

Our Trip to Israel

October 2012

Day One

10/16/2012

I am CST/ 8am "plane time" on the airplane



I hardly know what date to write. This day has been totally surreal. As I write we are 2/3 to 3/4 done with our flight and are flying over the Alps. It was/ is a long night. I was not able to sleep but did manage to doze a little for a few minutes at a time. I opened my window to see the last bit of France (we think), the Black Forest of Germany, and I am now watching the sun rise over the Swiss Alps.



THIS IS NOT EVEN THE HIGHLIGHT OF OUR TRIP!! This isn't really part of our trip at all!! I am filled with awe as I see these famous sights of Europe. Oh the riches and splendor or the wonders and majesty of God! What is man that you are mindful of him?! How beautiful is the geography of creation!! Even the clouds above the Alps are beautiful as they swirl in rhythmic ribbons and the red and orange light of the early morning sun dances around in rainbow swirls.

Now the clouds are so dense it is like looking out on a carpet of snow. Occasionally there is a lightening of the cloud cover and I can see the ice-capped mountains below but just as quickly the mountains are swallowed up beneath the clouds. These clouds are different now. They look like photos I've seen of the Antarctic tundra stretching out as far as the



eye can see with rolling hills and delicate swirls. The sun has risen fully now and the clouds are reflecting the sun's brilliance at their peaks and are shadowy in their valleys.

Our fellow travelers are very interesting. Many westerners of course – their manners and dress are what I am accustomed to. There are also several passengers I would guess to be Indian Muslims with saris and head wraps (turbans?). The ones I find the most curious are the ones I suppose to be Jews from Israel. They are dressed in the same way that I think of when I think of orthodox Jews: white button down long sleeve shirts, black pants, a black suit coat and yamikas. Some even have the starched hats! I saw one gentleman put his hat away at the beginning of the flight in what seemed to be a hat shaped case. I saw another adjusting his yamika and noticed that he had the traditional curls of hair that go by his face – only they were bunched up inside his yamika!

We are just parallel to Rome now but unfortunately, we do not get to fly over it.



The airport
from the outside



On the Bus

Our first stop was the ancient city of Caesarea. Herod built this city in about 25AD. This city was very important in the Roman world and beyond. We stood in the exact area where Peter walked into Herod's courtyard and was met by Cornelius. Our guide (Doron) said that by walking out to meet Peter, he was placing Peter's social standing above his own thus ending his career.



At Caesarea, a plaque was found inscribed with Pontius Pilate's name. This is the only inscription with his name ever found.



The original entrance to the theater.



We walked down from Herod's palace to the theater a little ways away. This theater would have been outside the city walls at Jesus' time due to the things that they did in it. It was in

Where Paul would have stood during his trial.



this exact theater that Paul was tried and condemned and it was here that he made his appeal to Rome. He was taken from this theater and kept under house arrest by the harbor (now underwater) for about two years until they could

find someone who would agree to transport him. During this time, Paul was responsible for his own expenses (ie. food, shelter) but was not allowed to leave the house where he was staying to work. This meant that he was fully reliant on the good will of others to survive this time.



Before leaving the theatre, Dan and Dave went down into the orchestra seats of the theatre and sang the doxology. It is a fairly large sized theatre, but even without a mike they were able to be loud enough that we could hear them clearly. Our guide gave us ten to fifteen minutes to walk



around after he finished his talk. Dan and I walked down to the



The Hippodrome



Hippodrome area to where during the Byzantine Era they had divided the huge Hippodrome into several different churches and schools to see one of the "church



This is one of the areas that was made into a church during the Byzantine Era.

areas” that was still somewhat there. Then we walked down to the Mediterranean Sea and touched the water by the Sea. The place where we were would not have been shoreline during the time Peter and Paul were here. Herod had built up a harbor area, but over time, it has disintegrated and the Sea has reclaimed the



shoreline.

After we got back on the bus, we drove out a couple miles and got to see the huge aqueducts that Herod built for the water supply. Here they just stopped the bus



and let anyone get out that wanted to take a picture. We saw many people swimming in this area – there was a nice beach area next to the aqueducts.

Aqueducts

9:25pm at the hotel in EinGev



A brief recap: We got up from our hotel in Niagara Falls. We had a slow start in the morning by strategically packing everything so that it would be spread out if one of our suitcases were to be lost. We arrived at the airport with plenty of time to spare and spent most of the afternoon just hanging out at the airport. We finally met up with our group and

boarded the plane – only to sit on the tarmac an extra hour waiting. After finally getting into the air, it was a lot of fun to watch the map function on the screens by our seat. How awesome to know the various countries you are flying over!! We definitely identified France, Germany, and Switzerland for sure! The Alps were awesome!! After about halfway through the Alps, it got cloudy and didn't clear up until we were over Israel. Our first view of Israel showed most (all?) of the houses were white (as we later learned ancient houses were made of stone and modern houses are made mostly of concrete). It was no problem to get through customs (the agent looked very bored) and find (all! 😊) our luggage. When the entire group had made it through customs and



baggage, we went out to our bus. It was a very nice tour bus with a place to stow our luggage below. It reminded me of the bus we would take on choir tour!



Then we were off!! We thoroughly enjoyed seeing the landscape. This area is very agricultural. We were constantly driving past orchards with exotic (and regular) fruit trees, many “forested” areas, lots of beautiful flowers, and even cattle. (We ever saw one tractor!) Our



guide said that Israel tries to be as self-sufficient as possible – they try to export as much as possible, but definitely prioritize their own citizens first so that they can import as little as possible. America could learn a lesson here!



After a short bus ride, we arrived at Caesarea which was built by Herod in honor of Caesar. It was a massive harbor city that was mostly destroyed by earthquakes and fighting. We first walked where Peter walked in the second courtyard of Herod’s castle. The “doorway” we walked through was the very doorway that Peter walked through and was greeted by Cornelius. We also got to sit in the theater where Paul was brought in as a prisoner and made his appeal to Caesar. Paul was held in the harbor area for 2 ½ years before shipping out from this harbor on his way to Rome.



In this area on the beach of the Mediterranean Sea, we picked up some sand and a few seashells. The sand is said to have originated from the Nile River. After leaving the theater, we went back to the Hippodrome area where we walked in an area that was divided into several churches during the Byzantine era – one of which was left somewhat intact. We saw a spot where they are currently excavating and learning new things about this area.



Remnants of statues found in the garbage dump. The heads of these statues were destroyed but otherwise they are in relatively good condition due to the fact that they were “trashed” by later civilizations that believed that it was wrong to have graven images.



We walked down to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea where we were able to touch the water. Then we took our bus and drove quickly over to the area where the aqueducts were – just long enough to get out and snap a quick photo.



You can see why Elijah would have chosen this hill in particular. From the top of this hill, you can see almost the whole country (East to West - and a good part of North to South too!) His challenge would not have been missed by any of the people – especially once the fire started raining down!

First we walked into the courtyard area where there were many beautiful flowers and a statue of Elijah. Then into a

Back on the bus, we drove over to Mt. Carmel. We stopped most of the way up the mountain to have a falafel (yum!) and try various Israeli salad things – including hyssop.

After eating, we got back on the bus and went the rest of the way up the mountain where we stopped at a Franciscan monastery built where they think Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal.



small chapel where the guide gave a talk and we read the account of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. After this, we went up to the rooftop where the smell was fishy but the view was breathtaking. The guide pointed out all the

Biblical historical sites we could see from the top. We watched the sun set from the top of Mt. Carmel and then got back on the bus to go to our hotel.





When we got to our hotel there was a little bit of mass confusion. They gave everyone an envelope telling us what room number we were in. They did not give us a map or anything telling us the layout of the hotel. Each person was in their own separate “cabin” in a gated area. The cabins were, of course, numbered but only by the front door. So we all walked around in the dark looking for our cabins. It was somewhat like a scavenger hunt, only you felt tired, hungry, and yucky so it wasn’t so much a fun kind of scavenger hunt, but a cranky kind of scavenger hunt with an edge of excitement. You knew that as soon as you found the right cabin, you would be able to sit down and rest for a few minutes before supper. You also knew that the longer it took to find your cabin the less time you would have to rest. Finally, we all found our cabins and were excited to see how lovely they were inside.



Our cabin (and I’m really using that term loosely, because it was a beautiful place) was much bigger inside than we thought it looked from the outside. It had a main entryway/hallway, straight ahead was a small bedroom with two twin size beds and to the right was the bathroom. To the left there was a small kitchenette, a dining room table, a couch and a double bed. The bed was different, it was really two twin size beds pushed together. They shared the same comforter, but different fitted sheets. How strange!



Once our luggage was delivered to our room, I went ahead and took a shower and then we went down to supper. The supper was in a huge room. We had assigned seating for our

group. We were among the last to get there, so we just sat wherever we could find a spot. The meal was a buffet and it tasted very good. They had a salad bar similar to the lunch one we had experienced and they also had an entrée line, a soup area, and a dessert bar. It was very nice just to sit and enjoy some down time after many hours of being up and going. We greatly enjoyed chatting with the people that we sat by and getting to know some of the people in our group.

After supper, we had a brief meeting and then it was off to bed to prepare for another day.