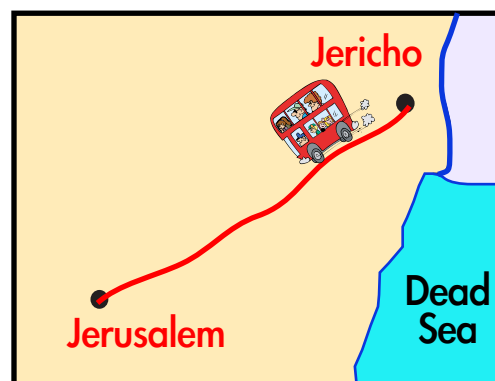


Tour of the Holy Lands - Jericho to Jerusalem



Welcome everyone – new friends here for the first time and old friends for the second and even third time. Israel welcomes you! You've already read many Bible stories, but here in Israel you'll see and feel the stories come alive again. Our tour has taken us all over this country – to the North, South, East and West. Today, we'll begin where we left off last year - right here in Jericho - and head towards the middle of the country. Let's climb aboard our friendly bus for the 17-mile drive to our destination this summer -- the holy city of Jerusalem!





As the road climbs higher and higher, we are approaching our first stop – the Judean Desert. We’ve left Jericho behind us, as well as the Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized. Do you remember the words Jesus heard at his baptism? “And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). What an honor to hear that God was pleased with him. But that same Spirit that blessed him now led him into this wild, empty wilderness. Why? The Bible said Jesus would be tempted (or tested) by the devil. Of course, there wasn’t a real devil with horns and a tail. These were tests that occurred in his thinking and tried to lead him away from God. If Jesus passed the tests, then he would be ready for anything. The first thing he did was to fast, which meant to stop eating for 40 days. 40 days was a period of time prophets took to prepare for an important task. Then he would be ready for his first test.



Jesus was hungry after those 40 days. It was a good time to tempt him with food. A question came to him, "Did God really call you His son? If He is really your Father, he wouldn't leave you alone out here to starve. Let me help you. Look at these stones on the ground. If you are God's son, use your divine powers for yourself and turn the stones into loaves of bread. You don't need God anymore" (Matthew 4:3).

Jesus answered with words from Moses from the Old Testament (Deut 8:3), "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Yes, when Moses was in the wilderness, he had no bread or meat either, but he waited, never doubting, and God sent manna and quail. Hadn't Jesus just spent 40 days listening to and depending upon God to sustain him? Plus, Jesus' demonstrations of power were always for others, never for himself. He knew better than to give into this temptation. And so he passed test one (Matt 4:4).



Next, the devil tried to convince Jesus to climb up to a high spot on the Temple platform in Jerusalem. (We'll see it when we go to the Temple.) If he agreed to jump off that high place, angels would help him fly. That would prove he was the son of God, and he'd be seen by crowds. Again, the devil tried to trick him. He quoted Psalm 91. "God will send his angels to catch you. You won't even stub your toe on a stone." (Matt 4:5,6). But Jesus replied by referencing the Bible, too. "Thou shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Deut 6:16). Jesus knew that no one makes God do anything (Matt 4:7). Besides, Jesus would never take credit for anything. All credit went to God. Test two was passed!



In test number three, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain close by and showed him thrones and crowns and palaces, which he could conquer. "I'll give you all this if you will worship me." But Jesus was not the kind of Messiah that took over governments or kingdoms. "Be gone!" he said. Then with words borrowed from Deut 6:13, he replied: "Worship only the Lord your God and serve only Him." (Matt 4:10) After passing all three tests, the devil left him, and angels (messages from God) refreshed him, comforted him, and waited on him. Now Jesus was ready to begin his mission.



Is Jesus ready for another test? Always. This time it was a lawyer who knew he was supposed to love God and his neighbor, but he asked Jesus a key question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus gave a very special answer. He told the man a parable that we call *The Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:25-37). It took place very near here.



Let's pull off the smooth pavement, get out of the bus, and walk over to the edge of this huge ravine. We'll need to hold hands for safety and look down, down, down. Our guide points to the outline of a road winding and twisting its way around the steep, rugged mountainside. It's a famous ancient road once traveled by Jews and Romans 2000 years ago. It is so steep that in 17 miles between Jerusalem and Jericho, it falls 3400 feet.

Now let's look at the Bible story: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho." Look at those curves in the road again. Picture robbers hiding around every corner and in every cave. Can you just imagine how the man felt when he was surprised by thieves?



People walked both ways on this road in Bible days. Workers in the Temple in Jerusalem lived in Jericho. When they “came down,” they were going home. When they “went up,” they were going to work. In the parable, “there came down a certain priest.” Priests had many duties in the Temple - offering lambs every day, keeping the fire burning on the altar, washing hands and feet before entering the Temple, and following Moses’ law. When a priest saw the wounded man, he “passed by on the other side.” Next came a Levite. Levites were doorkeepers, who prevented unclean people from entering the Temple. They were musicians and teachers of children. The Levite also “passed by on the other side.” These two holy men were afraid of becoming unclean. Instead, they should have been examples of charity. The next traveler was a Samaritan.



To the Jew, there was no such thing as a good Samaritan. Any Samaritan was hated by the Jews. His family background was not purely Jewish. He was not allowed in the Jewish Temple. His worship was different. His Temple was on a different mountain.

What did the Samaritan do when he saw the wounded Jew? He wasn't afraid of becoming unclean. Here was someone who needed help. He went over to the poor man and bandaged his wounds, using his own wine and oil to clean him. He lifted him onto his donkey, led the animal to an inn, and stayed with the man all night. In the morning, not only did he give the innkeeper enough money to care for the man for several days, but he also promised to return and pay more if more care was needed.



After Jesus told the parable, he asked the lawyer, “Which of these men acted like a neighbor to the poor man?” The lawyer answered, “The man who was kind and compassionate.” The lawyer just answered his own question. But *knowing* the law wasn’t enough. Jesus told the lawyer he must go and *be* a neighbor to everyone. What an impressive stop this was, and a good parable, too!



There's still more to see today as we head towards Jerusalem, so let's get back on the bus. Before reaching the city, we'll take a side trip to a special place outside of Bethlehem where Jesus was born. Some of us know the Nativity story by heart, but you still might want to read it again before we get to Bethlehem (Luke 2:7-20). Let's pretend it's night time - all the rooms in the inn are taken - Mary and Joseph find their way outside the city to a field where shepherds are watching their flocks. They find a cave used as an animal shelter. A low wall protects the animals. Mary gets off the donkey, Joseph removes the blankets so Mary can be comfortable, and they move in. This is where her baby is born.



Mary knows just what to do with her baby. It's what all mothers do. They wrap babies in long strips of linen cloth, called swaddling clothes. They wrap them round and round from head to toe so they'll feel cozy and safe. If you traveled with us in 2008, you'll remember that we climbed Megiddo and saw a manger - a box where animals eat. It was carved out of stone just like this one. Joseph probably finds some straw to make it soft and sweet, and Mary lays her baby in the manger.



As we look out from the cave we see sheep grazing close by. We thought the field would be covered with green grass, but there are only little tufts of grass and lots of rocks. In Luke's story, the shepherds must have been surprised and scared as the sky lit up. They were minding their own business, taking turns watching their sheep, keeping an eye out for thieves and wolves. They were definitely not expecting an angel. They thought that angels came only to important people, like prophets – not to unwashed shepherds.

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE

**1 THE BABY WILL
BE BORN IN
BETHLEHEM**

**2 HE WILL BE A
SAVIOR, A
DELIVERER**

**3 HE WILL BE THE
CHRIST OR
THE MESSIAH**

**4 HE WILL BE
CALLED LORD
OR MASTER**



The angel said, "Fear not, for I bring you good news of great joy, for everyone." The angel wasn't something to be afraid of at all! The shepherds could spread this news everywhere. The angel described the baby in four different ways. He was born in the city where David was born. (The Jews knew their expected Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.) He would be a Savior, a deliverer. He was to be the Christ, another word for Messiah. And he was to be called Lord, or Master. The shepherds were told what to look for – a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes (no surprise) and lying in a manger (very unusual).



When a boy was born, the local musicians came to perform simple music near the home. But when Jesus was born, suddenly a whole chorus of angels joined the first angel and began singing. They praised God for His wondrous love that brought peace into the hearts of men. As the angels left, the shepherds said, "Let's go over to Bethlehem as fast as we can to see this wonderful thing that has happened." So the first visitors to see the baby Jesus were not fancy men, but plain men, coming straight from their nighttime work caring for sheep in the fields.



After the shepherds visited the baby, they told everyone they met what the angel had said. Those who heard the good news were impressed. But Mary told no one. Instead, she treasured the angel's words in her heart. Two years later, wise men from the East visited the child Jesus. They brought expensive gifts. You may remember that we traveled with them last year to Petra. Now, let's get back on the bus for the last few miles to Jerusalem!



Get ready, boys and girls! Our first view of Jerusalem is just over the hill. We've driven 17 miles uphill. In Bible times, we would be obedient to Moses: "Three times a year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God" (Exodus 23:17). Today might just be one of those three Feasts - Passover, Festival of Weeks, or the Feast of Tabernacles. Enormous numbers of Jews came to the Temple from all over the country and every corner of the Roman Empire. A million or more Jews lived in foreign lands. They camped on the outskirts of Jerusalem and among the townsfolk. They say that the walls of the Temple gleamed like snow on a mountaintop. There was so much gold covering its sides that people's eyes hurt from the glare.

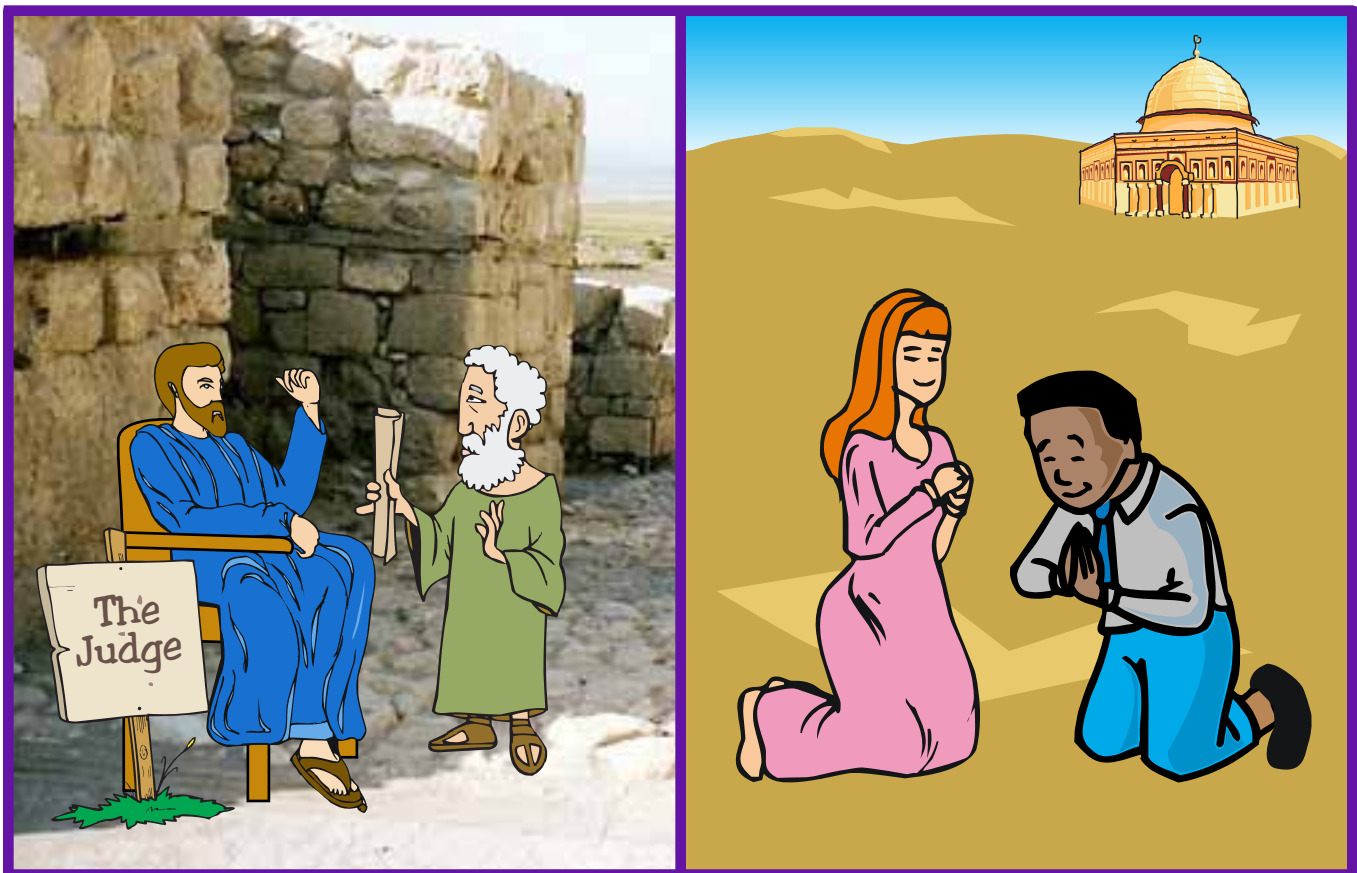


Today there is gold, too, but it covers the golden dome of the mosque on the Temple Mount.



Traveling to Jerusalem is called a pilgrimage. If we were part of a pilgrimage, we'd be singing pilgrim psalms. Today, let's pretend we're singing Psalm 122. I'll give the verse number, you find it in your Bibles, and I will read the meaning of each of the verses.

1. I was so excited when they invited me. It was a long way and dangerous, so we will travel together. We wanted to share adventures. Our imaginations had been stirred by stories of Jerusalem, its walls, its buildings, its Temple.
2. After years of longing and waiting, our feet are actually pressing its pavement.
3. Staring up, it's like the buildings and walls are joined, sewn together like a tent in the wilderness.
4. We see pilgrims from all parts of the world. We come today for the Feast of Tabernacles to thank the Lord for His bounty in the harvest.



5. Look! There are the judges holding court beside the city gates, where the kings of David's line reigned and judged.
 6. Let's pray for this city. May all who love this city prosper and be at peace.
 7. May your inhabitants be secure, from the least to the greatest.
 8. and 9. This I ask for the love of my brothers and friends who live here, and for those at home not privileged to make the journey. I pray that this city may truly be a city of peace.
- Now, after our winding, uphill drive, let's settle into our hotel.



We're up bright and early this morning. We're going to visit the most important site for a Jew - the Temple Mount. There used to be a Temple here, but it has been destroyed and rebuilt more than once. King Solomon built the first Temple. King Herod built the last Temple. In its place today is the Dome of the Rock, which was built by Moslems who captured the area years ago. The outer walls of the Dome of the Rock are covered with beautifully designed blue tiles. Its dome is covered with real gold. You'll want to take lots of pictures.



Let's get in line behind these school children. We have to take our shoes off, just as they did. Who in the Bible took off his shoes to stand on holy ground? It was Moses, right? As we step inside, we find we're walking on several layers of beautiful Persian carpets. It's so quiet. In the middle of this round room, there's a round fence. If we stand on tip-toe at the fence, we can see a huge rock inside the fence. Let's listen to the remarkable story about the rock?



The story of the rock is found very early in the Bible - in Genesis 22. It's the story of Abraham. He and his wife Sarah finally had the son God promised them, Isaac. He would give them grandchildren and pass on to the world the idea of worshiping the one, the only, God. But first God had a test for Abraham. "Abraham," God said. "I am listening," Abraham answered. "Take your only son, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Sacrifice him there." (Human sacrifice was something pagans did to please their gods.) So Abraham and Isaac rose up early, loaded their donkey with firewood and left. When they arrived, Abraham left the donkey with servants, loaded the wood on Isaac and went to the worship spot. Little Isaac said, "Father, I see the flint stone to start the fire and I see the wood, but where's the sheep for the sacrifice?" Abraham replied, "My son, God will provide a lamb."



Abraham built a stone altar, laid out the wood, tied up his son and laid him on the wood. He was ready to trust God even for this. He loved his son, but he loved God even more. Then, just as Abraham reached for his knife, an angel of God called to him, "Abraham, don't lay a hand on the boy. Now I know that you love God, for you would sacrifice your son for Me." In that instant, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in the bushes. The ram would be the sacrifice. Abraham and Isaac learned the love of God that day - that God desires life, not death, for his children. The Temple was built upon that sacrificial spot.

It's late, but it's been a wonderful day here in Jerusalem. Let's plan to come back tomorrow for more Temple stories.