

## Israel Trip Log – Pastor Mike -- 2018

### Friday 11/9/18 – 1:30 AM

- Met at church without sleep and caught 2 shuttles to LAX (left 2 AM)
- Arrived LAX before 4 AM and met up with Valley Christian Church from Chino and began checking in
  - Their pastor is also Pastor Mike — two Pastor Mikes — not at all confusing!
- Took off 7:30 AM for Toronto on Air Canada – met up with Ron Pease’s brother Ricky & sister Linda to make 17 from Lighthouse; 15 from Chino: 32 total (one of ours – Allie Garcia — got sick and cancelled the week before we left)
- Left 4:50 PM for 10 hour flight to Tel Aviv on huge Boeing 787-9 (9 seats across in 3 rows of 3)
- Saw the smoke from the fire burning around Malibu from our airplane window – didn’t know yet how bad
- Tried to sleep but impossible – very uncomfortable on plane -- we were SO tired!

### Sat. 11/10/18 — 10:15 AM

- Arrived at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv — lost the day of Friday in flight
- Took 2 hours for hundreds of people to clear customs — not enough workers on the Sabbath — very frustrating to just stand there that long after 2 days with no sleep, but people held their patience and we got through — Israeli customs not challenging at all like we had heard
- Met our tour guide Ziv in the airport who took us to our large, nice motor coach after getting our luggage
- Headed for Caesarea in Galilee while Ziv gave us the lay of the land
- Travelled past Jaffa (Joppa) where Peter raised Dorcas from the dead and where he had the vision to include Gentiles in the faith
- Struck with how similar the land looked to CA — coastal flowers & trees — palms, Bougainvillea, sandy scrub — saw some on 4-wheelers on the dunes and buildings similar to ours, but fewer
- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lives in Caesarea (his formal residence is in Jerusalem) — he has the best restaurant in his home, Ziv says, but we were not invited
- Thought after 2 days without sleep we were heading to our hotel, but we started right in with a visit to a Roman theater in Caesarea — our first visit — VERY impressive!
  - Here plays & music were put on (not gladiators or Christian persecution — that happened in amphitheatres — which means 2 theaters — oval — which were few — while regular theaters are a half-oval and were many
  - There was also a large 2<sup>nd</sup> theater by the sea for horse racing, etc.
  - And a large pool at the sea’s edge built by Herod the Great
  - Here Peter baptized Cornelius & co., the first Gentile converts to the Christian faith
  - Quite a complex of seaside structures, the only Mediterranean seaside site we’ll see on this trip
- From there we travelled to Mt. Carmel
  - We stopped on Mt. Carmel at a little restaurant run by a Druze family — Druze are very hospitable and live in small communities
  - Had Falafel (fried chickpeas, like hush puppies) and schnitzel — flattened, fried chicken breast — with pita bread and many kinds of cabbage (many colors, marinated, pickled, etc).
  - Then we drove to the top of Mt. Carmel where there is a Carmelite monastery with a statue of Elijah vanquishing the prophets of Baal [pic]\*
  - At the top of the monastery we had an incredible view of the Kishon Valley and the Valley of Jezreel (that includes Armageddon) to the East; and a view of the setting sun over Caesarea and the Mediterranean Sea to the West
- Got into our hotel on the shore of the Sea of Galilee: Hotel Ma’agan Holiday Village — small villas run by a local kibbutz — already dark
  - Most of us were dazed and too tired to eat dinner, so we got our rooms, unpacked, showered for the first time in 2 days, and went to bed early

### Sunday, 11/11/18

- Up at 6 AM, got ready and had breakfast at 7 AM: eggs, pancakes (no bacon or sausage in Israel!), yogurt, and lots of types of breads — croissants, cream cheese, even salmon and other fish
- So calm and scenic by the Sea of Galilee, which is not as big as imagined
- Took our bus up into the Golan Heights on the East Bank of Israel, right by the fenced border with Jordan
  - Up above the Sea of Galilee, we stood on the slopes of the Golan Heights in the area of the Decapolis, where Jesus cast out demons from the man of the Land of the Gadarenes
  - I was blessed to read the story to our group from the Gospel of Mark
  - We could so graphically visualize the pigs screaming down the steep slopes right into the Galilean Sea, where they drowned — so real and easy to visualize
  - And last night on Mt. Carmel, we saw a large wild boar run across the road right in front of us — maybe the descendent of one that got away!
- We stopped at the ruins of the small village of Chorazim (Chorazin in the Bible) where Jesus worked miracles, but the people did not believe: “Woe to you, Chorazin...”
- Then stopped at Tabgha, where Jesus is believed to have fed the 5,000 (an ancient mosaic celebrates this miracle with fish symbols)
- Then to the Mt. of the Beatitudes, where Catholic nuns built a beautiful chapel with each of the beatitudes in Latin on stained glass windows — previously visited by the Pope
  - Solemn, quiet inside — no talking — as opposed to thousands immediately outside in groups being narrated by guides, singing, praying
  - I was honored to read and comment on the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount on the plaza outside, overlooking the Sea of Galilee (the other Pastor Mike and I took turns reading related Scriptures at each site)
  - There were dozens of large motor coaches like ours competing for space, coming and going — very busy
- Then to Capernaum, Jesus’s home base for His ministry, where Peter & John and other disciples lived
  - It was a large city in Jesus’s day, now in ruins, perhaps because of Jesus’ judgment on Capernaum for lack of belief
  - We saw the ruins of a Byzantine church built over the site claimed to be Peter’s house, where Jesus and the disciples stayed — and now a modern church with fish motifs has been built over that
  - Most impressive was the substantial ruins of the synagogue of Capernaum, where Jesus taught
  - An unusual feeling, a sobering impression, came over us as we sat on the stone benches of the large synagogue where Jesus attended and taught, overlooking the Sea of Galilee
  - Also sitting under the shady trees thinking of Jesus and His disciples here 2000 years ago
  - And we saw a full-size statue of Peter, who was called here by Jesus to leave his nets and boats and come follow Him
- Then on to Tiberius (the Sea of Galilee is also called in the Bible the Sea of Tiberius), where we ate at a restaurant by the sea: pita bread, relishes, roasted potatoes, and chicken or tilapia (which I had) — also called St. Peter’s fish — delicious — with dates for dessert
- We left and headed for Magdala, a large town in Jesus’ day, where Mary Magdalene was from (Mary of Magdala)
  - There we took a boat out onto the Sea of Galilee for an hour & a half or so — one of our group’s favorite activities — where we had silent prayer out on the lake in wonderful peace, away from the tourist crowds
  - There I told the story of Jesus stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee
  - Then we danced & sang Hava Nagila (Let us Rejoice), and one of the Valley C.C. Couples decided to get married, while on our boat (in the future) — very exciting
  - We got off the boat and went into the Ancient Boat Museum where we saw a film and an actual wooden boat from Jesus’ time period on display — 2000 years old!
  - Andrea and the others bought things in the big gift shop there; I got a fish to hang in my office and remind me of Galilee, and that Christ called me, too, to be a fisher of men
- We rode in the dark to the ruins of Magdala and saw the synagogue and town ruins from Jesus’ day
  - We were thrilled to meet up with Sara Chay, who runs Jerusalem Tours with her husband and brother Benji — who also came to meet & greet us
- We returned to our hotel and ate a big buffet dinner of chicken, meatballs, etc. with delicious desserts — chocolate and white cakes, etc. — then to bed early to get up early for a big day tomorrow

Monday, 11/12/18

- Got up at 5:30 AM, got ready, and had a big delicious breakfast of scrambled eggs, cereal, breads, etc. at our hotel
- Took our bus to Cana of Galilee, the site of Jesus' first miracle
- Ziv, our guide, mentioned that couples who want to renew their wedding vows may do so in or near the wedding chapel there, and that there is wine for a toast
  - He asked if we can drink wine, and I said "Some do, some don't" — so he announced "I guess there is no limit!"
  - Everyone laughed as I said, "That's not what I said!"
  - Ziv is very funny... he said "Translation problems"
- Cana — mostly Arab, very different feel, like a foreign city (we previously felt very much at home in Galilee)
  - MANY couples from many groups are being married or re-married here, many dressed in white silk clothes (many Catholic, many from Philippines)
  - We did a renewal of vows for many in our group, starting with Valley Christian Church
  - Pastor Mike Spradlin did ours last, as Andrea and I renewed our vows 40 years later where Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding feast
  - Then I renewed vows for Mike & Gail Nicholson, Ron & Nenita Pease (whom I married last year), blessed the marriage for Warren & Linda Hand, then renewed vows for Mike & Carla Spradlin
  - Then a toast in a small Cana gift shop with some bad-tasting wine — Ziv called it Knocker wine, because it will give you a headache like being knocked in the head
- On to Nazareth in Galilee, which is under Palestinian control — 2/3 Arab, 1/3 Christian
  - Very busy, larger city with lots of traffic — surprising, since it was just a small village in Jesus' time
  - Went to a recreated Nazareth Village, led by a wonderful young Christian man, the son of a Pastor in the Church of Christ in Nazareth [pic]\*
  - He gave a very inspirational talk in the only full-scale recreated synagogue — like the message Jesus gave in the Nazareth synagogue long ago
  - We decided to have each church group give \$10/family to buy a brick from each church (\$120 each) to help fund the planned expansion of this ministry
  - Then we toured a huge Catholic Church — The Basilica of the Annunciation — built over a Byzantine church from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which was built over what may have been Mary's home where an angel announced that she would bear the Messiah
  - Interesting, esp. the art contributed from around the world, but not my favorite thing — lots of icons, veneration of Mary, etc.
  - Ziv bought us all a piece of Nazareth Baklava, which we ate at the town fountain — delicious — could really taste the honey
  - Then Ziv gave each of us a small jar of local honey
  - Very tricky getting through the crazy traffic in Nazareth with our big motor coach, but our driver Walid did a great job! (He is an Israeli Arab — not quite the same thing as a Palestinian — older, very distinguished, usually patient, but could get worked up honking the horn, etc.)
- On to Megiddo in the Valley of Jezreel for lunch and a tour
  - Another lunch on the road of schnitzel chicken sandwiches in Pita bread with cucumber, tomato, and cabbage, plus fries and a cold Coke!
  - Then we climbed the hill of Mt. Megiddo, a tell (mound) from many ancient cities there, with a breath-taking view of the Valley of Jezreel — the site of many battles, as recent as WWI
  - We saw the gates to the ancient city on the hill, the ruins of horse stables and a palace and homes on the top, and looked over the expansive Valley of Jezreel and thought about Revelation and the final battle to come here, while the other Pastor Mike read from Revelation
  - Then we climbed down many, many stone steps to a secret tunnel to an outside spring — their source of water, hidden from their enemies
  - The lights went out, so it was completely dark, unsettling to some in our group, except for the light from our cell phones
  - Then we went up some steep steps and out into the fresh air and sunlight

- And so our journey to ‘Armageddon (Mt. Megiddo) came to an end, as we drove out through the Valley of ‘Yis Reel (Jezreel)
- Everywhere you go, you see road signs to places we’ve read in the Bible: Capernaum, Tiberius, Nazareth, Megiddo, Mt. Gilboa, Mt. Tabor, etc. — all in Hebrew, Arabic, and English — because the land is filled with people of all 3 languages: Jews, Arabs and other Muslims, and Christians
- We ended the day at Yardenit on the Jordan River where hundreds of people were being baptized/re-baptized
  - at sunset
  - Striking seeing people of many nationalities in white robes in the Jordan River
  - You pay \$12 and they give you a white robe, a towel, and a plastic bag for your wet things and a large changing room & showers for many people
  - Many groups were baptizing, singing Amazing Grace and other songs
  - I baptized 9 people from our group, including Ricky Pease — Ron’s brother — for the 1<sup>st</sup> time
  - And 8 of our group I re-baptized: Ann Beavers, Lorrea Crane, Mike & Gail Nicholson, Ron & Nenita Pease, Linda Thomas (Ron’s sister), and Marilyn Wolk — as it was getting dark (they had lights)
  - Then Valley C.C. had 11 re-baptisms, including Pastor Mike’s wife Carla
  - We celebrated by singing “Victory in Jesus” — what a day!
  - We started the day with the renewal of marriage vows and ended with the renewal of our marriage to Christ
- Back to our hotel for dinner and early to bed (9 PM)

Tuesday – 11/13/18

- Packed up and checked out of our hotel by the Sea of Galilee and headed for the Dead Sea at 7:30 AM
- Toured Bethshean, where King Saul’s body was hung after battling the Philistines
  - A major city of over 100,000 with a theater, an amphitheater, paved roads, a bathhouse, steam room, shops, brothel, homes — all in ruins, but much in good enough shape or re-construction to visualize a large, bustling city
  - Marble columns, mosaic floors, marble floors
  - A very pagan feeling, although there were some Christian features
  - We sat in the theater as Carla sang “Amazing Grace” without the need for any amplification — amazing acoustics in the half round
- On the bus ride to the Dead Sea, our guide asked if we could modify our plans to skip Beersheba to avoid rockets being fired into southern Israel from Gaza
  - We reluctantly agreed, although we would have liked to see it, but safety first
  - Security fences line the left side of the road all along the Jordan River, from Galilee to the Dead Sea
  - On the other side of the River we are looking at the nation of Jordan — their only agricultural area along the Jordan River
  - All this reminds us of the tentative situation for Israel with their neighbors all around
  - While at peace with Jordan, next year their 25-year treaty for Israel to lease some land will not be renewed, to Israel’s dismay
- We stopped at Jericho, which is under Palestinian control — very trashy, very pushy vendors
  - Jericho is the oldest and lowest city on earth
  - We saw camels for the first time on this trip — you could pose on one for \$, but none of us did because we had a real camel ride planned later
  - Went in store, which was full of all kinds of nuts and trinkets, scarves, etc.
  - I bought 4 little decorated camels for my 4 granddaughters
  - They were too rude to haggle, and one was insulting to me while I was dealing with another — not good salesmanship!
  - Glad to leave and get back into Israeli territory
- Went to Qumran and saw caves used by Essene community and to store the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947ff
  - Very hot and had pesky flies, but fascinating to see the caves of the most important biblical archeological find of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
  - We tried to eat lunch in a large restaurant there, but the lines were way too long, so we left
- The Dead Sea is over 1300 ft. below Sea Level — the lowest place on earth

- The Dead Sea is very long & narrow — longer than I thought — huge
- We went to Masada National Park and had lunch, then took a cable car up to the top, which was very impressive — Herod's personal stronghold in case of attack, and where 900 Jewish zealots committed suicide in AD 72 rather than be taken by the Romans — "Never again!" the current Israeli soldiers swear.
- Got to hotel by the Dead Sea — very nice! The Leonardo
  - Many of us spent an hour at their spa, going in an indoor pool heated with Dead Sea water — really makes you float!
  - And then spent time in an indoor heated pool (regular water) with strong jets and a splashing fountain — very relaxing and refreshing after a long day walking and riding on the bus
  - Dinner was great at the huge hotel restaurant, with so many buffet areas with so many items (didn't care for the lamb) and great desserts 😊
  - Tired after a long day so we turned in for our only night here

### Wednesday — 11/14/18

- Had a nice breakfast of cereal, omelet, hot tea
- Walked down to the Dead Sea and went floating in the water with about 15 from our 2 groups on a very clean, soft salt beach with white salt on the bottom all the way out 25 yards or so
  - Very soft on your feet and pleasant to rub all over your body (but avoid your eyes)
  - And of course very buoyant and mild temperature — a little cool at first, then fine
  - Andrea floated with me holding her up
  - After half an hour or so, we showered at the beach and walked with Ann & Ruth up the hill to our hotel
  - This was our only free morning, so we went back to the spa to warm up in the 2 heated pools
  - All the ladies left early to go get showered & ready to check out, and I worked out at their gym for ½ hour — felt good — only opportunity to work out
- Boarded bus @ 11:30 AM and headed for Jerusalem, where it is supposed to be rainy and cooler for the next few days
  - Saw some Ibex (mountain goats) along the way in a very dry, rocky expanse
- Went to alternate baptismal site on the Jordan River (Qaser El-Yahud) which was similar to other site, but less crowded and muddier water (further downstream) and more natural-looking, with lots of greenery in and around the area — except for the signs warning not to cross the river into Jordan
- Went to a place called Genesis Land that everyone really enjoyed
  - We all got to go on a camel ride down a dirt road to a Bedouin-style tent re-creating part of the story of Abraham (how he came to this land) and a delicious meal around low tables (the rest got to ride the camels back)
- Went to Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, which is under Palestinian control
  - It rained hard on the walk from our bus to the church and got us all wet
  - Waited in a huge line for close to 2 hours to spend 2 minutes in a very small, very ornate room — where you stick your head in 2 at a time to see/touch a silver star for 2 seconds while people fuss at you to hurry up
  - I was moved more by touching the side of the manger where Jesus was said to have been laid
  - And looking up, there was a large star on the ceiling above
  - Long wait, high expectations, over quickly
- Then we went shopping after a nerve wracking bus ride through the crowded streets of Bethlehem
  - We were taken to a private shopping spree in a very nice, but very expensive store run by Christians — Bethlehem Nativity Souvenirs — where our people spent a lot of money — some thousands of \$ for nice jewelry, nice carvings made out of olive wood, etc.
  - After plying our people with wine and an expensive gift to me and the other pastor — a really nice olive wood carving of Jesus, the Good Shepherd
  - Then the owner gave me a beautiful wooden cross of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with free shipping and other gifts for our group — very generous
  - Disappointed to find out later that some in our group were subject to high pressure from the salespeople, so I told our guide — felt a little like our group got fleeced, as many of these same items we found later for much less

- But they could not have been nicer or more generous, not only to me and the other pastor, but to our people — one of our group bought some very expensive jewelry and other items but their credit card would not go through, so the owner let her take them on her word that she would pay as soon as she got home — amazing
- Got to our new hotel in Jerusalem — the Ibis — for a late buffet dinner and late to bed
  - Hotel and rooms nice but much smaller, and hard to get around our room with suitcases on the floor

#### Thursday — 11/15/18

- Got ready, had breakfast, and off by bus to the Mt. of Olives — many churches and thousands of Jewish graves overlooking the Old City and the Temple Mount — many want to be buried facing Jerusalem
  - We went in several ornate churches and saw an ancient olive grove with trees up to 2,000 years old, but nothing was as impressive as looking down on the Holy City from the Mt. of Olives as Jesus did when He wept over the city's coming rejection of Him and its destruction just 40 years later
  - I was impressed by the condition of the walls around the old city, even though partially restored over time — looked impressive like the walls around a castle, with arrow notches all around
  - And the Dome of the Rock, with its golden dome, really stood out right where the Jewish temple used to be
  - We walked down into the Kidron Valley and were given hospitality in a tent with couches and given hot tea or coffee while someone played the flute
- It began to rain, so we made it back to the bus and went to Mt. Zion (sometimes called Jerusalem, but also a spot within Jerusalem) and then to the site of the Upper Room
- Then to King David's tomb — although not the likely site, as it was outside the Old City walls, and King David was likely buried within the city walls
  - Many ultra-orthodox Jewish men were praying and reading Scripture in a small room just outside David's tomb room
  - Women were separated to an adjoining room where they saw the other half of the same possible tomb of David, and all men had to put on a hat or a loaner yarmulke
- Had lunch at the Holocaust Museum (Yad Vashem), then toured the museum's expansive memorial grounds, then the very detailed, very graphic museum inside — very sad — so much death and misery
  - Took the whole afternoon — would have preferred more Bible sites or to be less rushed at the sites we visited, but we wanted to pay our respects in deference to our guide
- Came back to hotel, had dinner, then walked at night with Ziv through the streets of Jerusalem and entered the Old City through its impressive walls at the Jaffa Gate and saw the most amazing light show of Jerusalem through the ages — not random lights, but beautiful, colorful animation of the city's varied history (The Night Spectacular)
  - Everyone loved it (about 22 of us went)
  - The bus came to pick us up, then we went to our rooms -- everyone tired — we have an early morning and long day tomorrow, which ends at 4 PM for the Sabbath (the whole nation shuts down for 24 hours: sundown Friday to sundown Sat., announced by siren)

#### Friday — 11/16/18

- Had breakfast at 6:30 AM and left on bus at 7:30 for the Old City
  - We walked to the Jerusalem Archeological Park and it began to rain — saw a rainbow
  - Walked to the Western Wall of the former temple on a different section than the prayer side, separated by a large stone wall/arch (Ziv says they don't like to call it the Wailing Wall)
  - We went around the corner to the South side of the temple's walls and went up many stone steps and had a beautiful view of the city below
  - Saw a miqveh — a Jewish ritual bath for cleansing
  - Many of the original stones in the temple wall are HUGE — the smallest ones weigh tons, and the biggest ones are hard to conceive how they moved and set them
  - We walked along the pavement by the Western wall of the temple where Jesus actually walked [pic]\*
  - Went through underground tunnel that runs along the Western Wall — very long and claustrophobic for some in our group

- We came out and went to the Prayer Side of the Western Wall (men on the left, women on the right), where some ultra-orthodox Jews were praying — I wrote a prayer thanking God for providing the temple long ago and Christ today, who makes us His temple, to provide a way of atonement for our sins and access to God
- I put my written prayer in one of the cracks between the stones high above our head (Ziv said the rabbis clean them out regularly and bury them, not destroy them, so our prayers always stay in Jerusalem)
- Saw the Pool of Bethesda area (now dry) and went into a beautiful, simple church — the Basilica of St. Anne — where tourists including us took turns singing a cappella — the acoustics were incredible — a nice time of worship
- We walked some of the Via Dolorosa and the Stations of the Cross
  - We went underground and saw the street level in Jesus' time where He is said to have been scourged
- We walked quickly through the very narrow, crowded streets of the old City as Shabbat (the Sabbath) was about to begin at sundown (about 4:10 PM)
  - All stores close, all work stops across the whole country
- But first we had a nice lunch paid for by Valley C.C. at a restaurant off the street of the Old City
- We went into the enormous (spread out) Church of the Holy Sepulcher where a few of us stood in a HUGE line for an hour to touch the supposed rock of Golgotha where Jesus was crucified (through a small hole in the dark under a table in this huge church built over it — could feel, but couldn't see it) — like the Church of the Nativity, with much pomp and iconic relics, with Jesus displayed behind in elaborate silver artwork — very different from the real event in the Bible — candles burning, people from many countries kneeling and kissing the icons and revering Mary
  - Most of us did not wait in another long line to go into a room where Jesus was supposedly buried — also covered over by the church and decorations
  - So much artwork, icons, religious trappings — nothing like our humble Lord — I far prefer seeing the sites outside than the ones turned into ornate religious displays
- We got to go shopping in the crowded streets of the old city in a more reasonable store with many of the same items/kinds of items as the expensive store in Bethlehem
  - Got many gifts for family & friends
- Saw a few more sites below ground level and left the old city as Shabbat was about to begin
- We took our bus back to the hotel and have a couple of hours until dinner
  - Then nothing tonight, as everything is closed
  - Had dinner at hotel and played cards with Ann & Ruth (Ruth lost to her chagrin)
  - Nice, relaxed evening

#### Saturday — 11/17/18

- Started at Church of St. Peter Galicanto (the Rooster) where Jesus was denied by Peter at the house of Caiaphas
  - Saw underground cave where Jesus may have been held in jail for trial (or it may have been a stable)
  - Saw stone steps outside where Jesus was brought up from Gethsemane for trial
- Went to Israel Museum where we saw a fantastic outdoor scale model of the old city in Jesus' day and thereafter with the temple clearly visible and how it related to the rest of the old city — best model I have seen
- Went into the Shrine of the Book where we saw info & samples of the Dead Sea Scrolls
- Ziv brought an acquaintance named Victor on the bus, who sold many of us a nice, inexpensive sterling necklace of the Jerusalem cross (I had been wanting to get Andrea a nice necklace)
- Went to new U.S. embassy in Jerusalem and took turns taking our picture by the Trump plaque outside the building, which was closed (Sat., the sabbath)
- Saw the Knesset (Israel's parliament building)
- Went to lunch in Bethlehem at a big, nice restaurant called "The Tent" Shepherd's Valley
  - Delicious pita/salad/chicken/beef & lamb meatball lunch
  - I paid for everyone's lunch out of our Holy Land gift to repay the favor from Valley C.C. yesterday
- Andrea caught gift-giving fever and bought lots of cashmere scarves and shopping bags from street vendors in Bethlehem
- Went to Shepherd's Fields and saw examples of caves and we all went in and sat on benches and worshipped in one, singing Christmas carols about Bethlehem

- I had Ziv's microphone and lost our group for a moment, so I had fun imitating him ("We are walking now to Jerusalem, not far — only 2 minutes...")
- Left shortly after for the Garden Tomb — a very special place with no church, no icons — just the possible hill of Golgotha and the Garden Tomb where He was laid and then resurrected
  - I felt a moment of strong emotion at the tomb itself, at the thought of the body of our Lord laid there, who died for me
  - Much more authentic-seeming to us than the alternative church with elaborate decorations and icons
  - All owned & run by a British group. A very nice British lady named Maureen gave us an extensive tour of the grounds — no charge for any of this for anyone — all dependent on donations, which we gave
  - Maureen explained that the hill of Golgotha has collapsed some and no longer resembles a skull, but it did just a hundred years or so ago (she had an old photo)
  - We took a nice group pic and went into a private area in the tree-filled garden where I expressed my gratitude to have been given this trip by our church members and to be able to join the church group from Chino
  - Then I gave a prepared talk leading to communion, which was provided free with small wooden cups that we were given to keep (see talk at end)
  - Very moving, such an honor — then led our group in taking communion and singing "The Old Rugged Cross" and "Victory in Jesus" — a very celebratory way to wrap up our tour
  - We brought Ziv up and thanked him and gave him a love offering we had collected in addition to the tip we had already paid through our tour — he deserved it
  - Ziv thanked us and said our driver Walid thought we were one of the nicest groups they had had.
  - Then we all hugged or shook hands with one another and celebrated our fellowship with one another
  - Debra Payan was sick and stayed in her hotel room today, so missed this special conclusion to our tour
  - One of the Oak Ridge Boys was in the next group area beside us, but we didn't stay to hear him sing
  - It got dark, so we shopped in their gift shop and left
  - On the bus, we had Walid stand and thanked him and presented him a love offering in addition to the tips we already paid — he deserved it, too
- We returned to our hotel for half an hour, so Andrea and I walked down the street to the shops and after trying several stores, found a nice Jerusalem Cross necklace for her — at the only shop we could find with a few Christian items, run by a Bedouin, right after opening at the end of the Sabbath Sat. evening
  - Made by him, he said, of sterling silver, opal, and sapphire
  - Very happy to buy something nice for her to remember this trip by
- We met our group in the hotel lobby, including Debra Payan, and followed Ziv through the narrow streets of Jerusalem after dark for dinner at a pre-arranged restaurant, which had delicious grilled beef, chicken, and veal, courtesy of Jerusalem Tours
- Ziv gave both pastors a nice framed image of Jerusalem in sterling silver, and gave each of our group members a ceramic pomegranate as a symbol of prosperity, and a certificate of completing our pilgrimage to Israel
- On the way back, we ran into a large group of Asian Christians worshipping with great joy & dancing in the shopping square and we joined in the celebration, singing songs like "How Great is Our God" — amazing to sing this with hundreds of believers in the middle of Jerusalem our last night
- Then back to our rooms to do a lot of packing, including finding safe ways to pack our many gifts for friends & family without getting broken
- Got to bed about 10:30 PM, tired but fulfilled after a very successful, meaningful journey

#### Sunday — 11/18/18

- Up at 5:30 AM, got ready, ate breakfast of eggs and cereal and met Ziv and our group at 7:30 in the lobby
  - Left for final bus ride to Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv
  - Hugged Walid goodbye and said "God bless" to each other
  - Ziv stayed with us through check-in until we cleared the initial security — who asked me and our group members some questions, but not too intimidating
  - Hugged Ziv goodbye — what a great tour guide — funny, knowledgeable, patient, but very organized — always working, calling ahead — flexible, but firm in leading us / protecting us / keeping us moving — couldn't ask for a better guide

- Did a little shopping in the airport in Tel Aviv — bought some chocolate candy for Christmas for our family  
— Cleared 2<sup>nd</sup> security for carry-on's (they confiscated some small scissors Andrea was using to do crafts on the plane)
  - Shopped some more, bought more gifts — very expensive at the airport, but we thought of some more people we should thank with gifts  
— I got a large, hot, delicious cinnamon roll ☺
  - Boarded plane at 11:10 AM and headed for Toronto at 11:55 AM for an 11 ½ hour flight on the big Boeing 787-9
  - Toronto was a HUGE airport with extensive security — more than Tel Aviv — had to show our passports at 3 separate checkpoints, went through my carry-on bags, asked me a lot of questions, confiscated some Dead Sea cream from one of our group members, etc.  
— Left Toronto at 6:25 PM their time for a 4 ½ hour flight back to San Diego — to arrive about 8:51 PM San Diego time — to meet shuttles to give us all a final ride back to the church and then home  
— We should get to the church by or before midnight, after nearly 27 hours of traveling today  
— A long trip, but so glad we were able to experience it!
  - Thank you, Lighthouse, and thank You, God, for this wonderful opportunity!
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### My Communion Service Message at Garden Tomb – Saturday at sundown — 11/17/18

—While many of the sites we have seen are in dispute, I want you to close your eyes and go back with me 2,000 years ago to the place everything has been leading to...

- ❖ The Apostle John tells us: [Read John 19:41-42]
- ❖ We are standing at or near the very place where the most important even since the creation of the world took place — the death of Christ for the salvation of a lost world.
- ❖ Where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus carefully took down the body of our Savior, wrapped it in spices and strips of linen, and laid it in a garden tomb and rolled a stone to seal the entrance
- ❖ Where Jesus' body lay quietly for part of 3 days
- ❖ Where during the dark of Sunday morning, an earthquake announced an angel from heaven who rolled that stone away and sat on it – because it could not keep our Savior in
- ❖ Where those guarding the tomb fainted
- ❖ Where Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came and found the tomb empty and met angels who told them “He is not here; He is risen, just as He said.”
- ❖ The Apostles Peter & John ran to this place to see the empty tomb for themselves and went away wondering...
- ❖ And Jesus stood in this place, alive and victorious, resurrected, and announced this incredible news to a very overwhelmed Mary Magdalene
- ❖ Just think of it — Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead on this very spot — not far from where He instituted the Lord's Supper, because he never wanted us to forget what took place here.
- ❖ Because here He gave His life,
- ❖ Here he paid for our sins,
- ❖ Here we found forgiveness,
- ❖ Here He defeated Satan,
- ❖ Here He defeated death,
- ❖ Here eternal life became possible.
- ❖ Because here heaven & earth intersected when God came down to fix this broken planet, because “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”
- ❖ So today, let us celebrate what happened here nearly 2,000 years ago, as we eat the bread and drink the cup of our Savior's sacrifice for our sins
- ❖ Because, while they were eating... [Read Matthew 26:26-28]
- ❖ Pray: Lord, thank You for what you did here long ago...
- ❖ Sing: The Old Rugged Cross; and Victory in Jesus