

The Harris Devotional Tour Book of Israel

by

David C. Harris

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ✓ Introduction Letter and Map
- ✓ Jerusalem – Going Up
- ✓ Jerusalem – Mount of Olives
- ✓ Jerusalem – Garden Tomb
- ✓ Sacraments Part 1 – Communion
- ✓ Dead Sea – Ein Geddi and Masada
- ✓ Dead Sea – Mud and Salt
- ✓ Sea of Galilee – The Chosen Home of Jesus
- ✓ Capernaum and Korazim
- ✓ The Miracles of Jesus
- ✓ The Teachings of Jesus
- ✓ Sacraments Part 2 – Baptism
- ✓ Mount Megiddo
- ✓ Caesarea
- ✓ Going Back But Looking Forward

INTRODUCTION

The booklet you hold in your hands was written as a companion to your tour of Israel, but it is more than a guide book, it is also a devotional. In it you will find fourteen entries to correspond with a two week trip through the Holy Land. They can be read in any order, but they deal with the major sites most tours will visit. I suggest reading one per day, prior to visiting the actual place. This will give you a biblical orientation, and an opportunity to set your heart and mind on the Lord before hitting the road that day.

You may find these readings to be good for the evenings, when things are quiet, and you have had time to settle in before bed. Or you may find that you have time during one of the many drives you will be taking, although chances are you will want to see as much as possible looking out the window. Either way, you will want to bring a small Bible with you to Israel.

There are also meditations for your early morning prayer time, and a section for you to write down personal thoughts or experiences you want to remember about your time in the Holy Land.

This booklet was made for you to use as you see fit, and it is my hope that it will aid in your spiritual pilgrimage through Israel.

In Christ,

David C. Harris



The Great Sea
(Mediterranean sea)

Sidonians
(Phoenicians)

Damascus

ASHER
ZEBULUN
NAPHTALI

DAN

Lais

Kedesh

Hazor

Capernaum

Kursi

Bashan

MANASSEH

ISSACHAR

Megiddo

Caesarea

Jezreel Plain

Beth-shan

MANASSEH

Plain of Sharon

Jordan River

GAD

Jabbok

AMMON

GILGAD

EPHRAIM

DAN

BENJAMIN

Jerusalem

JUDAH

REUBEN

En-gedi

Philistines

Beer-Sheba

SIMEON

MOAB

Wilderness
of Zin

EDOM

River of Egypt

JERUSALEM – GOING UP

Reading: Psalm 120-133.

Look at the headings of each of these shorter Psalms, and you will see they are called songs of *ascent*. This is because Jerusalem city is 17.2 miles *above sea level*, and as you go there you will surely notice that it is an uphill drive – your ears may even pop as the altitude increases. These particular Psalms were sung by the children of Israel on their journeys *up* to Jerusalem, in fulfillment of God's command to make aliyah three times a year, hence the name *ascent*, or *aliyah* in Hebrew.

If this is your first time to Jerusalem, you may want to think on the words of Psalm 121, and imagine making this journey *on foot!*

*I lift my eyes up to the hills –
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

*He will not let your foot slip –
he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*The Lord watches over you –
The Lord is your shade at your right hand;
The sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.*

*The Lord will keep you from all harm –
he will watch over your life;
The Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and for evermore.*

JERUSALEM – MOUNT OF OLIVES

Reading: Matthew 21:1-17, with 26:36-56

Chances are, when you finally make it to Jerusalem, you will feel overwhelmed. That is to be expected. As it was back in Jesus' day, Jerusalem is very noisy, filled with merchants, religious zealots, and hardly a soothing place. In Matthew 21 we read that Jesus entered the city to shouts of praise, and then cleaned out the temple courts. One thing people often miss in this passage begins in verse 14, where we read the following:

The blind and lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

"Yes," replied Jesus...

The temple area was not a place you would consider safe for children, and today there is heavy security and metal detectors there. But when Jesus entered Jerusalem, on the day of his Triumphal Entry, the very first thing that happened after he cleared out the corrupt merchants, was that it became a safe place for the blind, the broken, the wounded, and for children to come to Him.

But by the end of the week the tides had turned, and Jesus was arrested at the Mount of Olives. For this story you will want to read Matt. 26:36-56. At some point in your Jerusalem visit you will stand in the very olive grove where Jesus was arrested. You will look out at the gate thru which he entered, and you will sense His presence.

JERUSALEM – GARDEN TOMB

Reading: Matt.28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-9

When Jesus raised from the dead he appeared to a small group of women first. Luke tells us there were three – Mary of Magdala (“Magdalene” from up in Galilee), Mary the mother of James, and another disciple named Joanna, or Salome. These three women had returned to the burial site in order to give Jesus a more proper burial treatment. But when they arrived, they were told by two angels, “*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, he has risen!*” (Luke 24:5-6). The women were shocked and amazed, so much so, that Mark's gospel tells us they couldn't speak. But one of the angels told them, “*He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you,*” (Mark 16:7). And finally, when the men arrived, John's gospel tells us they found the burial cloths folded neatly, but nobody lying in the tomb. Simon Peter rushed in, followed by John himself, whom, having merely entered the vacant tomb, “*saw and believed,*” (John 20:8).

An empty tomb lacks all the characteristics of death. When you enter it feels as though there is something missing, and there is. Death is the enemy of mankind, which Jesus has conquered, once and for all. His empty tomb means that death does not have the final word, that honor belongs to God. This is the living hope of those who put their faith in Jesus.

SACRAMENTS PART 1 – COMMUNION

Reading: Exodus 12, and Matthew 26:17-30

Eating with people you love is meant to be sweet. When you sit down to a good meal with friends and loved ones, there should be an easy feeling of contentment, because the connection people make at the table of fellowship is a sign of deepening relationships. In Exodus 12 we see instructions spelled out for the eating of the Passover meal. It was to be eaten quickly, and sparingly. The children of Israel were about to be put on the run from Egypt, and they did not have the luxury of relaxation and feasting. Many years later, when Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples, it was in this same spirit of the Exodus, only this time God would deliver his people not from oppressive Egypt, but from the chains of sin and death.

When Jesus conducted the proceedings at his Passover meal, he did so knowing full well that he was going to the cross the next day. He blessed the meal, passed the wine, and shared the bread, giving his disciples something they could connect with in his absence – something for all the senses to *see, taste, smell, and touch*. (They also sang a hymn!)

MEDITATION

As you wait for the return of your Savior, take time to give thanks for the good gifts of God. You could start by praying, “Loving Heavenly Father, although I cannot touch, see, or hear you right now, I want to invite you to eat with me today. Please help me be more like you starting with...”

Dead Sea: Ein Geddi and Masada
Pre-Reading: *1 Samuel 24 with Psalm 18.*

When you enter the area of the Dead Sea you are coming to the area of King David, more than anyone else. 1 Sam 24:2 makes mention of the crags of the wild goats. Those goats are still there today, and with a little luck you may see them! This is the area in which David hid from Saul, prior to becoming king of Israel. At the end of the chapter you will notice that David “went up to the stronghold.” That stronghold is understood to be Mount Masada, where you will most likely ride the tram to the top. The view is spectacular, and you will learn a good deal of history while you are there.

MEDITATION

Perhaps you have felt pursued by an enemy of some sort in your life. David ran from Saul for years before finally seeing relief. He hid in the stronghold of Mount Masada, but he understood very well that God was his true rock and stronghold.

I love you, O Lord, my strength.

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;

My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.

He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

Psalm 18:1-3

DEAD SEA – MUD AND SALT

Reading: Genesis 18 and Matthew 5:13

The Dead Sea sits at the lowest point on earth, at 1300 feet below sea level, four times deeper than the lowest point in Death Valley, CA. It sits on a massive fault-line, which runs all the way through the Jordan river down through Africa. The area is barren and surreal, almost like being on another planet. There is no fresh water, and it is incredibly difficult to grow food in the region, even with modern farming techniques. There is no place quite like the Dead Sea on the face of earth, and it makes us question the idea that Israel is a “land of milk and honey.”

Nevertheless, if there is anything in abundance here, it is *salt*. In the Bible we read that Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt, during the destruction of Sodom. There was also a *salt covenant* in ancient times, whereby two parties would exchange a pinch of salt, each placing it in the salt-pouch of the other person, as a means of saying, “This covenant between us may be broken, only if these individual grains of salt can be returned from the mix!” Salt was historically used for flavoring and preservative, and Jesus teaches this analogy in his Sermon on the Mount:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”

– Matthew 5:13

SEA OF GALILEE – THE CHOSEN HOME OF JESUS

Reading: Matthew 4:12-17, Luke 4:14-30

The geographical life of Jesus progressed as follows: He was born down south in Bethlehem, while his parents were going up to Jerusalem for a Roman census. After they dedicated him to the Lord as an infant at the Temple in Jerusalem, his parents took him back to their own home in the town of Nazareth, up north. Sometime during his earliest toddler years, he was taken out of Israel altogether, and stolen away into Egypt, where his parents protected him from King Herod, until it was safe to return. Once at the age of 12, almost a full *Child of the Law*, he was found sitting in the temple courts listening to the teachers and asking questions. He had most likely *gone up* to Jerusalem every year of his life.

But when Jesus began his own ministry, he relocated from his hometown of Nazareth to the Galilee. This move allowed his message to become mainstream and international, as everyone who passed through Israel by way of the main trade route would have been likely to find out what was going on in that area. By moving to Galilee, Jesus increased the scope of his ministry enormously.

MEDITATION

Jesus moved to Galilee after he heard that John, his cousin, had been thrown into prison. When life's significant milestones occur, it is often necessary to seek out a change in footing like Jesus did. Let God speak to you today as you pray, "Loving Heavenly Father, I want to grow wherever you plant me. Here is my life. Take me, send me, and shape me into the person you want me to be. I give you..."

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

Reading: Matthew 14:22-36, Mark 5:1-20, Luke 7:11-17, John 2:1-11

Walking on water, turning water into wine, raising the dead, giving sight to the blind.

"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:41) Jesus did most of his miracles in the Galilee area. Demons were cast out of possessed people, thousands were fed on hillsides, men with leprosy were cleansed entirely, withered limbs were restored to wholeness.

"What's this wisdom that has been given to him, that he even does miracles!" (Mark 6:2)

The identity of Jesus was wrapped up in his actions. He *was* what he *did*. His miracles were meant to show mastery over the elements of nature, mastery over the physical bodies of human beings, and mastery over the spiritual realm. He used his miracles as divine expressions of joy, mercy, rebuke, care, and indescribable power. When Jesus performed miracles, people could not help but say, *"We have seen remarkable things today."* (Luke 5:26) And oftentimes they put their faith and trust in God because of it.

MEDITATION

A miracle need not be flashy. There are small miracles, humble favors from God which bring us grateful relief. Food, water, shelter, love, health. These things come from the hand of God just as much as those so-called larger prizes of life. If you have the ability to praise God, consider that a miracle in itself, not so small after all. Today you might begin your prayers with, "Dear Jesus, you have done amazing things in my life, so I fully trust you with..."

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

If Jesus had only done miracles, without any teaching, there would be no Christian faith today. The miracles of Christ were markers of his authenticity, so that his words would be supported by his actions. In other words, if Jesus *was* what he *did*, he also took the time to tell us who he *is*. It is inaccurate to consider Jesus entirely in the past-tense, as even his teachings are with us today, as powerful as the moment they were first spoken.

The Sermon on the Mount represents the core teachings of Jesus. Chances are he taught this sermon over and over, throughout the region of Galilee. It was the perfect sermon, designed to be learned and lived. You might consider reading it entirely, from Matthew 5 to 7. That is the best way to get the flavor of it. But if you are in a hurry, make sure to memorize the first saying, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*” In this beatitude Jesus lays out the foundation for everything else that follows: Blessed are the poor in spirit. You must be in *spiritual poverty* in order to inherit the kingdom of God. You must first begin by realizing your own *spiritual lack*, if your desire is to get to heaven. You must see yourself as a *spiritual pauper*, having nothing of any value that would make you deserving of the good gifts of God. According to Jesus, the people who have a home in heaven, are those who recognize they are spiritually homeless here on earth.

MEDITATION

Have here been times in your life when you have allowed pride to enter in, and said to yourself, “God blesses me because I'm quite devout.” If so, Jesus would tell you to repent, confess, and be healed. Today you might begin your devotional time by confessing, “Almighty God, I come to you, a sinner in need of mercy and grace. Please forgive me for...”

SACRAMENTS PART 2 – BAPTISM IN THE JORDON

Reading: Matthew 3, Luke 3:21-23

Have you ever wondered why Jesus insisted on being baptized? Isn't baptism supposed to be for *sinner*s who repent? Yes, it is. So why did Jesus submit to baptism? In short, baptism could be done for a variety of reasons. A person could be baptized for the starting of a new ministry, for example. This is what Jesus did. Or an infant can be dedicated to God through water baptism.

Upon his baptism, Jesus officially began his public ministry of miracles, healing, and teaching. After coming up from the water the voice of the Lord spoke from heaven, “*You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased,*” (Mark 1:11). Simultaneously, the Holy Spirit visibly appeared and came upon him. It is the only place in the Gospels where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are shown together in the same setting.

Baptism originated as a Jewish cleansing ritual, which was common in the days of Christ. The large stone jars filled with water at the wedding of Cana – which Jesus transformed into vats of wine – were meant for just such ritual cleansing.

The biblical imagery of *water*, used in baptism, is important and recurs throughout the Scriptures. In the beginning of creation the Spirit hovered over the chaotic *waters* of the deep; Moses struck the *waters* which allowed the Israelites to pass through and escape slavery; and when they pierced Jesus' side *water* poured out. So the imagery of water baptism is one that calls to mind these pictures of birth, death, and major life transitions. A person can be baptized to mark any of these.

MOUNT MEGIDDO

Reading: Revelation 16:16, with 19:11-21

The word “Armageddon” comes from two Hebrew words, *har* – meaning mountain, and Megiddo, a specific city located on the plain of Megiddo in Israel, which you will visit while in the Holy Land. The view atop the hill is spectacular, and the archaeological site at Megiddo is highly enriching. There is nothing like a trip to Megiddo to unlock the meaning behind the single mention it receives in the book of Revelation, and as my insightful and quotable wife Debe pointed out, “It is not just an event, it is a *place*.”

In Revelation 16:16 we find the only New Testament reference to the city of Megiddo, which receives the dubious distinction of being the location where the enemies of God will gather for a final battle of futility against the Lord of all creation. John's Revelation gives the place only the briefest treatment, choosing to focus on the actions of God more heavily. The picture is one of absolute hopelessness on the part of those who defiantly spit in the face of God's offer of forgiveness and grace. These people have been chastised by plague after plague, and yet, like Pharaoh ruler of Egypt, their hearts have become increasingly hardened against God, and ever more vitriolic toward his gestures of love and dire warning. In an act of sheer mania, these forces soon resolve to wage war against God himself, an entirely un-winnable prospect. This final battle, John says, will take place at Har Megiddo. You will learn the reasons why when you get there yourself.

CAESAREA

Reading: Acts 10-11; with Paul's story covered in Acts 21-26

Caesarea is a significant city to the New Testament apostles, particularly Peter and Paul. In Acts 10 we learn that Peter was called up from Joppa (in modern Tel Aviv) to Caesarea, to meet with the household of Cornelius. This meeting marked the first time in Scripture where gentiles received the Holy Spirit. Peter heard them speaking in tongues, praising God, and reasoned, *“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have,”* (Acts 10:47). It is from this point where the church proper began to break outside of its Jewish cocoon, and started to spread up through the areas of Asia Minor, down into northern Africa, even making its way to Rome itself.

The Apostle Paul has several connections with Caesarea, as it was an important port city from which ships launched regularly. Both Paul's second and third missionary journeys took him through Caesarea, where he had friendly associates, and prior to his final trip to Rome he was incarcerated there for two years before appealing to Caesar. It was here that Paul appeared before King Agrippa, whom, being shocked at Paul's testimony exclaimed, *“Your great learning is driving you insane! Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”* To which Paul answered, *“Short time or long – I pray that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”* (Acts 26:24-29)







