

Meeting God in Holy Places

- Or -

Lessons Learned from a Visit to Israel

When you have traveled to areas of historical importance where a great event took place or well-known person spoke, such as, a Civil War battleground, did you feel a reverence or solemn-ness for those who were involved many years ago, especially those individuals you held in high esteem? And we treat that location with a special respect.

Gettysburg - the Alamo - Pearl Harbor - Normandy

Has anyone else been to the Holy Land? - the area where the Biblical characters lived & traveled, fought & died, prayed & communed with God, and especially, the land where Jesus walked and taught, performed many miraculous works, and was crucified on the cross of Calvary. Areas where the Apostles traveled with Jesus – and then where they were preaching the Gospel to the just beginning early churches.

Israel is the land where God chose to reveal himself to us.

How can we define a 'Holy Place'? What should be our reaction?

Moses: (Exo 3:5 NIV) "Do not come any closer," God said.

"Take off your sandals, for **the place where you are standing is holy ground.**"

Joshua: (Josh 5:15 NIV) The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for **the place where you are standing is holy.**" And Joshua did so.

The 'presence' of God:

The place is only 'holy' because of God's presence, or activity.

In spite of all the commercialism of today, and the very diverse religious beliefs found in the area, the feeling of **AWE** and **Reverence** is very strong. Some identified sites are only symbolic, and you may even find more than one location marked as the spot where a particular event took place, but many locations are known to be fairly exact.

During the next few weeks, I want us to travel thru parts of the Holy Land to some of these areas and look for some of the lessons that God has provided for us - perhaps with a little different perspective. A better

understanding of the terrain, the landscape, and the people will help it all come together.

If we want to see Jesus as the Good Shepherd, it helps to have observed real, honest & true shepherds tending their flocks out in the fields around Bethlehem.

As you travel through the Holy Land, the people and places of the scriptures seem to come to life. I think we all have a faith that allows us to know that the people and events we have read about for many years in the Bible were real, and really happened, just as they were recorded by inspired men. But there is really no way to describe the feeling as you observe the **Pool of Bethesda** and consider the healing power of Jesus (John 5:2-9), and while standing in the **Garden of Gethsemane** visualizing a praying Christ (Matt 26:36). Or, while traveling along the very rugged old Roman **road to Jericho**, putting yourself in the sandals of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37), and considering, 'How would I have reacted?'

Can you even imagine the feeling of observing the Lord's supper in the garden within sight of the hill of **Golgotha** (Matt 27:33) and the **empty tomb** where it is thought that Jesus was buried? (John 19:41-42)

And standing on the **Mount of Olives** (Acts 1:12), and imagining the feeling of fear & happiness, sorrow & joy, apprehension & enthusiasm as Jesus went up from them and disappeared in the clouds (Acts 1:9).

Who can know the exact spot where Jesus was born? But the point is, that somewhere in the village of Bethlehem, just south of Jerusalem, God surprised us by **coming into our world** so that **we might enter into His**. That is the incredible impact of a visit to Israel.

Experiencing a sudden storm on a previously calm Sea of Galilee provides a new appreciation of the apostles' fear (Lk 8:22-24).

As you walk away from Bethlehem, or Gethsemane, or the Jordan River, or the Sea of Galilee, your life should never be the same. You've walked on '**holy ground**'. You've touched and been touched. You've seen the 'face of God' more clearly than ever before.

We can compare some of our perceptions to the 'real thing'. For example, how have you always envisioned the manger where Jesus was born?

(**John 5:2-9** NIV) Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called **Bethesda** and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. {3} Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. {4} * {5} One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. {6} When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" {7} "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." {8} Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." {9} **At once the man was cured**; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,
* vs. 4 is not in the earliest manuscripts.

(**John 19:41-42** NIV) At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. {42} Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

(**Mat 26:36-46** NIV) Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." {37} He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. {38} Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." {39} Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." {40} Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. {41} "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." {42} He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." {43} When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. {44} So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. {45} Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. {46} Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"