committed suicide while fighting against the Philistines. Jonathon, David's bosom companion, and King Saul's two other sons, also died here while battling with him against the Philistines:

"Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchishua, the sons of Saul. The battle pressed hard upon Saul, and the archers found him; and he was badly wounded by the archers."

"Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and make sport of me."

"But his armor-bearer would not; for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword, and fell upon it. And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword, and died with him. Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together (1 Samuel 31:1-6)."

As a result of their tragic death, David was devastated and cursed the mountain in his famous "lament of the bow" (2 Samuel 1:21):

"Mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, may no showers fall on your terraced fields. For there the shield of the mighty was despised, the shield of Saul—no longer rubbed with oil."

Today the area is known for the beautiful array of wild flowers that adorn the mountain in spring and the incredible Jezreel Valley vistas below. Along with many birdwatchers, you can see the Harod Valley's ponds and wildlife. On a clear day, the site believed to be where Jesus was transfigured can also be seen (Mount Tabor).

A stop here would make for a relaxing time of meditation between the rush to try and see everything on your itinerary. Take some time to pause on this beautiful mountain and prayerfully reflect on all that you've seen so far in Israel. As the Psalmist reminds us in Psalm 46:10, most likely written when Hezekiah was besieged by Sennacherib's army, *"Be still, and know that I am God."*

Joppa (Joshua 19:46; Jonah 1:3; 2 Chronicles 2:16; Ezra 3:7)

The biblical town of Joppa is known today as Jaffa and located near Tel Aviv, about 30 miles south of Caesarea, on the gorgeous Mediterranean Sea. It is one of the oldest harbors in use, dating back to Jonah when he fled from the Lord, but only small fishing boats use it now. As a key port of entry for over 4,000 years, timbers for Solomon's Temple were brought from Phoenicia and taken to Jerusalem from here. A walk to the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem is only a good stretch of the legs, about three days.

The Apostle Peter also raised Tabitha from the dead here (Acts 9:36-42), and had his vision of unclean animals at Simon the Tanner's House that led him to Cornelius' home, and his ultimate salvation as the first Gentile convert (Acts 10:1-8).

Today there is a church to commemorate Peter's vision (Acts 10:12-17) that opened up the gospel to the Gentiles, and opened itself up to Napoleon Bonaparte as a guest in 1799. Originally built in 1654 on the foundation of a medieval fortress, it was destroyed twice before being re-opened in 1894.

That may all seem old to us, but when you consider that Egypt ruled Canaan after the famous Megiddo Battle (1456 B.C.), and that the city is referenced in the ancient Amarna tablets, Jaffa's true age becomes more apparent as recent digs suggest.

During the 1950's, an archaeological dig in Old Jaffa added to her history when Pharaoh's Fortress and a gate structure were revealed. Large fragments of this gate honoring Ramses II can be seen in the Jaffa Museum. The continuing dig also divulged her end came in a fiery destruction, evidenced by over two-dozen burnt cedar timbers that were uncovered. The timbers are the oldest ever unearthed and suggested the structure was at least a two-story building. A religious structure known as the Lion Temple (a lion's skull was discovered there) was also excavated, but her rituals are still being sorted out, most likely a mix of Egyptian and Canaanite beliefs.

Other important discoveries at the Pharaoh's Fortress dig included a scarab of Amenhotep III, charred seeds (chick peas, barley, olive pits, and grape seeds), arrowheads, a spearhead, decorative ivory pieces, ceramic vessels, a bronze gate hinge, and deer antlers.

If time permits, be sure to visit the Flea Market for the old-time haggling experience (Proverbs 20:14). Some extra-special souvenirs can be found here that you won't see in other commercial shops.

Masada (Joshua 15:62; 1 Samuel 23:29, 24:1ff)

Welcome to Herod the Great's fortress in the Judean desert! Hopefully you enjoyed the cable car ride to the summit, the marvelous view of the Dead Sea, and are in good enough shape to bravely walk back down the trail (an option). After seeing these astounding ruins, you have to wonder why such a powerful king needed a fortress like Masada.

According to Josephus, the captured Jewish rebel who sided with the Romans and the only historical source for Masada, Herod had two great fears:

"It is said that Herod prepared this fortress as a refuge in time of need against two dangers which he always envisaged: the one, that the Jewish people might depose him and put a king from the royal house which had reigned before him on the throne; and the second, even worse than the first, the fear of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt...."

The first fear happened (long after his death) in 66 A.D. when a party of Zealots overthrew the Roman garrison at Masada and helped trigger the Great Revolt against Rome. It lasted for almost seven years (66-73), highlighted by Titus' destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Situated almost 200 feet above sea level on a mountain area that is nearly 2,000 feet high and covers nearly 23 acres, almost 1,000 Jewish revolutionaries made their final stand against Rome. Thanks to some serious excavations you can see it all as if it happened today, envisioning their holdout amidst the palaces Herod had built for himself as a refuge.

The end of the Roman siege came in April of 73 A.D. The Romans under Silva built a

wall around Masada and a 375-foot siege ramp to access the Jewish fighters, which took months to construct, and with the help of Jewish slaves rolled a massive battering ram against the gates.

After several years, knowing the end was inevitable, rather than die as Roman slaves, these Jewish rebels chose to commit mass suicide. Of the 960 Zealots, only two women and five children survived to tell the tale of Masada to the 15,000 bewildered soldiers.

These digs from the Great Revolt period reveal a treasure trove of how life was in Israel in 70-ish A.D. Below Masada are the excavations of the Roman camps that had up to 10,000 soldiers in them and the colossal siege ramp. Some discovery highlights in the fortress above are Herod's 15 storerooms that were filled with jars of provisions to withstand any siege, as well as weapons, a synagogue with rare coins, multiple copies of Old Testament scriptures hidden in the floor, multiple cisterns, and Herod's intricate thermal bathhouses (very impressive).

As you walk amongst the ruins, note the black line that runs along most of the existing walls. Below the line are the original walls left standing by the Romans; above the black line are the reconstructed walls from the original rubble.

Nearby are the famous Qumran Caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered between 1946 and 1956, as well as Ein Gedi where David fled from King Saul and cut off Saul's robe. Both of these sites are too close not to visit while at Masada, so be sure to make time to see them.

A visit to the Holy land will change your spiritual life and bring the Bible to life like never before. It is an investment in your spiritual growth that will transform how what you read on the page is now a real place, embedded in your head and heart forever. You'll go home wondering why you didn't come here sooner.

Shalom!