

June 9 Caesarea, Mt. Carmel, Megiddo, Mt. Arbel, check-in Nof Ginosar (Kibbutz), spending time by the Sea of Galilee

Great breakfast—lots of cheeses, veggies, fresh-squeezed orange juice (we squeezed our own at a stand), fish, eggs.

Our former neighbor, Mark Wulf, is on our trip. He remembers me as “Connie 2”—when he was small, there was Connie 1, Connie 2, and Connie 3 all in a row on Butler Street in Blair. Connie Nelson and I are still there—she is watching our house and getting our newspapers.

Bob Sweeney led in prayer on the bus, and we sang the Hebrew alphabet song. Our guide had not heard it before—the Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters, all consonants too—but some of the consonants double up in sound, because of dots. So we sing Aleph Bait Vait—but there is only one B. But it is a quite catchy tune—and Ronny said he couldn’t get it out of his head ☺.

It is 1 ½ hours by bus to **Caesarea**. The Gospel was taken to the world through Caesarea. Israel is geographically a land bridge. It is part of Asia. The River Jordan is a “creek with good PR”. But its springs are a good source of water. All the travel between the “super” civilizations went through Israel. The society in Jesus time was ½ Greek. Israel itself was a road, from place to place. There are two categories of land: the mountains (inferior) and the valleys (more advanced—because the highways are in the valleys). Jewish communities were in the mountains (remember, Abraham offered Lot the choice—and Lot chose the lush valleys). The Canaanites and others were in the valleys. These two areas were always in conflict. Egypt, Persia and others saw Israel as a gateway. And so, to impress other civilizations, the conquering nations always made their Israeli cities look sumptuous—so the other civilizations would see, and think, “How mighty you are!” For example, when Ronny came to Manhattan in New York, and Washington DC, he said “Wow!”—these are some of the first cities that travellers to the US see, and they are indeed amazing.

Israel is still a border nation. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim all consider Israel important.

The King of the Hebrews needed to be of the tribe of Judah, a Hebrew, and appointed by God. In 67 BC, Pompeii the Great appointed a local man, who could live with the Romans: Herod Antipater, an Edomite, who was converted to Judaism. The high priest was supposed to be of the line of Aaron, but Herod the Great (4 BC to 10 AD) offered the office of high priest for the highest bid. He got somebody not in Aaron’s line. Herod built Caesarea from 20 – 10 BC as a Roman city, to prove to Rome that he was loyal to them. It was a pagan city. In 70 AD, when Rome sacked Jerusalem, the capital city then became Caesarea.

We saw the Theater (which is a modern one, built on the old, and used today for special events), and Ronny spoke to us there of many things. The Latin speaking Romans became the Roman Catholic church; the Greek speaking people became the Greek Orthodox church. Josephus was a Jew who was also a historian. He saw the Roman wars, and described current events of his time. **Herod the Great was a great builder.** He even **built mountains**. Herod sold **salt** (the only preservative of those times—we get the word ‘salary’ from salt). Herod sold **honey** (from the date palms—needing hot weather and the fresh water of oases), and Herod also sold **tourism** (to the

Holy Temple in Jerusalem, the House of All Nations). Caesarea was a harbor city: olive oil and wine were shipped back to Rome, and there were no taxes. Sebastus (Caesar in Greek).

Caesarea, the melting pot of nations, where the god Mithras was worshipped, is mentioned in the New Testament. **Acts 10**: Cornelius called Peter from Joppa to Caesarea. Peter had his dream of the sheet with the unclean animals in Joppa, and after that Peter was willing to accept Cornelius' call to the pagan city of Caesarea. **Acts 12**: Herod Agrippa was in Caesarea. The Herods were not nice people: they killed off their own family to gain more power. They had such a name that Ceasar once said he would rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son—he would be safer, and much less likely to be killed. Josephus said that at Caesarea Herod Agrippa I appeared in a silver cloak, and the people here at the theater said “You are God!”—and Herod Agrippa died 3 days later of worms (**Acts 12: 18-23** gives a similar account). **Acts 24** Felix told Paul, “You nearly convinced me”. Eusebius lived here about 300 AD. He was a Christian bishop, and wrote about the Nicene creed. The woman with the issue of blood was from Caesarea. Phillip lived here.

In Caesarea, the public things (like the theater, the baths, the hippodrome) were built outside the city walls. City walls are for protection, so if people lived *outside* the city walls, then it is reasonable to conclude that the area was stable at that time.

After this talk in the theater, we “walked 1000 years” to the area of the Crusaders. We saw the Roman governor's home. While we were walking, somebody asked if the Beatles had performed in the Theater. Ronny said the Beatles were forbidden to perform there, because of their long hair. Ronny said that we were walking over an area filled with caves and even a jail. Paul was said to be killed here in Caesarea. Pontius Pilate was in Caesarea at one time.

The Hippodrome was a large arena, used for horse and chariot races. There was a sandstone marketplace here, and also it was a place that Christian martyrs were killed. In this part of the world, to raise land above the sea, retaining walls were built, but they were not filled in with dirt. Instead there were arches, and hollow spaces—small jailhouses, cisterns, storerooms and more. The area that we were walking on was covered with sand blown over from Africa—it was only excavated about 20 years ago (the 1990's). There are palace vaults—hollow, to build above the ground.

In the castle walls, there were slits—not for arrows, but for pouring boiling oil on the attacking enemy.

Caesarea was a harbor. The harbor was like a city within a city. We stood by a tamarisk tree (there is always water near the surface where tamarisks grow). Ronny said the tamarisk was actually on the ancient harbor, which is now still silted up.

In 1818 Caesarea became a Muslim town until 1948 (when Israel became a state).

Toh-DAH (thank you); Toh-Dah Ra-VAH (thank you very much).

In the Bible, directions are always given from the perspective of Jerusalem: from Jerusalem, East is straight ahead, forward; South is right; North is left; West is either behind, or toward the sea.

“Arab” is a culture, not a religion. In Arab towns, rooms are built on top of houses to accommodate the children’s families.

Israel is a national home, not just for Jews. It is not a theocracy. Its population today is 7.5 million, and is 75% Jews, and 25% Arabs, Christians, and Druse. There has been peace with Jordan since 1994. The last fight with Lebanon was 2006. With Syria there is no peace. With Egypt there is peace since 1946.

Mt. Carmel

The Jordan Valley is part of the Rift Valley. Mount Carmel overlooks the plains of Armageddon. Mt. Carmel has lots of trees today—every 2nd grader plants a tree on Mt. Carmel. In I Kings, it refers to Mt. Carmel as the Vineyard of God.

We passed a Druse village—the outside was truly dirty (trash, plastic bags—nothing picked up).

Elijah had the showdown with King Ahab on Mt. Carmel.

Armageddon is the crossroads of the Jordan Valley. One highway goes from the sea to Megiddo to the other mountains; another across the Jordan through Megiddo. Of the 4000 miles of the Jordan valley the only east-west crossing is through Armageddon. In peacetime this is a blessing; in war it is a curse. There is a pass, or “gate” at either end. David united the tribes by cleaning out the valley.

Mt. Carmel is a high place for many gods. Elijah fought the prophets of Baal and the prophets of the Asherah (a female god). Elijah 1: Other prophets: 800. The people themselves were silent. Ahab called Elijah the troubler, the trouble-maker. Today evangelical Christians are called the troulblers. But as with Elijah, 1 + God always is a majority.

Napoleon came to Armageddon through Gaza. There have been many battles on Armageddon and the Bible indicates there will be one last battle there too.

Tel Megiddo—water system (tunnel)

Megiddo was the crossroads of the world. It is a manmade hill, close to the roads and close to a spring of water. Because each layer built upon another, the top was shrinking. We went through a tunnel from the top of the hill down to the spring and then out the bottom. Excavations have shown that gates to the various cities were built one above the other, and the route angles up the hill so that people who used their right arms would be at a disadvantage when coming up for the attack. When Jesus was here, the top of Megiddo was in ruins—and there were 21 civilizations under the level that Jesus saw. We saw basalt walls carved with flint. To hold weight, there would be 3 layers of stone, but one layer of wood, so that it would help withstand the shock of earthquakes. Megiddo was conquered in David’s time, and then Solomon built a chariot town on Megiddo. It goes through the days of Ahab. The layers covered 500 years—sometimes only 7 years per layer. We saw a “high place”—a round place, and like the gates, one high place was built on top of an earlier one. When Solomon was king, he went to a high place, and God approved it. King Josiah tore down the high places and images. Josiah was killed in the Plain of Armageddon, on Jezreel.

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Driving through Armageddon Valley, we saw Jezreel by Mt. Tabor (Deborah—leader of armies; also the place of the Witch of Endor).

I also saw modern graffiti in English: “Birya Belongs to Us”—our tour guide said that Arabs are trying to take back the land.

Israeli license plates are all numbers: xx-xxx-xx. Gas is \$8 a gallon (it is about \$3.70 at home in Nebraska)—Israel has 100% tax. Also there are markers to indicate a Sabbath day’s journey—so many yards.

We returned to the hotel (kibbutz) for a wonderful meal. We went down to the beach of the Sea of Galilee and waded in the water, picked up seashells, and sat on chairs and talked until the stars came out. Beautiful night. The moon is becoming full.