

Accents from Abroad

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Part 1

Through the kindness of a Christian friend our Lord made it possible for me during the latter half of May to visit three different Bible lands, the major portion of the two-week having been spent in Israel. This article, and at least one more to follow, is only an attempt on the part of a novice to share some impressions which have been gleaned on this my first sojourn to Italy, Greece, and the Holy Land. Our first concern will be with the prominent cities of Rome, Italy; and Athens, Greece. In our second article we will center our attention on Israel.

Rome

The city of Rome, Italy's capital, has a population today of almost 3,000,000. It was the ancient center of the Roman Republic and Empire, and the home of the Roman Catholic Church. The city is located in western Italy on the banks of the Tiber River, and for centuries it was the leading city in Europe. The Romans call it the "Eternal City," and to this day it remains the living symbol of European civilization.

Rome was originally built on seven hills and was traditionally believed to have been founded in 753 B.C. by Romulus, the wolf-weaned twin of Remus. The seven hills are all on the east side of the Tiber River, while present-day Rome consists of three major areas: Old Rome, New Rome, and the Vatican City. The city witnessed the founding of the Roman Republic, the rule of Caesar and Augustus, the beginning of Christianity, the coronation of Charlemagne, the Renaissance the counter-reformation, Italian statehood, the rise and fall

of Mussolini, and the foundation of a new republic. Mussolini's regime was responsible for the restoration of many ancient historical sites. Rome was bombed several times during World War II, but on September 11, 1943, it was declared an "open city." While the city is chiefly a centre of culture, government, administration, and education, and not important industrially, there is no question but what it is one of the most magnificent cities in the world today. As Lord Byron once said, "Sooner or later everybody comes to Rome."

Rome is mentioned in the Bible only nine times in the Books of Acts, Romans, and 2 Timothy, although in the Old Testament Daniel's vision clearly identifies it as the empire of "iron" (Dan. 2:31-43), this last great world empire having left its visible influence and impact not only throughout Europe, but on the land of Palestine as well.

Visits to St. Peter's Basilica, the Pantheon, the Roman Forum the Colosseum, the Vatican Museum and the magnificent Sistine Chapel all left lasting impressions, and not the least of them the realization of Michelangelo's great and varied genius to which the Sistine Chapel, among other things, so eloquently attests. Yet I am reminded of the fact that men like Michelangelo were paid with the indulgence money squeezed from German peasants, and that it was in protest against such injustices that Martin Luther started on the road that led to the Protestant Reformation.

Nevertheless, to me personally the real highlight of my memorable visit to Rome was seeing the Mamertine Prison from which the Apostle Paul wrote 2 Timothy.

Some think that was from this same infamous prison that he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, but I personally do not share this conviction. At any rate, the upper chamber, or prison proper, was in ancient times connected to the lower dungeon only by a hole in the rock floor, through which prisoners were thrown down to await death by starvation or at the hands of an executioner in the charnel house below. Writers always described this prison with horror, one writer having said that it was “exceeding dark, unsavory, and able to craze any man’s senses.” The only exit from the wretched confines of the lower dungeon was a drain leading to the Cloaca Maxima which was used for the disposal of the corpses.

Two other things deserve special note, each quite in contrast to the other. First, there was a visit to one of the early burial places of Christians, commonly known as the catacombs, the most significant one being beneath the Basilica of Saint Sebastian. It is estimated that the length of the catacombs is anywhere from 350 to 600 miles with some 1,175,000 to 4,000,000 Christians having been buried in them. Second, just a few hours before leaving Rome, Roy Gustafson took my friend and me in a taxi to a large Jesuit church called “Jesus’ Church.” Believe me, the taxi ride in itself was a traumatic experience! Inside the church, among other items of interest, is a large statue of the Virgin Mary. Two other figures represent Luther and Calvin in hell with Mary’s foot on the former. A fourth figure represents an angel tearing up the writings of both men, the entire representation being called “The Faith pulls down the Heresy.”

Most of us are familiar with historian Edward Gibbon's five basic causes for the collapse and destruction of the Roman Empire, but perhaps you are not familiar with his causes for the success of early Christianity, which are as follows:

1. The inflexible and ... intolerant zeal of the Christians.
2. The doctrine of a future life.
3. The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive Church.
4. The pure and austere morals of the Christians.
5. The union and discipline of the Christian republic, which gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Roman Empire.

A study of Revelation 17 and 18 reminds us that Rome is by no means the "Eternal City." On the contrary, some day she will be utterly destroyed along with every vestige of her diabolical religious system, and this, within a twenty-four-hour period (cf. Rev. 18:8).

As we take leave of Rome let us continue to prayerfully remember those true servants of Christ who are seeking to bear a faithful witness in such an extremely difficult place.

Athens

On the afternoon of May 17th we left Rome for the honey-colored city of Athens, Greece, having arrived in the early evening. Athens is the ancient fountainhead of Western culture, rising above the Plain of Attica between the Cephissus and Ilissus rivers. Almost 2,500 years ago the city witnessed a burst of artistic creativity that profoundly influenced the Western world in its

cultural development, and this heritage lives on amidst the glass and steel of modern Athens. The city was named for the goddess Athena, and a good Bible Dictionary or encyclopedia will give you the details of its ancient history.

Modern Athens began in 1834 when it was proclaimed the capital of the independent Kingdom of Greece. Otto I, the first king of the Hellenes, rebuilt the city and it has grown steadily ever since, its present population being around 1,000,000. Athens is the center of Greek industry, producing textiles, steel, machine tools, armaments, and ships. One impression of the city is that it either has, or shortly will have, a serious pollution of its atmosphere, particularly in its large industrial section.

On the morning of May 18th we journeyed about 55 miles by bus to the ruins of New Testament Corinth. The drive west from Athens is quite picturesque with rugged mountains to the north and the Saronic Gulf to the south. It was easy to envision the Apostle Paul making the same trip, although his mode of travel would have been a far cry from our comfortable air-conditioned bus (Acts 18:1). Nearing the ruins of ancient Corinth we stopped at the famous Corinthian Canal cut through a narrow isthmus which links the Saronic Gulf with the Corinthian Gulf. This project had been thought of long before Paul's day, Julius Caesar having considered it and Nero having employed Jewish slaves for the task in an attempt to cut through the isthmus in 66 A.D. Nevertheless, it was not until 1893 that the French completed the canal which is 3.9 miles long, 69 feet wide, 260 feet at its highest point, and having a water depth of 23 feet.

It is easy to understand why Corinth occupied such a strategic geographical location, situated as it was at the southern extremity of the isthmus and at the northern foot of the impregnable Acrocorinthus, a rugged mountain rising almost 2,000 feet above sea level. While Athens was a city of culture, Corinth was a city of corruption. Among the ruins can be seen remnants of the Lechaean Road, the Temple of Apollo with its splendid Doric columns, the market place, shops, and an elevated platform or bema linked with the market place, undoubtedly the very spot where Paul faced his Jewish accusers in the presence of Gallio (Acts 18:12-17). It was here that I was called on to read 1 Corinthians 13 to our tour group, and after visiting the site of the ancient city one cannot help but have a fuller appreciation of Paul's letters to the Corinthians.

Upon our return to Athens, and a break for lunch, the afternoon was spent visiting the famous Acropolis, the sacred hills of classical times which dominates the city. Atop the 512-foot high Acropolis are magnificent temples built during the reign of Pericles in the 5th century B.C. The most beautiful of these is the Parthenon, dedicated to the goddess Athena. Also on the Acropolis are the Propylaea (the imposing entrance to the hill), the Temple of Athena Victorious, and the Erechtheum with its monumental porch supported by the Caryatids — columns in the shape of women.

To me the highlight of the entire afternoon was my scramble up Mars Hill, known also as Areopagus (i.e., the hill of Ares, god of war), where the Athenian court customarily met.

It is a bare rocky place, some 377 feet high, and located just a little north-west of the Acropolis. This was the place of Paul's address in Acts 17:22-31. Having had a pocket Bible with me, I first read the words of the passage on my own and was then asked to read it aloud as several stood around and listened.

It should be noted that today throughout Greece there is token religious freedom, but the Greek Orthodox Church holds the vast majority of the people with a firm grip, making it quite difficult for the conducting of any evangelical witness. A good work is carried on in Athens with an outstanding Christian lawyer as one of the main leaders, but the way is by no means easy for those who take a firm stand for Jesus Christ.

Our two-day visit in Athens went all too quickly, but the best was yet to be. Our TWA 747 jet flight was four hours late arriving as a result of a bomb scare in Rome, but at last we found ourselves aboard and "bound for the Promised Land" (as someone had appropriately written on large letters on his suitcase).

Part 2

This is the second instalment of the account of the visit of our Associate Editor to the Middle East. How quickly matters change there! No peace on earth, and no good will toward fellowmen forms a descriptive parody. God is over all blessed forever! He alone can make wars to cease.

It was the first time I had ever been frisked, but this is now a routine procedure at the Athens Airport, as well as at many airports throughout the world. Finally, after our four-hour delay, we were airborne around 6:40 p.m. on Saturday, May 19th. Our TWA 747 jet soon reached its cruising altitude as we headed out over the Mediterranean Sea, bound for Tel Aviv. It was a great feeling to know we were actually on our way to Israel, and for the majority of our tour group members the dream of some day visiting His Land would soon come true.

A Hebrew Hippie

Much of the almost two-hour flight was taken up in conversation with — for want of a better description — a “Hebrew hippie.” He was returning home to Tel Aviv after almost two years of communal living in various parts of the world, having “wintered” in the Canary Islands. His outward appearance was typical of “hippies” the world over, coupled with the fact that his “Right Guard” had worn off and he had a case of halitosis. Nevertheless, I found him to be an intelligent young man and able to speak English fairly well. I sensed the circumstances as a God-given opportunity to

talk to him about the Scriptures, the claims of Messiah, and the meaning of life.

A professed atheist, he readily listened to the witness which our Lord enabled me to give, and I can only play that our conversation might at least have been a link in a chain of witness that may some day bring him to the place of confessing faith in Christ. It was evident that his mind was by no means closed to the truth.

Tel Aviv

An unusual sight greeted us as we made our approach to Lod Airport just outside Tel Aviv. Hundreds of bonfires were burning all over the city, their flickering, torch-like orange-coloured appearance making an unforgettable scene, like something out of a fairy tale book. Later, the only information I could obtain as to the significance of the bonfires was that it was a celebration of some event dating back to the time of the Maccabees.

About sixty-five years ago the area now occupied by Tel Aviv was nothing but sand dunes. Today it is the cultural and commercial centre of Israel, being the largest city in the land, Tel Aviv - Jaffa having a combined population of 348,000. Israel's present population is a little over 3,000,000, while the total land area of the nation would fit into Lake Erie with room to spare. Nevertheless, it is one of the world's seven self-sustaining nations.

A town by the name of Tel Aviv (Tel-Abib) existed in ancient Babylon (now Iraq), and Ezekiel mentions it in his prophecy. "Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib" (Ezek. 3:15).

Netanya

That evening, having passed through customs with relative ease and little delay (it would not be that way upon leaving Israel!), we travelled 21 miles north by bus to the relatively new resort town of Netanya. The Sabbath had ended and upon entering the main part of town the scene was like a little “Times Square.” People were milling about everywhere, all in a seemingly festive mood, and most of them young people. By midnight we were at last settled in the King Solomon Hotel located on the shores of the Mediterranean.

It was wonderful to actually be in His Land and with so much to look forward to in the days ahead.

Caesarea

Early Sunday morning we proceeded northward about 10 miles to Caesarea, named in honor of Caesar Augustus, Emperor of Rome (27 B.C. - 14 A.D.). The city was founded by Herod the Great about 22 B.C., and for nearly 500 years it was the capital of the Romans in the Holy Land. It was the home of Philip the Evangelist (Acts 8:40, 21:8), and it was here that Herod Agrippa I was smitten by an angel and eaten of worms (Acts 12:20-23). Caesarea was also the home of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert of whom we have record in the Book of Acts (Acts 10). The Apostle Paul visited the city many times (Acts 9:30; 18:22; 21:8, 16), having been imprisoned there for two years (Acts 24:27), and as a prisoner sailed from Caesarea for Rome (Acts 27:1). It was the centre of a Jewish revolt in 66 A.D. and was destroyed by the Moslems in 1291.

Of particular interest among the ruins of Caesarea is the second century Roman amphitheatre located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea south of the Crusader wall. Its ruins were unearthed in 1961 and amidst the debris there was found a fragment of a Roman inscription which mentions Emperor Tiberius and Pontius Pilate. It is the first archaeological evidence of the famed procurator of Judea under whose rule (26-36 A.D.) Christ was crucified.

The fortifications, towers, aqueducts and piers of Caesarea are today mute testimonies of the might and power of the Roman Empire. The second century high-level aqueducts, typical of Roman influence, conducted sweet water from the mountain springs to Caesarea.

Haifa

From Caesarea we again travelled northward some 30 miles to Haifa, Israel's third largest city (pop. 217,000). Haifa itself has no Biblical significance, but today it is a vital nerve centre of Israel possessing the country's main port, its heaviest industries, including oil refineries, and its best engineering institutes. It is also the world centre of the Bahai faith. The city is situated at the meeting place of mountain, valley, and sea, having the best sheltered bay on Israel's Mediterranean coast. Haifa enjoys a temperate and healthy climate, and to me it unfolded some of the most magnificent scenery to be found in the Land.

Mount Carmel (Carmel meaning "vineyard of God") overlooks Haifa and, of course, the Prophet Elijah spent much of his time there, the mount having been associated with many important events in his life.

Megiddo

After a delicious and welcome lunch we journeyed over the Mount Carmel Range to Megiddo, 17 miles southeast of Haifa. The mound known as Tell-et-Mutesellim is the site of the ancient fortress city of Megiddo. It was of great strategic importance because of its location at the opening of a narrow pass on the Great Road which connected Gaza and Damascus. It has been the site of at least twenty cities in the last 3,500 years, having been one of Solomon's fortified chariot cities (1 Kings 9:15; 10:26-27; 2 Chron. 1:14-17; 9:25).

From the ridge of the tell (i.e., mound) we could look out over the Y-shaped Valley of Armageddon (also called the Valley of Jezreel and Esdraelon) which will be the scene of the final battle between the forces of good and evil at the end of the Great Tribulation and at the time of Christ's Second Advent. It is Israel's largest valley stretching from Haifa to the Jordan Valley, being 30 miles long and 12 miles across at its widest point. It is presently the breadbasket of the nation. Although there was a bit of haze in the sky, coupled with a brisk wind, the weather was ideal and the scene exquisitely peaceful.

Megiddo has an extensive Biblical history and is first mentioned in Joshua 12:21. Considerable archeological work has been done there, including the excavation of Solomon's stables, which at one time housed at least 450 horses and about 150 chariots. On the eastern part of the mound at the bottom of the excavations are the remnants of a edge of the mound, dating back to about the 19th century B.C.

The most interesting thing at Megiddo, at least to me personally, was the water tunnel at the western edge of the mound, dating back to the 12th century B.C. The ancient engineers sank a 120-foot shaft, and from the bottom of the shaft they bored a tunnel through the rock for 300 feet to a spring outside the city. In this way water could be brought into the city even in times of siege, the spring's opening having been hidden by a wall and a covering of earth so that besieging forces would not notice it.

Our Christian Arab guide, Elijah Subeh, gave me part of a polished stone arrowhead which he found that afternoon, a token of some past conflict at Megiddo. The same is now a meaningful keepsake on a bookshelf in my home.

The Well of Harod

Of further significance that afternoon was a visit to the Well of Harod, the spring, or well, beside which Gideon and his men encamped (Judges 7:1). It was here that the Lord reduced his army to the 300 men who lapped the water, putting their hand to their mouth, and with these chosen men Gideon routed the mighty Midianite army that night.

My picture was taken at the spring, lapping the water much as Gideon's 300 must have done. Please be assured, however, that I have no illusions that I would have been among the 300 in Judges 7.

The spring, which flows from under a large rock formation, is located in the area of Mount Gilboa about four miles southeast of the city of Jezreel. Many that afternoon, particularly young people, were enjoying the

park and swimming pool which are linked with the spring, the modern name of the spring being Ain Jalud.

Galilee

From the Well of Harod we travelled northeast, passing near Nazareth and Mount Tabor, both of which were visible in the distance. There was a brief glimpse of the Jordan River and then at last the fulfilment of our keenly anticipated view of the Sea of Galilee and its beautiful blue waters. After getting settled in our hotel in Tiberias, the Galei Kinnereth, which rests on the shores of the sea, we made our way northward to the YMCA site overlooking the water. There in that beautiful setting, midst the fading light of day, Mr. Roy W. Gustafson spoke to us from John 6, having centred his helpful devotional message on the young boy and his lunch of five barley loaves and two small fish.

Following a late dinner my Christian friend and I enjoyed a relaxed stroll along a dark sidewalk which led south from the hotel and parallel with the gently lapping waters of the Sea of Galilee. We had been assured that it was perfectly safe to walk there late at night, so we thoroughly enjoyed at that hour what we could not have done safely at a similar hour over 6,000 miles away in Detroit.

Our first full day in His Land was at an end, but it would never be forgotten.

Tiberias is the capital of Galilee, the latter being the most northerly of Israel's three provinces, Samaria and Judah being the other two. Tiberias is about 2,000 years old and owes its beginning and name to Herod Antipas, who in 20 A.D. began to build on the ruins of an ancient

town called Rakkat, having named the new city in honor of Tiberias, the Emperor of Rome.

The old city lies along the lake-shore, while the new city stretches across the hillside above.

Located 108 miles north of Jerusalem (via Jenin), the Sea of Galilee, meaning "ring," is 13 miles long, 8 miles wide, 80-150 feet deep, 685 feet below sea level, 64 square miles, and 32 miles in circumference. In the Scriptures it is also called the "Sea of Chinnereth," from the name of a town on its shores and meaning "harp-shaped," relating no doubt to the sea's actual shape (Num. 34:11; Deut. 3:17; Josh. 12:3; 13:27); the "Lake of Gennesaret" (Luke 5:1), after the fertile plain on its northwest shore; and the "Sea of Tiberias" (John 6:1, 23; 21:1). Ancient rabbis used to say, "Jehovah hath created seven seas, but the Sea of Gennesaret is His delight."

Monday morning we crossed the Sea of Galilee by motor launch to Capernaum. In the distance we could see the Mount of Beatitudes, as well as men fishing with nets, much as they did in Christ's day. Biblical events too numerous to recount here are connected with both the sea and the city. Capernaum was our Lords' Galilean headquarters for two years, while the ruins of the city are a mute reminder of its downfall as predicted by Christ (Luke 10:12-15), more of His miracles having been performed there than in any other city.

From Capernaum we journeyed north to the Golan Heights overlooking the Valley of Hula. At one time this valley was only a swampy lake, but now, like so much of Israel, it has been transformed into one of the most productive agricultural centres in the nation, the drainage of the lake having been completed in 1957. It

was not until the Six Day War (June 1967), however, that the area could be developed. The Israeli Army stormed the Golan Heights, ousted the Syrian forces from their strongly fortified positions and ended the long suffering endured by the settlers who in Israel's northern section had been subjected to heavy bombardment and shelling by the Syrians. We need not wonder why Israel's Prime Minister, Mrs. Golda Meir, has firmly stated that the Israelis would never give up the Golan Heights.

Remnants of the Crusaders, as well as the Six Day War, are prevalent in the area, and we were warned not to stray from the road because of the thousands of "live" land mines still in the district. Along the road our bus was stopped at an Israeli machine gun outpost in order to obtain clearance through an area in which the army was engaged in target practice.

We had a good view of Mount Hermon and the Hermon Range. Having seen both Mount Hermon and Mount Tabour, I am thoroughly convinced that our Lord's Transfiguration must have taken place on the former.

Our next stop was Banyas, or Caesarea-Philippi, one of the four sources of the Jordan River, and the place where Peter uttered his great confession and Christ spoke prophetically of the Church (Matt. 16:13-18).

We enjoyed lunch at the Kibbutz Ayelet Hashachar (see the title of Psa. 22), a kibbutz being a communal or collective village and governed by the general assembly of all members. It was here that I was introduced to a young outstanding Hebrew physician, Dr. Brian Pockroy, who is presently serving a tour of duty in the Israeli Army. He is a personal friend of my missionary uncle, Leslie S. Rainey.

From there we went to the Mount of Beatitudes, then)passed south through Magdala and back to Tiberias. It had been an unseasonably warm day, the afternoon temperature having been close to 100 degrees, so a swim in the Sea of Galilee in the late afternoon proved delightfully refreshing.

That evening we had many Jewish listeners as on a large back patio of the hotel Roy Gustafson spoke about the nation Israel and its place in history, or perhaps I should say its place in HIS-story.

Part 3

Our Associate Editor, W. Ross Rainey, in this number concludes the interesting and helpful account of his visit to the Holy Land.

Journey to Jerusalem

Early Tuesday morning we left Tiberias to go up to Jerusalem (wherever you are in Israel you always speak of going “up” to Jerusalem). On the way we saw such places as Cana of Galilee, Nazareth, the Tell of Dothan (where Joseph was sold into slavery by his brethren), Samaria (rich in Biblical history), Shechem, Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, Jacob’s Well at Sychar, Shiloh, Bethel, Mizpah, Ramah, Gibeah, even a distant glimpse of the tiny secluded village where Sirhan Sirhan was born (the young Arab who murdered Sen. Robert F. Kennedy), and at last the Holy City.

A visitor is not long in Israel but that he realizes it is a land of contrasts. One especially vivid memory of that morning serves as a choice case in point. Riding along toward Samaria, we watched Israeli fighter jets engaged in practice bombing. The bombing site was about half a mile from the highway and in the midst of farm land. People were busy working in the fields much as their ancestors had done 2,000 years ago and paid absolutely no attention to the swooping jets and bursts of orange fire and dense black smoke from the bomb hits.

Jerusalem

Believe it or not, there is no decent eating place between Tiberias and Jerusalem, so after getting settled

at the five-star Intercontinental Hotel we enjoyed a late lunch with a magnificent panoramic view of the Holy City from the main dining-room where we were seated. The hotel is located on the Mount of Olives and not only overlooks the city but the Garden of Gethsemane and the Kidron Valley as well.

In the late afternoon we visited an Arab shop in New Jerusalem, then went to another shop in Old Jerusalem (the walled city), having made our entrance on foot through the busy Jaffa Gate.

Weeks could be spent in and around Old and New Jerusalem, and though by then you might be exhausted you would have by no means exhausted all there is to see.

The day was climaxed by our usual evening Bible study, Roy Gustafson having helpfully directed our thoughts to key Scriptures which show the centrality and cruciality of Jerusalem as the world's centre in the past, present and future.

Wednesday morning we headed south out of New Jerusalem, past Rachel's Tomb, the Valley of Eschol from which Moses' twelve spies brought fruit, and on to Hebron in the Plains of Mamre, the place where God promised Abraham an heir and the Land itself (Gen. 15:1-18). Following a brief Bible reading at the Well of Abraham and a visit to a shop where souvenirs of Hebron glassware, and other items, could be purchased, we travelled over a remote road through the Judean Hills toward the Herodium, site of palace and burial place of Herod the Great. Enroute we were able to visit a Bedouin tent and see firsthand how these desert nomads live. At this spot I was able to get a picture of

the younger brother of the man who discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls. At another location we witnessed sheep-washing just prior to their being shorn.

From the vantage point of the Herodium we could see the location of the Cave of Adullam, as well as Bethlehem. Passing by the Shepherd's Fields we visited Bethlehem, most of our time having been spent at the fortress-like Church of the Nativity, built over the traditional spot where Christ was born.

That afternoon we visited the Hebrew University and the Shrine of the Book which, among other things, houses the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. Leaving the campus we had a quick look at the outside of the Knesset Parliament building and the Knesset Menora (a seven-branched candelabrum), a symbol of the State of Israel and a gift from the British Parliament. Returning to New Jerusalem we stopped to see a marvelous model of the city itself, the Judean Hills forming a picturesque background. On a scale of 1 to 50 it showed us a Jerusalem as it was during the time of Christ.

In our evening Bible study Roy Gustafson presented a splendid message on key prophecies regarding our Lord Jesus Christ, having traced his lineage and ultimate birthplace from the "seed" prophecy of Genesis 3:15 to the city prophecy of Micah 5:2.

Thursday morning we walked through the Dung Gate to the remaining remnant of the Western Wall of Herod's temple, better known as the Wailing Wall. From there we went to the edge of the Eastern Wall which faces the Kidron Valley, Gethsemane, and the Mount of Olives. From the top of the wall we looked down on Absalom's Pillar, the Bnei Hezir Tombs, and the Tomb of Zacharias.

We then proceeded to the elaborate and colorful Dome of the Rock, also referred to erroneously as the Mosque of Omar, the Moslem temple built over Mount Moriah (see Gen. 22). Next on our agenda was the Via Dolorosa and a guided tour through the remain of the Antonia Fortress built by Herod the Great in honor of his friend Mark Antony, and taken to be the traditional site of Christ's condemnation by Pontius Pilate. Before returning to our hotel we took time for a glimpse of the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-9).

In the afternoon we visited Gordon's Calvary and the Garden Tomb located north of the Damascus Gate outside the Old City. Here we were genuinely blessed through a stirring message given by a young Dutchman who is one of the caretakers in charge of the area. He knows and loves Jesus Christ, having been saved several years ago at a Billy Graham Crusade meeting, and carries on a vital ministry in relation to the thousands who visit this popular site annually. Just below Gordon's Calvary is a bus terminal with the usual hubbub and honking characteristic of such a place. Midst the beautiful and meaningful setting of the Garden Tomb I found the noise of the outside world quite annoying, having been reminded afresh of the world's crass indifference to Christ, even at the very site of Calvary.

That evening we enjoyed seeing the film "His Land." However, with all due respect to the film, there is absolutely no substitute for being right there in His Land itself.

On the Jericho Road

Early Friday morning we headed down to Jericho and the Dead Sea. The journey is indeed down, for while

Jerusalem is 2,550 feet above sea level, Jericho is 853 feet below sea level and the Dead Sea — the lowest spot on earth — 1,292 feet below sea level. On the way we stopped at the traditional site of the Good Samaritan Inn (Luke 10:25-37), my main memory of the place being a cranky camel which put up quite a fuss when his master made him get up and down to accommodate the desires of a few who wished to have their picture taken while sitting on his humpy back.

With the heat increasing by the hour we visited Old and New Testament Jericho, the Brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:1-6) which overlooks the Valley of the Shadow of Death (Psa. 23:4), and the Spring of Elisha (2 Kings 2:18-22). From near the Spring of Elisha we saw some of the excavated ruins of Old Testament Jericho, as well as having a good view of the Mount of Temptation in the distance (Luke 4:1).

Nearby is Qumran, a communal settlement of the Essenes, an ascetic and monastic brotherhood among the Jews from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D. who practiced a community of goods and rigorous discipline, and who for the most part shunned the company of women. As the Roman armies advanced, they hid their writings in caves, where they remained hidden until 1947. Way in the distance, on a rocky, rugged, steep mountainside, we could see the entrance of the cave in which the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, one of the most important finds of Biblical archeology. From there we went down to the Dead Sea itself, an incalculably rich body of water 47 miles long, 11 miles wide, with an area of 394 square miles. It is estimated that six-and-one-half million tons of water flow into the

Dead Sea daily, with almost the same amount evaporated each day.

Tiredness, a touch of the “bug,” and the unseasonably warm weather commenced to take their toll of our tour group with half or more of our number absenting themselves from the afternoon’s activities and unfortunately missing some interesting and important places. On our agenda was the Garden of Gethsemane, Bethany (Luke 10:38-42), the Gihon Spring (where Solomon was crowned king and located at the entrance to the 1,700-foot Hezekiah’s Tunnel, an S-shaped tunnel which was cut out under Mount Ophel from Gihon to the Pool of Siloam about 800 B.C.), the Pool of Siloam (John 9:7; Luke 13:4), and the House of Caiphas, the traditional site where Christ was brought before Caiphas from the Garden of Gethsemane.

The only snake I saw while in Israel was in Gethsemane — it was dead. I couldn’t help but think about that Old Serpent, the Devil, and his past presence not only in the Garden of Gethsemane, but in the Garden of Eden as well (Gen. 3).

That evening marked our last nightly Bible study session, Roy Gustafson having directed our thoughts to Hebrews 10:12, from which text and context he effectively stressed precious Gospel truths.

Leisure Hours

Saturday, May 26th, was a free day, a time to rest, to get a little washing done, to wander through the Old City, to shop for a few gifts, or perhaps to return to a meaningful spot. In the morning I cut across an old Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives just below our

hotel to the Panorama Hotel in order to fulfill my Uncle Les' request to look up an old Arab acquaintance. My mission having been successfully completed, I took an early afternoon opportunity to share taxi expense to the New City, getting out near the Damascus Gate. After making a couple of purchases in an Arab shop and enjoying a relaxed, interesting conversation with one of the shopkeepers, I returned for a brief meditative visit to the Garden Tomb and Gordon's Calvary.

Packing, enjoying the pleasant evening air, and getting a last look at the distant lights of the Old and New City marked the evening hours.

Homeward Bound

Sunday morning we left Jerusalem the Golden for the Village of Emmaus with a glimpse of Gibeah (Josh. 9:1-27; 1 Kings 3:3-9; 1 Chron. 16:39; 21:29) and the Valley of Aijalon (Josh. 10:1-14). Being the first day of the week it was fitting that Roy Gustafson shared with us the account of Luke 24 at a beautiful spot on the actual road to Emmaus. Following this moving and meaningful experience, we returned to the New City for an Arab meal with all the trimmings. The only drawback to me was that it was food we were not used to and, consequently, much of it was wasted — something I don't like to see anywhere, and no less so in that part of the world where many do not have sufficient food. From there we continued toward the sea coast to the twin cities of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, then to Lod Airport.

It was at the airport that the usual Israeli efficiency went awry. The customs authorities were understaffed in handling the necessary strict regulations governing all departing people and flights. The result? Many of us left

Israel with a rather unpleasant memory, the only real hitch during our entire visit. I was almost four hours getting through customs, having spent most of that time standing and waiting. As a result I was just about the last person to board our SAS (Scandinavian Airlines) DC-8 jet flight to Copenhagen, only to be told as I stepped aboard that the coach section was full and I'd have to ride first-class. I thought, What a pity! Imentrance to the 1,700-foot Hezekiah's spirit revived, and for the first time in tens of thousands of miles air travel I enjoyed a lavish meal in first-class with minitablecloth, armchair comfort, foam rubber footrest, and the courteous efficient service of both a steward and stewardess.

Our four-hour flight took us over Rhodes, part of the west coast of Turkey, Thessalonica, Vienna, Prague, East Berlin, and finally into Copenhagen. The next morning there was only time for a brief visit to the famous Tivoli Gardens, then to the airport for our SAS flight to New York. Our late arrival into Kennedy Airport caused us to miss our Detroit connection, so it was not until 10:00 p.m. that we arrived back in the Motor City, the day having panned out to be the longest of my life — 29 hours! It was great to be safely home again — there's no place like it! Nevertheless, looking back over the entire trip, it had been in many ways the most meaningful two weeks of my life and I was filled, as I am today, with a deep sense of gratitude to our Lord for the joy, privilege and blessing of visiting His Land, and for all His "goodness and mercy" along the way.

In closing, there are two words of advice I'd like to pass along: (1) If you plan to visit Israel, make sure you go with experienced leadership and the kind that will

emphasize visits to Biblical sites. (2) If at all possible, don't wait until the sometimes sickly sixties, the sagging seventies, or the aching eighties to make the trip. The tour I was on was advertised as a "Holiday in the Holy Land." To be sure, the trip was a fabulous change, but it was no holiday. All of us returned home weary, and some were just plain exhausted, so the younger you can go the better.

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psa.122:6).

Shaloam.