

Porter's Page

**Glimpses from the Los Angeles Nehemiah Project (LANP)
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serving the Los Angeles Nehemiah Project**

HOLY LAND NOTES: MAY 2009

The last month has been dominated by a special and unique experience to a foreign land. A group of thirty-two, including members from six Nehemiah Member churches, joined me on the trip. This was a highly spiritual journey that was billed as a life-changing experience and it did not disappoint.

Our mission trip took us to the first mission field: Israel. We journeyed to the only land God has called "My land." The descriptive moniker for the trip was "Walking in the footsteps of Jesus."

The physical journey took us to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capernaum, Cana, and Caesarea. Stops also included Biblical sights such as the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Empty Tomb, Golgotha, The Upper Room, the temple mount, and the pools of Bethesda. We visited the awesome Mount of the Beatitudes where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. We traveled the Palm Sunday route and traced Jesus' steps on the Via Dolorosa, the way of the cross.

We visited famous mountains, valleys, rivers and deserts: including Mount Moriah, Mount Zion, Mount Nebo, Mount Scopus and the valleys of Hinnom and Kidron. We saw the Valley of Elah where David met Goliath and where Samson met the Philistines. We saw the place where the ancient prophet Elijah dueled the 450 prophets of Baal.

We went to the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth, and floated in the water because of the salt content you can't sink. Near the Dead Sea we saw the likely place where Lot's wife may have been rendered a pillar of salt. The likely sight of Sodom and Gomorrah was nearby. By cable car we visited the fortress of Masada the sight of the Roman siege of the Zealots who preferred death to slavery; and Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found hidden from the Romans by the Essenes sect. We went to the Red Sea, sailed across the Sea of Galilee in a replica of the boat Jesus and His disciples sailed in; and traversed the Negev Desert and the oasis of Ein Gedi.

There were several Biblical landmarks. We visited the Church of the Annunciation where Mary was approached by the angel about her divine motherhood; we visited the Church of the Fishes and Loaves, the Church of all Nations, the Church of the Nativity and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

We journeyed to the country of Jordan. While there we traveled the Kings Highway and visited the spot where John the Baptist actually baptized Jesus in the Jordan River in the site called, "Bethany beyond the Jordan." We saw the awesome rock formations of the city of Petra also. We visited a Bedouin camp and took a jeep ride in the Wadi Rum Desert. The picture of a shepherd tending and leading his flock was the pastoral background for many sights.

These were just the physical experiences. The spiritual experience cannot be accurately accounted in words. Our experience was more than the acquisition of knowledge. Knowledge ignores the benefit of imagination, experience and emotion. The spiritual benefits can't be recounted in words because each pilgrim had his own reaction to being exposed to these precious faith shaping venues. But all were deeply touched and the common refrain was "Wow" and to express disbelief in the deeply felt emotion, we often heard, "Can you believe that?" And usually with a gasp, we heard, "this is overwhelming." Some couples renewed their marital vows at Cana; and many of the pilgrims re-dedicated their baptism in the waters of the Jordan River.

It is safe to say all the pilgrims have been changed in a way that strengthened their faith, and they have been emboldened in their witness to say that Jesus is not only the Lord, but He is my Lord. What we experienced was inspiring; and what we brought back was a new spirit.

Consider the contrast of our presence in His land and that of our Lord's presence there. We lived in a 5-star hotel, while Jesus was born in a 1-star hotel and even then God had to provide the star. This reality had a humbling effect on the pilgrims. As we were walking in the footsteps of Jesus across the rocks and marble stones and dusty roads and uneven terrain; we were reminded that while we merely walked in His footsteps; He actually walked in our shoes.

The mission work we do at home takes on a new spirit and the study of Holy Scripture has come alive in new and profound ways. This was billed as a trip that would change our lives and it has. Our spiritual engines are revved up and ready to proclaim the Gospel with a new zeal.

Serving joyfully,

Rev. Arthur L. Porter

Thanks for the prayers and support of our fellow pilgrims in mission.

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Your partnership through financial support of this mission is most appreciated. Donations for the Nehemiah Project can be sent to Iowa District West (PO Box 1155, Fort Dodge, IA 50501). Your support will be forwarded to Dr. Porter and related ministries.

