

ARAMAIC BIBLE COMPANION

REFLECTIONS ON VISITING THE HOLY LAND

Runaway Nazareth Boy

Let's start with a touch of humour. I sauntered down the Suq in Jerusalem and of course, as ever, there came the call "Come, come see my shop-good prices!" followed by "Where you come from?" "Scotland" I replied-only to be regaled with this sweet poem:

*There was a Nazareth boy and a naughty boy was he
He ran away to Scotland the people there to see
There he found
That the ground was as hard
That a yard was as long
That a song was as merry
That a cherry was as sweet.*

It is very true that wherever you go things are much the same. Walter Entrican, a homiletics lecturer I had in earlier days used to say "There are two things about the world-its climate and geography and its people and the needs of the latter are the same everywhere you go."

Patsy Fagan Lyric

My mother used to run a Boarding House where the Mountains of Mourne run down to the Irish Sea. As a boy not the height of a breakfast table I was rehearsed in an Irish song by summer guests from Scotland as they looked at my fair hair and bright eyes. They said in chorus:

*'I'm working here in Glasgow, I've got a decent job
Carrying brick and mortar and me pay is fifteen bob
I rise up in the mornin', I get up with the lark
And as I'm walkin' down the street you can hear the girls remark
'Hello Patsy Fagan' You can hear the girls all cry
Hello Patsy Fagan, your'e the apple of mi eye
You're a dacent boy from Ireland, there's no one can deny
You're a rarem tarem devil may carem dacent Irish boy.*

The Apple of God's eye

You would be entitled to ask “What’s the connection of Patsy Fagan with the Holy Land?” and sure enough there is none. But wait-there is something about the “apple of the eye”. We read, don’t we in Zechariah 2.8 “Whoever touches you touches the apple of my eye” The Lord is very sensitive to Israel-her wellbeing and her future are in his mighty hands. In these latter days since 1948 and the independence declaration of the then premier *David Ben Gurion* (a distant relative of *Nicodemus Ben Gurion* who came to Jesus by night) Israel has flown her prayer tent with the star of David on it as her flag above this beautiful land-what an ensign! What an exquisite country! If you ever have the opportunity to visit take it. Mina and I first flew By Monarch to Ben-Gurion (Lod) airport in 1992 to commemorate our 25th Wedding. We were picked up by *Maggie Matheson* who worked in the spectacular period setting of the Presbyterian hostel in Tiberias.

By Blue Galilee(1992)

*By blue Galilee Jesus walked of old
By blue Galilee wondrous things He told
Saviour, still my teacher be
Showing wondrous things to me
As of old by Galilee-blue Galilee!*

Our first ever walk was north from Tiberias past some stalls where we bought citrus fruit and on past a flourishing Kibbutz where the “first century fishing boat” is preserved and presented to view. Then onward we walked beyond Magdala and Capernaum (Jesus’ home town & the synagogue and Peter’s house & all that) and Heptapegon (where our Lord fed the five thousand) and on the other side of the road Beatitudes where the birds swooped in huge flocks and the fields were literally white to harvest. We walked on and caught sight of a few vigilant coneys standing guard over their home in the basalt near Chorazin on the mountain side sitting like cinders in its black rock ruins on the face of the hill-oh what a ministry it had and failed to appreciate. On an on we went by now de-hydrating for the heat of the day was coming on. At length we arrived at the Bailey bridge by the head of the lake close to where the Jordan flows into the Sea. On a subsequent journey we were to go along the river strip to the newly discovered site of Bethsaida which lies a few kilometers due north on a lovely hill with trees flowers

between the cumulus and the river-a gorgeous location. On our way back we dined most pleasantly under bedouin style dark tent cover on Peter's fish and olives by the Sea and returned for a little rest to the

hostel –an eventful and unforgettable first day in Galilee.



Bob & Mina with Peter & Betty Donald-
Curator-Garden Tomb

McCheyne's 1839 research party

Away back in 1839 in company with *Andrew Bonar, Dr.Black and Dr.Keith* this doyen of the Scots Free Church visited Palestine. A section returned via Budapest

to assess what numbers of Jews lived there among whom they could establish a gospel witness (one missionary for one year costing £250) on the principle "To the Jew first". The 1839 delegation found only 5 converted Jews in Israel! We worshipped with about 50 in one gathering in Galilee. It is of interest in the light of Covid19 that they could not get to Jerusalem by Hebron because a plague was rife there. They journeyed by donkey and camel first approaching Jerusalem in its humble state from Ashdod by the Mediterranean –much of Jerusalem was "as a ploughed field". Their route took them by Latroon(village of the good thief) and Ramah. When they nearer Jerusalem Murray McCheyne could abide no longer the slow pace of the donkeys and gaining his feet he ran forward to gain the first glimpse of Jerusalem. Of course on coming home he found his congregation rejoicing in revival but his earthly stay was short and as *his colleagues commented "He first gained also glimpse of Glory"*.

Bonar observes that Bethany had but 5 buildings-the city had only 4 gates-Jaffa Damascus Stephen and Zion and around its walls the circuit was 3 miles. I well remember our first evening in Jerusalem when we ran together in the Valley of Hinnom to take the superb view from Peter in Gallicantu built by the home of the biblical Caiaphas. The location is special as a small mosque once stood there which covered the tomb of David referred to in Acts 2.29. More of Jerusalem as the story unfolds.

The Scotland-Israel McCheyne Trip (1996)

I modeled our itinerary on McCheyne's-exploring Jerusalem the Golden first. The interval of 150 or so years proved very instructive on looking back. Our approach by midibus took us past the Jaffa Gate where MMcC called out "Our feet shall stand within thy gates O Jerusalem" Psa125.2. We stayed in the Church of Scotland hostel-the same base as MMcC. He saw the "Hebrew" church foundations being dug-50 foot above 1st century Jerusalem-as he looking across beyond Acladama. The church was built with Stones from Anathoth (Jeremiah's birthplace)-still intact and glistening fresh today. Our monarch flight had dropped into Lod where *Edersheim* says the Sanhedrin met that impeached our Lord at 4.45pm Israeli time (Darkness falls at 6pm) and we filed out of our 19seater midibus to the joys of St.Andrews (built to commemorate *Allenby's* 1917 relief of the city ("as birds fly will the Lord defend Jerusalem" Isaiah31.5 -he deployed the earliest aircraft and the defenders fled). How happy we were to arrive. What more could you want-tidy bedrooms with private facilities-a comfy lounge where we had an evening singsong-a lovely garden-a small shop where to browse before nutritious evening dinner. We never felt more at home. As if this was not enough of enjoyment-the next day was Independence Day (5h Iyyer) and we would witness a glorious fireworks display from the hostel roof gallery.

Chimham's house-the world's oldest church

The second day's itinerary included a coach trip to the top of the Mount of Olives to a vantage spot for photos of the Eastern Gate (where our Lord will enter when He comes in glory) and a delightful walk downhill past the supposed Ascension locale via Zechariah's tomb (slain between the temple and the altar (Lk11.51) and a visit to the *Pater Noster* and the small tiles plaques teaching in multiple languages a pattern for our approach to God. A dear blind man was strategically positioned there. Then further down the steep flagstones to Dominus Flevit (where on another occasion we were locked in for over an hour at siesta time on account of forgetting a vital sunhat. Our Olivet walk concluded with a photo-call outside the Church of all Nations with 8 old olive trees in the grounds (-one at least standing from the early if not earliest century of this dispensation of Grace. *Horatius Bonar* -of the 1839 party wrote:

Not from grey Olivet alone

*We see the gates of light,
From Morven's Heath and Jungfrau's snow
We welcome the descending glow
Of pearl and chrysolite
And the unsetting sun.*

In AD1248 the Ottomans applied a 1 medina per tree tax but 1/2Medina to fruitful trees which led to the felling of unfruitful specimens. **MMcC observed that one of the 8 olives he saw was 24feet in girth.-any we saw were half that girth.** Our morn on the Mount was beautiful –now we were bound for what the poet has called “satisfactory” Bethlehem. Yet has it mystique and a unique history.

*O Now, carry me to Bethlehem to see the Lord appear to men
Just as poor as was the stable then-The Prince of Glory when He came!*
The jewel of Bethlehem was the star pinned to the spot marking where Jesus was born. To enter that church-the ancient inn of Chimham(friend of David cf Ps63.2) and the oldest church in the world you must bow low-we who believe are redeemed because of the “stoop” he our Jesus took.



The star that marks the birthplace of Christ in the
Church of the nativity

A Barlucci ceiling & Murphy O'Connor

It's a bumpy track from David's city to the fields where the Shepherds heard the Angels sing. Our Arab driver talked himself past his friends by some subterfuge that suited him and them.

Our equivalent would be a vehicle charge. As we queued I listened to a tall man with a ponytail in a gentle scholarly altercation with an archeologist. It went something like this:

Irish scholar “What would you be doing?”

Archeologist “Determining the age of these church founds!”

Irish scholar “What century would you say?”

Archeologist “The third I would say!”

Irish scholar “That's where you wad b' wrang!”

Archeologist “Are you casting doubt on my expertise?”

Irish scholar “Na-ye just don’t know yer tiles!”

The point *Dr. Jerome Murphy O’Connor* (Dominican scholar & Professor of New Testament at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem and brother of the late *Cardinal Archbishop Cormac O’Connor* of Westminster) was making is that as Roman tooling improved tiles were refined and smaller. The tiles in the tassellated floor in question were too small for the era in question.

I struck up a conversation with Jerome and enjoyed his company greatly. He undertook to lead both parties and in we went to the modern chapel with its superb ceiling depicting the animals worshipping the Christ-child. *Jerome*-a man of instant disarming questions launched his opening ambit “Ye are well-taught Protestants I know-where do we read in scripture of the “Ox that knows its master and the ass that knows its master’s crib?” Silence all round! I am surprised quoth he-“You will find the quote in Isaiah1.3.” There are some things we need to know-maybe not the history of glazed tiles but-yes-the salvation story writ large in our bibles. Jerome knew the word as anyone reading his commentaries on Corinthians will readily acknowledge-and he knew His Lord!

Tantur Bible Open Air experience centre

For our first full day in the Holy Land this was a real learning curve and a terrific experience. On we went to En-Kerem-the “village” of John the Baptist and hence to Tantur-a culture experience centre established by *Dr James Fleming* and my friend *David Hodgson* who arranged for the induction of a number of us as guides to Israel. *Dr.J.W.Fleming* of New York is an indefatigable scholar and founder of the Israel and US Bible Experience centres. David supplied each of us with James’ A4 “Lifetime Bible Lands Companion” that folds in 5 complete with infra red Satellite Photos of the Land. James Fleming developed an open air center at Tantur (now closed). His “Biblical Resources” with 150 Sections (Four hours of lectures)on every conceivable item one needs to know about Israel in relation to religion, geography, society, history and background to scripture is unsurpassed anywhere in the world.-a modern “Land and the Book”. Our scribe on an Introductory tour was the gentle giant *Rev. Geoff Grogan*-late celebrated bible teacher of Glasgow Bible College (who often joined me as preacher in Ayrshire) Geoff. wrote a log including data on Tantur-its open air artifact

constructions and lectures-featuring “cross construction”, “tents” “threshing floor, wine press & Oil extraction procedure” –“wells and springs & cisterns” “Quarries and Tombs” to mention just a few. The loss of this centre and resources is a marked loss to all subsequent tours.

Gordon's Calvary



Golgotha (old bus Station)Jeremiah's Grotto

*Calvary covers it all my past with
its sin and shame
My guilt and despair Jesus took
on Him there
And Calvary covers it all.*

Now come the greatest spiritual vistas and most awesome thoughts of the entire tour –gazing at

Golgotha and the old Bus station (once Jeremiah's grotto where he sat

amid the trials of famine and ruminated **sorrow**"*Lamentations*1.12) & the Garden Tomb site.

First one must take it in-such a beautiful place-so quiet-so stunning-one reaches for the camera to snap the wooden door with its “He is no here-he is risen” and the nearby scarp of Golgotha with hollowed eyes and mouth. On the short walk between at the midway point one passes incognito a



Pastor Pearson in the chisel cut garden tomb chamber

“**myrrh**” tree with once whispered to me just as we passed as thousands do unawares.



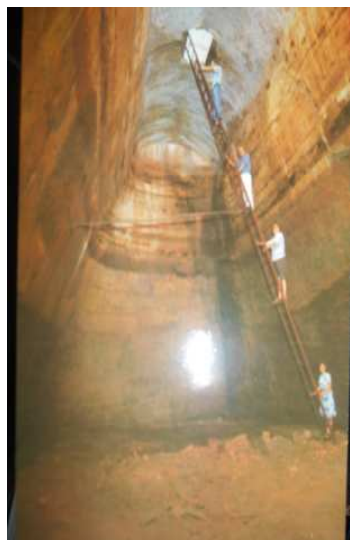
Ancient chiseled Anchor east wall of an early church

*My Lord has garments so wondrous fine,
And **myrrh** their texture fills;
Its fragrance reach'd to this heart of mine,
With joy my being thrills*

*Out of the ivory palaces and into a world of sin
Naught but His great eternal love made my Saviour come*

The author was inspired by *Wilbur Chapman* speaking on Psalm 45.8—a prophetic vision of Christ leaving the glory of heaven to bring redemption to a sin-stained earth. The fragrance of His garments remains—the beauty of His character, a balm for the bitterness of His earthly life, and cassia for His healing power.”

If you know anything about the Boys Brigade you will know that their great text from Hebrews 6.19 is “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek” Well on the front of the garden tomb any good guide will point out the anchor inscribed



Water cistern to serve the garden

above in the stone from the early centuries when a church was built just proud of the tomb and the tomb was its eastern wall—whence came the sunshine of our souls.

About 40 yards west is a manhole cover and beneath a cistern capable of providing thousands of gallons of water for the ancient garden.

Upon entering the tomb you are in a vestibule immediately right of which are two table-like stone platforms with a passage between—all carved from solid rock. The ceiling is chisel picked somewhat like artex work but more painstaking. One of the platforms has been extended beyond the original dimension of

the sloping roof to accommodate a taller figure. The evidence that this is “the place where they laid Him” is very compelling. The distance from

Golgotha is a three minute walk. The locale is north of the Damascus gate adjacent to the North West ancient agricultural fields from where Simon would have come.

I produced daily factsheets for my party and from the one for the locale etc. of Calvary & the garden tomb I will retail some detail for your interest.

1. It is without the gate Hebrews 13.12
2. By a place “calling itself Golgotha” by its visible evidence Lk 23.33
- 3 It was en route to the North & North West fields. Mk 15.21
- 4 It accords with the place of sin-offering Lev. 1.11
- 5 It encloses the site of stoning Beth-ha-selikhah where Romans crucified
- 6 Tertullian stated that at Calvary/Golgotha Christ suffered.
- 7 McCheyne’s party passed nearby but could not get sight of the place because of the Arab village that disguised it entirely.
- 8 In 1867 German archaeologist *Conrad Schlick* found the Tomb
- 9 In 1875-83 Col Condor & Gen. Gordon secure the site
- 10 *Louisa Hop & Dame K Kenyon* confirm the tomb as 1st century.
- 11 One sector was chiseled afresh from 5’9” to admit a 5’11” figure.
- 12 The garden cistern capax 200,000 gallons relates JOHN 19-41
- 13 An adjacent vault is inscribed “buried near his Lord”
- 14 Earthquake fissures are very evident
- 15 The garden tomb “*topos*” is just over 300 years from Golgotha Jn 19.41.



Author near the Empty Tomb of our Lord

Mina & I stood by the tomb with joy like that of Mary on the resurrection morning. It demonstrates superb confirmation of what *C.S. Lewis* calls “The Grand Miracle” and stencils on the soul the greatest acts of redemptive love and hope standing between creation and this very day.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Most pilgrims visit this glitzy place. It has very negative credentials. Dr. Fleming passes this building which was erected in the fifth century by the mother of Constantine as one of many Basilicae in honour of Christ.

1. The Church's history a priori is very suspect for it was only to be erected after the finding of the original cross. The Emperor's mother grew irritated with the extended time of search and threatened the searchers who under duress came up with a suitable and curiously convincing wooden artifact. Pieces of the same began subsequently to appear throughout Europe. The Basilica was erected on the site of the find which geographically relates not at all to the gospel facts.
 2. Facts that we can adduce are that it lay by no highways. The church was taken into the city by *Helena* according to *Willibrand*(722AD)and by the Latin testimony of Jerome who writes "*Et inventionis sanctae crucis quondam extra urbem jacentia nunc ejusdem urbis muro*"(*The sacred cross discovered outside the city situated itself at the wall of the city*). **Pretty miraculous woodwork, I must say.** In effect the church was moved to suit Helena's preferred pilgrimage site.
 3. The distance from the Gabbatha pavement of Pilate to the concocted sepulcher is **five inches** and the distance from the Tomb to Calvary is **2-3 feet**.
 4. In May 1891 *James McKean* who visited the subterranean passages and pretentious quarried and plastered sites below wrote a book entitled "Among the Holy places" from which I extract. "You enter the sepulcher which would hardly accommodate 3 people but its high roof is festooned with lamps. Returning to the stone of anointment you ascend a steep stone stair on the east of the entrance –this leads to Calvary-three large crucifixes are set in the rock. You may lift a narrow piece of grating and put your hand into the rent of the rock. It is open to question if the rock is genuine. Descend the stair and pry into the places immediately below the rock and you are somewhat staggered. Here are rooms of various sorts. You are forced to the conclusion that if the rock upstairs is in its natural position there must have been most industrious honeycombing underneath it. And yet you cannot conceive how any body of men, let alone devout men, could have conspired to suspend the rock there on masonry, and give it out to be the genuine, natural Calvary. My only comment would be –you can't easily trick a Scot! The place is a fix and a fraud.
- As a party we gave the place short shift and walked a little way to Zion gate via a construct of Mark's house and were greeted by one of the crackpots you see in the city playing a harp and projecting himself with all faith as David incarnate. We were glad of our tea and an evening

sing song and epilogue when we could meditate on the living Lord after being deeply moved at the authentic tomb,

*O Calvary! dark Calvary!
Where Jesus shed His blood for me;
O Calvary! Blest Calvary!
'Twas there my Saviour died for me.*

Off to market at Beersheba



Women baking at Beersheba Market

An early 8.15am start took us south beyond Bethlehem and Solomon's Pools and Hebron (passing the turn off to the field of battle of David & Goliath in the Valley of Elah) where we stopped to watch the glassblowing and see the Tomb of the patriarchs. This was the valley of Eshcol route taken by the 10 spies of Joshua. In the last decade of the 20th century Christian shops existed in Manger square and we visited a fine Bible College led by *Dr Awad Bishara* on the way in to the city and by the pools a great Catholic establishment was still in full swing many Christians lived in the vicinity. Any destination south of Bethlehem is now closed to tourists.

Tel Beersheba retains the well of Abraham still delivering good pure water though its "*Oaks of Mamre*" are of more modern planting. The market was a treat. En route one member of the party observing a



Sheep & Goats, camels & clothes tools & cars also sold.

lounging Bedouin asleep by a home which looked poorly cared for observed "You'd wonder that fellow doesn't get up and tidy the place!" You would, but that fellow wouldn't-it's probably no different a generation

later.

Well we arrived at the market. No stalls-everything was on the ground. Car parts-clothes of all descriptions-shoes –animals of all species from camels to donkeys, copper coloured rugs and multi-coloured carpets and grapes and olives by the bucket full-and confections galore. The spice fragrances hang in the warm air and mingle with the smoke –but you have to watch your feet for Camels are everywhere. There was Arab coffee like treacle and sweet honeyed cakes the size of cartwheels. One of these could be cut in concentric circles and would provide enough for four or five parties our size. We did indulge in the cakes and baklava. The experience was worth having-it was our only exposure to the Bedouin economy in action and one had to say these people were fair and they were honest and full of initiative.

The Western Wall

In the indoor cool we enjoyed our “build your own salad” courtesy of James Fleming’s Italian café while we watched a mealtime video and then rested on the tricliniums replicating the Passover style and participating in the teaching and actions of the meal -a fitting prelude to our return to the city.

Our approach was by the Stephen Gate (formerly the north gate and one of 8 today including the “eastern/golden gate” sealed in 1530). It bears the lions of the Marmeluke coat of arms and commemorating the wall construction of *Suliman the Magnificent*. Just inside is the building sited above where the home of Anne the mother of the Virgin Mary. Bethesda; the water had forsaken the great chasm where 5 colonnades had been -now it resembled a naval dock. By AD520 it had just 2 pools and by AD1100 it was shortened by the Crusaders who built St Mary’s (viz The church or house of St Anne). Our walk took us along the “Ecce homo”. No visitor should miss the Cardo-the “Oxford St. of the city or the “Ecce Homo” roadway built by Hadrian in AD135. The nearby Gabbatha or pavement still bears the markings of the “Game of Kings” (cf. Luke22.64ff)

Our day ended by the Western wall with its mighty ashlars; The temple “Sacrum” lies above –and of it Christ said “Not one stone shall be left upon another”(Matt24,2/Mk13.2/Lk 21.16) There hard by (but below the present levels) the present Dome of the Rock represents Moriah and the place of Burnt offering –in direct line east from the HOLY place.

The containment or “Wailing” wall was the only structure to survive Roman assault. McCheyne in 1839 counted 10 courses of stone some 15X3 and others 8X8 and all 24 feet long. Some of us took at prayer cap and tucked a written prayer for the peace of Jerusalem in the wall and then visited the synagogue of the wall. There Rabbis of the poorer sort still beg for shekels. It was time for dinner and then a gentle evening stroll around *Montefiore’s* village for senior citizens-a neat little dormitory hamlet originally built to eliminate squalor by the polish Jew who also repaired Rachel’s tomb.

The Dead Sea, Engedi, Masada & Sodom

A visit to Israel may be a pilgrimage sometimes “running where Jesus walked!” so it is great when you can relax Day 4’s requisites were swim gear towels sun cream and definitely shades or a wide-brimmed hat-we were off to Qumran, Engedi, and Masada and some travelled on to Sodom (which is pollen free if salt rich) for sight of the great salt fields and the fabulous pillar of Lot’s wife.



Bob enjoys the shade near Engedi waterfall

The rift valley is one of 4 such on earth and the only one reachable. At a depth of 1300 feet and with 2 atmospheres it is the lowest place you can go on earth. *The spiritual observation of McCheyne was “How shall we escape if we neglect so*

great salvation/”-Hebrews2.3 As MMcC also observed “the waters are still sullen” in Jeshimon 1Sam.23.19. With 26% solids in the water everybody can float and many love to smear on the skin purifying bituminous chemical laden with bromide for the nerves and magnesium for the skin and this you can buy at Qumran. It can be washed off by use of one of the many showers provided after sufficient enjoyment of your new black skin.



View of Salt pillars at Sodom

I recall floating on my back and reading a newspaper held aloft. Lots of fun is to be had and immense riches lie to the south in the minerals being harvested from the fast receding waters. Still the awesome lesson “Remember Lot’s wife” is the abiding thought.

A better place to swim is lovely Engedi where the ibex plays and the waterfall cascades from 200 feet above into the warm water pool. Whilst sedately travelling up the cable car to Masada’s glorious viewpoint is a challenge the ‘Ein’ or ‘eye’ of water the ‘kids’ of the goats (hence Engedi) love is also a great youth play-pool. The oath of the Israeli army is “Masada shall not fall again”. Its 900 defenders last stand galvanized future warriors of the nation that Titus believed almost conquered his legions,

Qumran

In the year AD63 the Qumran “watch” spotted the shining snake of



Qumran caves where Dead Sea Scrolls were hidden

Pompey’s army and sound the alarm. The contents of the Scriptorum were hurriedly deposited in concealed cave No.4 within 100 metres of the settlement.

It was not until AD1947 that the treasure trove of well preserved documents ascended into the higher

atmosphere and higher learning. We viewed the scrolls in miniature in the “House of the scribe Kibbutz” nearby. It was the histrionics of an Arab boy “*the wolf of the Ta Amirah tribe*” set off a scramble throughout Europe for ancient scrolls. *Mohammed* was throwing stones

into the caves and guessed from the “ping” that he had hit some pitchers with gold contents stirred the learned world out of sleep concerning the third sect of the Jews-the Essenes. These people used to accept youths from Jewish and especially priestly families to advance them in the scriptures and holy living –and doubtless here John the Baptist “who was in the desert till his showing to Israel” was trained. The sect sought “the teacher of Righteousness” and had an advanced interest in Apocalyptic. A very early copy of Mark’s gospel was found among its treasure trove of documents.

We had a little look at the mini scrolls and essential liquid refreshment after the administration of a hugely over-spiced meal that filled the coffers of the restaurateurs. Then we were off –the ravens of Masada had not eaten from our hands and the bats had not bitten our noses and before the leopards came out but not before we had a camel ride to boot we were primed for the “ear-popping” 3000 feet crawl upwards to our hostel home for a dinner.

Bethany

Up with the prayer call and away after breakfast we made our first stop at Bethany. I have a good story told by the guide to Lazarus’ tomb. There we stood awaiting descent by the winding stairway to the ancient tomb. The ruins of Lazarus home were a few meters uphill. Impressive ruins they were! Ancients say Lazarus owned up to half of the property in Jerusalem and that he had a military career. That would certainly explain the crowds of mourners comforting his sisters.

O the story of course-it just shows that “in laws” haven’t their sorrows to seek even in Israel. The guide produced a sling like that of David-placed a stone neatly in the pocket and swung the twisted cords pleated into it several times and whirled the stone toward nearby Bethphage. There was a cry “You’ll kill somebody!” The guide’s well practiced reply ricocheted back “Only the mother-in law”. One has to suppose that being a tomb guide benefits from a little light relief.

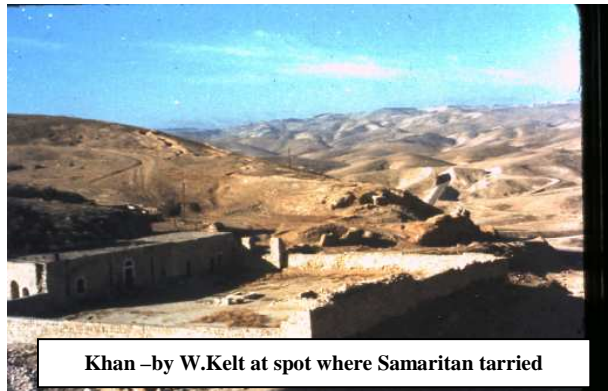
We were glad to be advised that Lazarus did not have to climb the circular staircase of 24 steps by which we descended-there is a lower entrance-but this feature tended to enhance a miracle that needed no embellishing-“Lazarus come forth” was our Master’s grand prelude to His own Resurrection and His manner of galvanizing the disciples in

face of his death. ***Rightly would McCheyne observe “In all our afflictions He was afflicted” (Isa.63.9)***

*He is able He is able
I know my Lord is able to carry me through
He healed the broken hearted
And set the captive free
He made the lame to walk again
And caused the blind to see.
I know my Lord is able to carry me through*

Wadi Kelt and the house of the Good Samaritan

A modest ancient road runs in parallel with the one by which we travelled to Jericho but there are distinct links. Today's house of the Samaritan (an old Turkish Khan or inn) stands a few kilometers from Bethany as the land begins to plateau. The Wadi Kelt or old Road on which the robbers set up their trap for travelers compares to an Irish lane for twists and bends and narrows. As we alighted to take some photographs near the Qilt Elijah, where he fled from Jezebel (1Kings 18-19) a nearby group of salesmen not unlike the original bandits edged



closer to us. Some of our party was attracted to their wares. Soon these quasi salesmen with a string of watches on their arms began to attempt to lighten us of valuable holiday equipment-we had fallen among shrewd thieves not burly robbers and

seeing our danger just in time hopped back on the bus leaving them on this little changed old road awaiting the next travelers on the Jericho Road.

The oldest city on earth

Jericho, an 8000 year old city is overlooked to the west by the Mount of Temptation where little round stones lie like bread rolls on the earth. Tel Jericho *Prof. Garstang* estimated to represent a BC1200 fall of the city whereas *Dame Catherine Kenyon* thought BC1100 is more likely. Bricks 4in X 2.5 once were widely spread about. Kenyon reckons the mud earthwork walls simply slid down but *Leonard Wooley* insisted they fell flat. Kenyon found 23 levels of construction through the millennia.

A prolific spring once fed the city-probably the one whose water Elisha made sweet provides 76 litres of water per. second today. The city is of course under the Palestinian authority. Passing through coaches can be set upon but we travelled under Arab auspice and passed through unscathed.

Jericho in a sense became a city under a curse Joshua 6.26 & 1Kings 16.34 but the Lord passed through it and lifted the blight of blindness from not a few and the curse of loving Mammon from the life of the Zaccheus the *rich titch*.

*Jesus passed through Jericho
As to the cross He went
And to the humble and the weak
The Son of God was sent
Saviour I believe
Let me now my sight receive
Christ of Jericho
Let me Thy salvation know.*

Above that vital visit of Jesus and his gracious stay with Zaccheus could be written in letters of pure gold "He bore the curse for you and me". In Aramaic the Holy Spirit is called the PARAK QLITA "the breaker of the curse" because He continues in our souls and experience that our Lord did by His atoning death. It matters that Jesus passed that way-I wonder did He go on to encourage those of the "Moon city" to be pure as the moon and fearful as an army with banners when in the last weeks of ministry He went to stay at Bethany beyond Jordan?

American Baptist travel mentor

In those days the last old Arab firm in East Jerusalem was on its last legs with walls loaded with files of past clients but few on its current

listing. In the 1990's I used to walk unmolested and with no cause to fear with several thousand dollars currency to the agency office. One thing I did learn is that Arab businessmen in my experience never made repayments so you had to secure an agreement with a minimal deposit. By the same token I was never swindled but when the firm collapsed I lost a small prepayment. I was fortunate to have a direct line to the M.D. of one of America's most experienced Holy Land Travel Firms who gave me an oral on the rulebook by which he operated, "Plans are established by seeking advice" Proverbs 20.18. He always added a percentage for small losses and reckoned it safe to allocate one third of your overall estimated cost to airfare, one third to hotel accommodation and one third to inland travel entrances tips etc. by this rule of thumb we always ended with a small balance which I either returned or spent on a good celebratory meal for the party during the holiday and once such party I shall mention shortly.

Emmaus Quibebah

G.K.Chesterton put it so well "The resurrection launched a winged thunderbolt of everlasting enthusiasm"; the Emmaus Road disciples discovered that zeal when they met the risen Lord incognito. From the burning heat of Jericho we travelled to the leafy village of Quibebah –a location 60 furlongs from the city. It has by distance the prior claim to being the ancient home village of Cleophas. Another claimant is Abu Ghosh which is also pleasant but is 10 miles distant as opposed to 7.5. Abu Ghosh is more likely to be Kirjath Jearim. Luke24 is a favourite passage with most Christians and the two travelers to Emmaus expressed disappointment with Jesus. McCheyne had no idea where

Emmaus might be and suggested `Kephorieh south of El Geeb by the very uncertain mapping of natural beauty plenteous vines and a rocky path.

The ancient village of Quibebah strengthens its claim with its well ordered small homes of evident antiquity and a fine roadway of the old Roman type comparing well to the Via Appia reaching



Rembrandt's Emmaus Interior

south of Rome-it is much shorter and narrower but is suggestive of an ancient military settlement within easy marching distance of the city. The discussion with our Lord that caused the hearts of Cleophas and his friend to “burn within them” coupled with the manifestation of the nail-pierced arms renders this incident at the climax of Luke’s “factbook” a very telling proof of the Risen Christ if on change of mood alone. The unparalleled scriptural lessons taught have led to the name “Emmaus” being chosen by several bible teaching agencies as the model and mantle of their Bible Course.

Ben Yehudi Street

It was the last night of a packed schedule in the south of the country. It is I think best practice for Tour Groups to immerse them in the rich history, travel experience and sheer intensity of culture to be found in Jerusalem and the southern *loci prisci* before moving north to the gentler and more restful scenery and pleasurable relaxation of Galilee. A Saturday evening after sunset is the prime time to enjoy Ben Yehudi Street. Here after the observations of Sabbath Israeli Jews let their hair down and crowd into the restaurants and sit in family groups outside at tables well spread.

Our entire group joined in the party spirit to spend the surplus money that was available after all major bills had been paid.

We had gateau and cream with coffee and knickerbocker glory ices to follow or alternate menu choices as suited taste. Over the way a musician was playing his violin and several Sephardi Jews were registering the end of Sabbath with their ram’s horns. It was a most pleasant cacophony.

Then there was something I have never before seen nor ever seen again. There were solemn Rabbis in a small circle rehearsing Torah and speaking much like the British evangelist would. The only trouble was that after Sabbath most people had enough of formal religion-but this group has made provision for that too. Sometimes beside, and sometimes before the bespectacled gentlemen stood a most comic little chap. He would clap and then he would “boo” and you had to wonder was he for or against. He seems at first sight to be mocking the more serious gentlemen-but very soon one gathered he was a vital part of the act. He was the draw and his comic Hebrew comments which were largely lost on us caused much hilarity but meantime the message of the

more sober contributors was hitting its target. One could say there's no show without Punch and here there was no proclamation without light relief.

The Israeli football team had just won an international match and the place was ecstatic. We proceeded to the "Scottie" with much to talk about and were looking forward to the Tiberias "Scottie"(Scots Presbyterian Hostel) stay and time by the Lake and amid the spring beauty of the Golan.

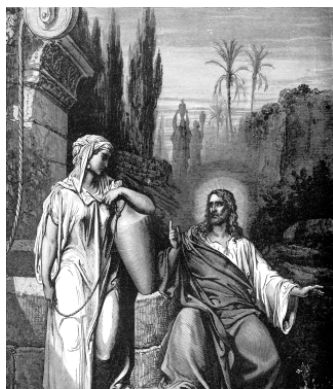
Samaria & Sychar

"So long, farewell, auf wiedersehen, good-bye –I heave a sigh and say "Good-bye". That much was always true on leaving the "Scottie" in Jerusalem. There was some cheer in our hosts' hopes of "Jerusalem next year" (it would be two years till we were back-that is "some of us"). "I'm glad to go, I cannot tell a lie"-that was also true because we had an exciting day ahead and beyond that the joy of exploring Galilee, Golan and even reaching the glimmering Mediterranean at Carmel. ***Yet as Murray McCheyne so truly testified "It seemed a wonderful privilege to be allowed to worship in the very city where Immanuel died and where His living voice called on Jerusalem sinners in accents of 'more than human tenderness'saying "If any man thirst let him come to me"Jn.7.37***

The route north lay through Anata(Anathoth),Gabaa9Gibeah, Er-ram(Ramah) Tel Nasbeh (Mizpeh), El Beeroth(where the Holy Family noted Jesus'abence), Beitin(Bethel) Khirbet Seilun(Shiloh) and Balata(Shechem) to Sychar. The little village is marked by a Greek Orthodox Church where building began in 1903 and it remains a work in progress! Just short of half our 100 miles of travel we made Sebastiyeh (ancient Samaria) our half-way house for refreshments and we did a welcome walk of about half a mile circuiting of the old city, on the raised grassy walkway that covers its walls.

The dusty roads and different national habit matches the geographic change. We were alert to men wearing ruby red hats-Samaritans. Sure enough one or two of the 600 of their population were spotted as we come near Nablus where little Mordecai took McCheyne by the hand saying "Jehudi"-and he in turn gave the lad the tract of Salmasius who when dying wished he had spent his days studying scripture-it was for the man at the Bazaar. Samaritans have their own Torah supposedly

written by Abishua son of Phineas 3781 years ago (by 2020). In MMcC's day there were only 120 Samaritans. They do not believe in the restoration of the Jews although the evidence is everywhere today.



**Dore-impression of the
woman at the well**

In the fruitful
Vale of Sychar, McCheyne recorded seeing
almonds, pomegranates, figs, grapes,
mulburries, carobs and oranges, besides
noble palm trees.

A mountainside above the vale is the setting
of Jotham's "parable of the trees", the valley
runs between Ebal and Gerazim where
Joshua pronounced the blessing and curses
attendant on obedience and disobedience
and (Joshua 8.32-33).

The nearby Tomb of Joseph (200 meters
north of the well) was out of bounds for
security reasons so we filed in to the (now)
indoor well of Sychar. In 1839 a small chamber (now enlarged) housed
the well. The well is 75 feet deep but dry in 1839 though normally
holding 10-12 feet of water at the bottom in those earlier days. It is 35
metres deep today-about 114 feet. An intermediate estimate by *Bishop
Brown Rigg* made it 95 feet. The guide instructed us to drop a coin and
wait several seconds before it splashed into the water below with an
echo! This underscores the vital point "The well is deep and you have
nothing to draw with". Each of us in bygone days found the Way to God
a mystery until one of God's chosen vessels with gospel treasure in it
through the blessed Holy Spirit poured out the gospel word-that we
might taste the living water and never thirst again.

*We're feeding on the living bread,
We're drinking at the fountainhead;
And whoso drinketh Jesus said,
Shall never, never thirst again.
What, never thirst again? No, never thirst again!
What never thirst again? No never thirst again!
And whoso drinketh Jesus said,
Shall never, never thirst again*

In 1839 *Horatius Bonar* (Famous hymn writer & member of the McCheyne party) went alone to Samaria where at a synagogue 50 persons worshipped. One of these guided the party from the city's East gate-2 miles to Sychar. There our Lord rested at the entrance of the lovely vale at the base of 800 foot Gerazim. This is the place where the story of John 4 unfolds and although *Horatius Bonar* dropped his bible into the well but not before they read the story with "New and lively interest". *Dr.Keith*(another colleague of McCheyne)lost his cane with a compass on its handle at Ramah! I can empathise because I lost a blackthorn cane with turned handle made for me by *George Craig* of Randalstown, Like Keith and Bonar I can say I was greatly enriched and in no sense impoverished by my visits to the land of my Lord.

Galilee at last



**Mina prepares cakes on
"Scottie" verandah
Overlooking the lake**

God made seven seas but He loved Galilee the best!-my words, but who that has experienced this lovely inland Sea would contest this truism?

We boarded the midibus once more passing Dothan(with Davidic connections) and Jenin junction(where the 10 lepers were healed)and the vicinity of Naboth's vineyard and towering Gilboa taking two short breaks before we caught sight of Chinnereth-lovely lake Galilee.

At Harod we had a short walk-had time allowed we could have had a swim-it's a fabulous national park. There it was that Gideon selected his 300 men to face

Midian (Judges6-7). Then a further short break at Beth-Shean for 3pm and for 5shekels each we viewed this city of Manasseh where the valiant men of Jabesh Gilead recovered Saul's body from disgrace (1Sam31).

The lake is 30 miles long and we still had 15 miles to travel along the western shore. We passed Kibbutz Deganya whose kibbutzniks played a significant part in the battle for independence. On a previous occasion I have stayed overnight there. It houses many hardworking arable

workers and provides good solid meals and a happy environment though less convenient for exploring northern Galilee. We went whizzing past **Hammam** –the hot spring baths where *Mina* and I have enjoyed gymnastic exercises in the pool and browsed in the Christian bookshop in the complex. There is also an ancient synagogue with a zodiac on the floor-testimony to the fact that the earliest use of that device was in connection with prophecies of the Lamb of God the Messiah.

Our arrival was timed-the heavy gates were ajar and a welcoming party greeted us most warmly. Our sample of the loveliness as we came along whetted our appetite-but first we must be shown to our rooms and get a quick wash. Then we could meet on the Eastern verandah and watch the sun set on the lake where the Lord often sailed and taught faith building lessons. Two years before McCheyne arrived in 1837 there had been an earthquake in Tiberius. In those days the population was 12,000-in 1996 it was 25,000.

There we were learning the loveliness of the jacaranda and the date palm-gathering grapefruit freely to eat at leisure-enjoying a swim from the garden that slopes down to the water's edge. The history too is glorious. *Dr David Watt Torrance* came to Israel in the 1880's to preach convert and heal. He was a deeply respected surgeon and his staff delivered at least half of the babies of the city helping kick start the population growth that has now doubled since his day. We would gather every evening in the warm open air balcony that could accommodate 20 easily. The sound of music from nearby pleasure boats and the lights on the shore were intriguing. No less so were the antics of the lizards that sped across the ceiling as we sipped tea and coffee with biscuits and cake-these little chameleons are fascinating fellows. We always ended our day with an epilogue-and the scriptures were carefully selected for the venues. We shared our itinerary for tomorrow and I took a little breather before we dropped into bed. Leading a party is not for the fainthearted! My walk yielded a surprise-I saw the one and only glowworm I ever set eyes on-lighting up and fading out once and again. We were almost on a different planet-a well peopled planet-a beautiful one and there were landscapes galore out there to explore for the remainder of our stay.

Clockwise and northwards to our Lord's adopted home

The kitchen sent us out with a lunch pack each in those days. We could choose a fabulous setting and dine Jesus style out on the Galilee "green grass". If you liked cucumber you were lucky for every day it turned up



Peter's fish supper
after lakeside trek

in the lunch pack. Why?- for the very good reason that you dehydrate so easily in Israel.

The only early itinerary round the North-West shores in early times was that of Theodosius in AD530. We repeated and extended this exploration.

Our itinerary got us to a wonderful selection of venues in 2.5 hours. We stopped (1) at **Dalmanutha** near the YM –this was the nearest our Lord got to

Tiberias in the gospel and he touched shore there by boat. Then we slowed down (2) to get a snap of the rusty yellow **Magdala** sign that reminds us of Mary from whom the Lord exorcised 7 demons. (*Bonar* believed she came from Magadan-Mijdel east of the lake-Mt15.39) We arrived at the (3) **Valley of the Doves** where there is a little ex-patriot cemetery. On another occasion Mina and I tidied a little grave marked by a wooden cross where is interred a dear son of Leadhills, Scotland who took his life when a lovely American girlfriend broke the relationship. The hills of Hattin lie in the background, and from thence originates the "lailaph"-the mighty lake storms that occasionally sweep Galilee. Then (4) we pass the basalt squared stone of the 7th century **Minya Palace** where you catch sight of the hyrax or rock badger standing straight up like the meercat. These creatures "make their home in the rock" and always station 2 guards. (5) We stop at the beautiful modern church of the multiplication where our Lord fed 5000 with 5b loaves and a few fishes. Mt15.17. A few trainee archaeologists were repairing an open air portrayal of the loaves and fish in period tiles of the 1st century. (6) Just around the corner is **Tabgha**-the seven springs. Shopping instincts came to the fore as we crowded around tables spread with stones engraved with the Peter's Fish-keyrings and various trinkets and postcards. Perhaps of more interest were the 5 stones leading out in the shallow water to form a way of embarking on fishing craft. (7) Also *Basilea Schlink's* text of the re-commissioning of Peter is **at the shore**-here the risen Lord walked and talked with the man who denied his Lord-just about a mile from his home in Capernaum. Uphill on foot we passed through the cornfields as

the birds wheeled overhead. As an aside let me refer to unfamiliar birds you will see-the blue “roller bird” with a brown back, the orange black and white Hoopoe(very easily seen)-the sunbird –the bul-bul distinguished by its call and the lovely halcyon bird –one might imagine a close cousin of the humming-bird. Our reward for the climb was to



The cornfields where Jesus walked with His disciples

enter (8) the **Church of the Beatitudes** and then purchase an ice-cream. Here card copies of the beatitudes were on sale. From the well attended garden skirting the church you can see a wide expanse of sea lying just over 600yards walk downhill and your height above Galilee sea-level is 200 feet. Turning aside a little we could break off a branch of the Christ thorn which I had

observed on an earlier visit grew plentifully here. Just over the hilltop lay (9) **Chorazin**-a crazy site of tumbled basalt stones-forbidding in the extreme-you need to climb around so we gave it a miss. So we drive that mile onward to **Capernaum** (10) the town where Jesus and Peter and Andrew lived

Bethsaida

Before we share the sine-qua-non story of how Nahum’s promised “beautiful (Messianic) feet” would tread his Old Testament hamlet by the sea let me solve the riddle of the missing jig-saw piece of geography along the lake. For Year upon year the spiel of guides spun a yarn to pilgrims that Bethsaida (the town of James & John) was somewhere near Capernaum-it is 6miles further north. It seemed funny because no stonework connected to it-it had no authentic archaeology by the lake. It was in 1992 that we went *off piste* when curiosity killed the cat and I wanted to see where a side road at the head of the lake led to. The road led off just by the Bailey bridge where the headstream from Caesarea Philippi joins the Lake. As we walked on we came to the most exquisite scene. The quite adequate stream ran around a little hill sufficient to site a fair sized town. There were lovely trees and a green paddock like lower semi circle of grass below the mound and fine trees growing so naturally near the river edge. Where were we? What was this. We climbed the mound and began to see stonework around and beneath our feet. I picked up a miniature sandstone rose and realized I had

something of quite historic value. A little further and we spotted a few ladies poking around with trowels and asked what they were doing. They looked at us as if assessing who we were and then one said –we think we are looking at ancient Bethesda. We had solved the riddle of biblical Bethesda. Fishing boats could sail from there to the lake and there would be rich fishing at the mouth of the full flowing upper Jordan River. The guide books were dumb about it but the geography pronounced “authentic” with a capital A. Troll the internet and you will now find Bethsaida Julius El Araj and testimony to the fact that it was a Greek speaking city as John 12.20 powerfully hints. In 1839 most interestingly *Murray McCheyne* went my way and came to the same verdict. He rather dismissed the town twinned with Capernaum and opted for one associated with Caesarea Philippi (i.e. Philip’s territory) and cites Mark8.13-27 and Lk.9.10

Kursi in Gadarene country

It was time to consume our daily ration of cucumber sandwiches and what better place than a graveyard to choose for the picnic. A little along the east shore of the lake is the place where the herd of swine came down a steep place into the lake. But happy for us there was no demoniac to frighten us. In an equivalent place of tombs –perhaps the forerunner of the very one we chanced upon he dwelt-and might have appreciated a cucumber sandwich! We completed the circuit by calling at Yardenit Kibbutz and so rounded the bottom of the 30mile stretch of water passing the nature reserve that boasts a crocodile park. One croc did escape and when a very large pike stroked my body as I swam on the other side I was really shaken-but the crocodile stayed on the east till it was heard of no more but the Gadarene went on to evangelise ten cities one of which(Pella) was sanctuary to fleeing believers at the fall of Jerusalem.

Capernaum

Our exploration of the Western seashore north of Tiberias would not be complete until we walked under the splendid red Bougainvillea and paid to see a sight that holds such a lot of history. Here according to Matthew 4.13 Jesus lives **by** the sea **παραθάλασσω**



Ruins of 4thC synagogue on foundation of 1stC one

The main attractions of the site are the 4th C synagogue based on the earlier building and also the modern superstructure placed with amazing skill over the house of Peter. What strikes you about that house is that it has an expansive central area and

bed accommodation on the periphery. It is notably circular and expansive. It was in 450 that a church was first built over insulae in one of which fish hooks were found. As to authenticity the house had 131 inscriptions some mentioning Peter & Jesus. The present synagogue founds had 4th century coins in its limestone-the original base build was of rich limestone the second building was basalt. *Etheria* tells us the original synagogue was reached by many steps-seldom if ever known in the period. The city never rose against Rome and was inhabited by Jewish Christians until the 4th century according to *Eusebius*. *Etheria* informs us that there were 350 buildings and in the town when the first octagonal church was built. By AD 1300 there were only 13 huts of which 7 were poor fishing cottages on the site. Carved stone found on the site had inscriptions one of which read “Alphaeus son of Zebedee son of John made this for blessing on himself”. From Capernaum during our 1996 McCheyne Tour we turned back to our Tiberias hub. People naturally enjoy being guided but not dragooned. So the afternoon offered time to browse & discover. Some went to the Plaza to sample a Peter-Fish other to sun them in the beach garden and others to spend a shekel or two in the suq or even to soak in the Hammat Spa-a very refreshing experience. You could even walk by the water’s edge where we stayed and watch hundreds of infant fish swimming in the warm shallows. In Tiberias-one of Israel’s “Holy” cities the beaches are frequented either by men or women but not both-this rule we had to adhere to whilst staying in the city.

Safed-the city set on a hill

Morning had broken-the sun cast a blood red trace far across the lake from the hills of Moab. Breakfast past and our cucumber sandwiches packed with other goodies we were off over the hills and far away west. Various trips try tweaking their precious schedules. On this 1996 trip we visited Safed of which our Lord spoke glowingly as a type of outstanding testimony in the world's darkness. Mina & I saw its bright light much like the North Star on a late evening car drive when *Maggie Matheson* diverted us en route from Jerusalem to Tiberias in 1992.

This is an aside but two things are worth saying-the city is the centre of the Cabbalists-a mystic branch of Judaism heavily into alternative medicine and a doctrine of God admitting of what amounts to a second person or “head”. The City is on Mt Canaan and is called “The artist city”. I secured pictures in minute Hebrew script, penning the entirety of *the Song* and *Ruth* in the form of a violin and lady's hair respectively. More of this fascinating place of Jewish mystics and master artists later!

Jesus of Nazareth

Now, here's a little background to the next stage of the westward daytrip.

The Son of God was born taking upon Him full humanity without sin in Bethlehem but spent



somewhere short of 30 years of his life on earth at Nazareth. We know from archaeological work on ancient cemetery of the town that it never exceeded 600 in population in those years so with confidence we can say everyone knew Jesus and vice-versa. The *tekton* (Matthew 13.55) or builder-cum-carpenter trade meant that this “newish” town would owe a great deal to Joseph and he would be very hard-worked building and repairing-both the home shells and interior furniture. The growth of



Famous “shadow of the cross” picture of our Lord at work-(hangs In Joseph’s workshop church Nazareth

his family doubtless provided early engagement for his boys and his daughters would have trade linked tasks to add to their home commitment.

When our Lord rolled out His ministry nationwide the family was well able to hold business together.

He set out His five-pillars of vision in an address to the local synagogue (Luke 4. 16-19) which intrigued and stunned the congregation who would have thrown him over a cliff except for a miracle that enable Him to slip away. Our Lord made three practical points following His proclamation. First the prior claim of Nazareth was set aside clearly on account of a faith failure; second Elijah was not prepared to be stymied by lack of faith and travelled to Zarephath to answer a widow’s need and Elisha didn’t hesitate to respond to the Syrian enemy army chief who acted by faith on the good news of a Jewish slave girl. Our Lord set out in the preparation of the shoes on His beautiful feet with His gospel of grace reaching those who believed throughout the land and indeed the whole earth. As at Nazareth so in Jerusalem the Prince of Life would face and win over the fear of death and open the door of forgiveness and of heaven itself to faith by his good news of God’s covenant grace.

Cana or Qana

The first centre on the itinerary was Cana-a non-such place hitting above its weight at the outset of our Lord’s ministry through His visit. When Mina and I were separately interviewed after answering Israeli security that we had visited in a home the question was “Where? I was told there were two “Cana’s” and was quite at a loss. The stories we told corresponded well-it was a bit like “Which sock does your husband put on first in the morning?” but it came out good. We hit the trail on our McChayne Day 8 programme at 8.30am and got to Cana in an hour by midibus. It was market day and although the church fronted by large

pitchers was of interest there were no bells or marriage fever in the air. The town of the first miracle demonstrated to the disciples that Marya as they all called Him-the “Lord” could and would provide for them while they obeyed and did his will-that wedding feast said it all. It also told the story of the bridegroom of our hearts whose chief desire is to foster our nearness of union and devotion to Him and provide for and finally take in rapture to her heavenly joy.

That said we enjoyed a good browse through the diverse stalls with plentiful articles and souvenirs to choose from. Shrewd master of the Suq soon sniff out tour leaders and offer a “freebie”-a gift to incentivize tour members to buy at that stall. I was singled out and given a very unique present-a pottery vessel which poured wine for bride and groom. Because of its intricate inner channeling you could invert it after filling it up and the wine would not run out the way it went in but if you tipped it gently it came out of a spout by the side in a pleasant flow. I never mastered the science of the thing but shocked many a guest in years later by tipping it over after filling it in their view. The gift would be a unique and appropriate lifetime reminder of Cana.

Nazareth worship today



A busy 1996 carpenter's shop in Nazareth

By 10am we were in the town of “the Branch” from the root of David.

There we visited the ancient synagogue with its wooden seats-most rustic but nevertheless genuine-the successor no doubt to the renowned building where our Lord spelled out His ground

plan of salvation. Locations in Arab areas was tedious before the advent of the sat-nav for walkers; for example to find the historic synagogue (discovered in 1960) you would start at Casa Nova Road, enter the Suq and by a stroke of luck find Bazaar St.-then you turn left-then right at the next available junctions and look for an iron door –you enter a courtyard and hey presto –you have arrived!

A fascinating Church of the Carpenter's shop across the courtyard features a kitchen, living room & basement grain store. We followed

that by visiting the Church of the Annunciation that towers over Casa Nova St telling the world our Redeemer has come with its great Latin text VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST ET HABITAVIT IN NOBIS engraved and gilded in stone. Along an adjacent street you come across a modern carpenter's shop –a sign that they still ply the trade Jesus used- His motto was “Thorough” and “He did all things well”. Higher up the street is the “House of Joseph” cut from solid rock graced with a picture from the King of Edessa inscribed HAEC VERO IMAGO DOMINI “This is a true likeness of the Lord”. *McCheyne* was impressed by this house and portrait.

May is glorious in Israel but there is still the chance of a shower. The one heavy downpour we experienced was in Nazareth-it washed us off the streets.

One has the greatest joy to say that there is an(American) Baptist Church in Nazareth. On our 25th wedding anniversary visit Mina and I worshipped there singing the old Sankey hymns and listening to the first pastor & founder giving a rousing message in English translated into Arabic for the majority of hearers. The present Arab Pastor-Headmaster spoke to us of the school he and other staff run-where up to half of the youth of the city come for what is nationally recognised as the best primary education available in the city. The Nazareth Christian Hospital deserves high credit for its long sustained elite health contribution. The “Hill of precipitaion”(Lk4.29) is 1.5 miles by pathway above the town!



The fire fell –from Elijah's God

Mukrasah Carmel and Elijah

Travelling toward the coast and high in the forest we caught sight of the Plain of Esdraelon and coming to the traditional spot where Elijah contested with the prophets of Baal we looked down the steeps to the Kishon where the deceiving dancing prophets met their end. The 1839 party camped at Mukrasah –thinking about Elijah. Zarephath is but 1.5 miles from the shore at nearby Carmel.

Carmel

The term carmel” means garden or “vineyard of God”. The whole area is verdant and luscious-a 21,000 acre national park-utterly stunning. Visitors should look out for the Zemzarut tree flowering in its lilac glory.

On the seaward side of Carmel we were just filing out of Elijah’s cave when fresh young IDF recruits both male and female-filed in. They were being instructed in the glorious spiritual tradition they were defending. Kehilat Carmel founded by *David and Karen Davis* with a vision for Christians Arabs and Jews worshipping as one. David worked with *David Wilkerson* among the drug addicts of New York. Karen was a Jewess. Together they founded the “House of Victory” The property was purchased from Stella Carmel in 1950 and the centre completed in 1998-two years after the tour you are reading about. David had a great vision and Karen had the voice of an angel. To hear them minister the Word and sing the gospel was a treat. In 2003 the remaining Stella Carmel monastic buildings were secured and the ministry expanded. The communion altar has 12 stones reminiscent of the rebuilt altar of Elijah in 1Kings 18 and above it a skylight representing the open heaven from which the fire fell.

Carmel has a small market which provided our group with time to browse. After that we toured the museum and visited the 25 storey Eshkol tower. The University is located a stone’s throw away and there we enjoyed a refreshing lunch instead of our cucumber sandwiches. In his day *McCheyne and Bonar Keith and Black* all had a “dip” in the lovely Tantura Beach below the scar-with its 4 offshore islands and colonies of birds.

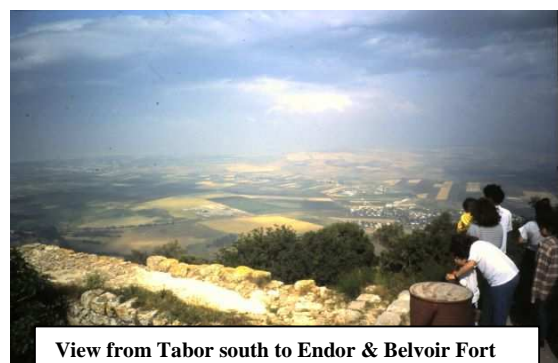
Caesarea

Following the coast at a lower level in our midibus we toured along to Caesarea Maritima(for 600 years the nation’s capital. Herod the Great in 22BC built a breakwater there-the skeleton of it still stands. In 1961 an inscription bearing the name of Pontius Pilate was discovered and in our time that stone was displayed for all to see. The city had a fully developed sewerage system and a 22 mile Roman aqueduct once stretched toward abundant fresh water beyond Dor. After much walking and travel we were glad of a paddle in the sea and sat sunning ourselves and enjoying refreshments by the giant arches of the Aqueduct.

Until the end of the second century AD a lively church remained in Caesarea-the majority of its population was Christian and it had the 1st Christian University in the world. In early Roman times it had temples to Jupiter, Neptune, Apollo, Hercules, Bacchus, Minerva, Victory and Astarte. Peter Cornelius Philip Paul Origen and Eusebius were all associated with the city. The crusader *Baldwin* carried off a shallow dish carved from emerald –the Holy Grail of the 1100's. Perhaps the event most worthy of mention is the defence of Paul before Agrippa in Caesarea-a discourse that ended with the King's famous response "Almost or in short order would you persuade me to be a Christian" Acts 26.1-29

Nain

Our route home beyond Jenin junction(where the 10 lepers were healed) led so close to Nain that we could not resist delaying a little to see the village which is probably no larger now than when the widows's son was raised by our Lord. The children are still lively and the older men sat on seating by the arch that marks the town boundary. One of our party-*Alwyn Pearson*-the founding pastor of Leicester "Trinity Life" church and since our united involvement in *Billy Graham's* Glasgow Crusade in the Celtic stadium a very dear friend-Alwyn set off to bring the gospel news to those older gents smoking their long pipes. He was equipped with tracts and they were readily accepted no least because they were tendered with such grace from a man of renowned spirituality and felicity of speech. Others dead in sin might thus live anew.



View from Tabor south to Endor & Belvoir Fort

Tabor

The Transfiguration traditionally took place on a mountain apart. A fully inhabited walled city(Itabyrion) covered the summit in our Lord's time-not just a monastery with one cow as when we visited. I am of the opinion that the Transfiguration

occurred in a Golan or Hermon context For that reason. Tabor is high-

1740ft high and it lies immediately above the town of Deburah(after Deborah of Judges 4).

Tiberias now seemed to say “Come home,come home ‘tis supper-time” and our sleepy band of pilgrims were on the way back at pace with a store of stuff from 8 memorable venues to talk about that evening over coffee on the veradah overlooking Lake Galilee now glimmering from the light of “Peter Boats” tied up just below. Tomorrow would be our last full day and we would be headed for the Golan-the famous war zone of the six day war.

From Golan to Ginnosar

Fortified by our packed lunch and refreshments –not forgetting those cucumbers sandwiches-we were off on the zig-zag climb-and it is steep all the way-towards Quneitra. From there one can see way into Syria-as far as the Road to Damascus. Out of the ground comes something like the chimney of a sea-going liner- complete we thought with listening devices. Over the fence –no man’s land-and beyond Syria with some semblance of security hut in the distance. Under the mountain where we stood swift figthers –we believe-were housed, ready to come to the defence of the state. Along the way uphill and on the plateau at the top small evidence of Syrian armour victims of *the 6 day war*-now rusted hulks.

Leaving the unique viewpoint we climb aboard our minibus with Isha and travel in the Druze Country to lovely Lake Merom above and in sight of which at Birkat Ram (Place of the “High Pool”) we stop at 9.30am.It is early but it is warm and the ground is covered with the lilies of the field more of which we will see when we pay our three-quarters of a shekel and visit the national Park at Dan near Caesarea Philippi. For the moment we are breathless not from climbing but the sheer beauty all around us-and we are thrilled to be able to use our money on Druze cakes and lovely refreshments and ice-cream as we take in the view of the legendary lake Merom. Herod Philip had a bright idea that it was the Jordan source and had chaff thrown into it in hope it would reappear at Banyas which he deemed was lower down. Of course the water sources are separate but a courtier threw some chaff in at Bayas-one of three main Jorrdan sources-and the King was right for the meantime! It is 7 miles downhill to Banyas or Caesarea Philippi and when all the snaps were shot we were off to that “ravishingly beautiful”place where ancient

mystics located the “Mouth of Hell” just where the Jordan gushes out from the rock overhead.

Caesarea Philippi(Banyas)

Arriving at Banyas by 10.30am we were surprised to see a bride and groom had first-footed us and were in the middle of their wedding photograph routine.

On one’s very first visit one’s eyes fasten on so much-the bougainvillea in its spring splendour, the sheer rock of Hermon’s foothills towering above, the limpid water funneled out of the rock and shifting at speed into the delves of Dan, the gorgeous flowers shyly sheltering in the long grass-the pools along the pathway under low arching boughs-pools where on my 1992 visit you could swim-but no longer. Sampling the natural beauty is an overwhelmingly pleasant experience. Here in profusion the connoisseur of the hedgerow and grass will spot the red anemone, pink phlox, white and yellow rock roses, golden cytissus, pink



Author snaps a gem with a spiders web habit

convolvulus, marigold, fragile wild geranium, red tulip, lovely orchids, astrophel, long yellow lupin-like mignonette, salvia, pimpernel and cyclamen of pink and white hue-lovely so lovely-my father was a gardener and he would have been in paradise here! Our stay is set for two hours

including a picnic at the lovely wooden tables and seats liberally available. There is time to walk to Dan(cf Dan to Beersheba -139 miles). One crosses the fast flowing upper Jordan already a growing stream-by a fine metal bridge. It has been said that the Jordan asked the Lord which was Israel’s greatest river and you can imagine the answer was Jordan for all other Nahal’s and Wadis are “tributary” to it. It is the “descender” and mirrors the ministry of Jesus from the glory of Hermon transfiguration through the ministry of Galilee with His baptism in Jordan and descent to the lowest place-death upon the cross.

On “this rock”

Let us take another perspective using word from *Dr. Jim Fleming's* “Survey of the life of Jesus” and think a little bit about Peter’s confession within that narrative. Jim writes:

“The setting of Caesarea Philippi for the naming of Simon as “Rock” was particularly appropriate in light of the 9,000 foot “rock” of Mt. Hermon that rises behind the enormous cliff. Under it the primary source of the Jordan-winter snow melt from Hermon finding its way underground and pouring out beneath giving rise to the phrase “living water.

Cut into the rock face are two niches. Statues of the Greco-Roman pantheon were kept in these forming a shrine. Titus arrived in 70AD to offer thanks for his conquest of Jerusalem. Presiding over the gods here was the mythical Pan, half- man half-goat, patron of the woodland. Association with Pan gave Caesarea its new name: ‘Panias’ (which the Arabs pronounce ‘Banyas’ At this spot Herod built a palace of ‘diamond- shaped’ stone like his Jordan ‘winter palace’ where he died. Most important was the impact of the ‘Great Confession’ as Peter recognized Jesus as the Christ and the Lord in turn renames him. In AD64 *Herod Agrippa II* renamed Caesarea ‘Neronias’ after Nero. Ironically the place named for Nero reverted back to Caesarea Philippi after his death in AD68, but Jesus renames a person who would be remembered-for ever-by millions (for belief in Jesus as Lord and God). Six (Mt,Mk.) or eight days(Lk.) after the ‘Great Confession’ on a very high mountain apart-probably the foothills of Hermon-the Transfiguration of our Lord took place.”

Safed

Our two hours were up and our little midibus virtually freewheeled downwards towards the intersecting crossing leading to Saded-the ‘Artists city” on Mt.Canaan. There you can listen to an actual fiddler on the roof playing that classic or sit and lick an ice-cream or buy jewellery or rare books to read. I prize my trophies from Safed-a town of lovely cafes and exquisite art shops-and a veritable stairway in stone as you climb to its main thoroughfare. The first is the book of ‘Ruth’ written so fine you would think each composite letter a mere dot-the other is the ‘Song of Solomon’. *Moshe Dadon*-a Jewish artist from Casablanca who made aliyeh in 1962-a retired police investigator-took up painting and

began to express his strong feelings about Judaism. He developed micro-calligraphy combining the biblical text with pictures-an ancient art form. A picture can take 3 months-so I came home with perhaps 6 months of his work. His magnum opus is Genesis although he has also done the 5 books of Psalms.

Safed is the 'beacon city' of Israel from where news of the New Moon is sent to Jerusalem for the beginning of its festivals etc. From here also Josephus masterminded the rebellion against Rome.

Borne upon the waters of Galilee

We parked the midibus by the lake and walked a short distance to our Jesus-Boat. This craft would carry 100 persons easily-the original of which a replica can be seen at Kibbutz Ginnosar would carry 8 easily and maybe even twelve.



The big catch-153

I have enjoyed this mode of transport four times over –once with a highly excited group of Druze ladies on an outing. On the penultimate day of our tour we needed something quite relaxing and nothing will beat a sail on Galilee –it is pure heaven-barring one of those sudden storms which tested the faith of Peter to the limit.

In 1839 *Murray McCheyne* also enjoyed a trip on Galilee. Leaving their tent on the pebbly beach he speaks of “bargaining with the boatmen to take us to what we were sure was the country of the Gadarenes”(KURSI where we stopped by on our circular tour of the lake). He tells us the boatman thought he could do it(get there and back)with the aid of the breeze-it is 10-12 miles across). But if the wind grew, he thought we would not get back till morning. He adds “Our servants procured excellent fish resembling carp-which we broiled”; he clearly had a John 21 experience but it was I think in their case an evening repast and they returned ere darkness fell.

During every sail on the Jesus boat the method of casting a net is demonstrated but never a fish is caught, The drag net or trawl is of course the proper fishing net to use and Galilee is still well stocked and fishermen set out from near Tiberias 5-6 days each week in the wee small hours. It appears that the apostle John was supplier of fish to the

High Priest at Jerusalem. Jews did not fish the Mediterranean and largely feared great waters and our wonderful Lord chose those “brave” fishermen as his disciple core.

I imagine *Horatius Bonar* wrote the Hymn he sets out in this part of his reflections on the historic 1839 visit:

*O give me Lord by this sacred wave
Threefold thy love divine
That I may feed till I find my grave
Thy flock both thine and mine
O Saviour gone to God's right hand
Yet the same Saviour still
Graved on Thy heart is this lovely strand
And every fragrant hill.*

Who has ever traversed Galilee and the glorious places of which I have written without feelings of precisely that order. This land does more for one than ever Grasmere did for Wordsworth. The secret behind the geography is that thee our Master walked and the supernal joy is that we ever were privileged to walk in His footsteps-nay that wherever we dwell we “Walk with the Lord”.

*When we walk with the Lord
In the Light of His word
What a glory He shed on our way;
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey*



A wrench –we leave Galilee

Our meals and packed lunch have fortified us in face of a busy schedule. Our midibus has been the ideal means of getting around. Whilst I submitted our itinerary to the Israeli tourist department by way of courtesy and as is normal

the coach was mounted on one occasion just to check passports and that

we were following itinerary. The army was courteous and efficient. Parties by 1996 were generally working under Israel Net Tourism whose coaches often had retired IDF drivers-the advantage in that case was the interconnect with the army who could veer any party safely out of the way of social unrest. Mercifully our travel over three trips never suffered from this missing link and we advantaged by a far wider itinerary coursing through the West Bank and reaching from Dan to Beersheba-our next 1998 trip would be among the last of such wide-ranging tours. Our 10 a day venues would be easily double those of modern tours.

Off we sped along highway 65 after the usual civilities of the evening before-speeches were made and little gifts exchanged. No more would we waken up to the minaret prayer call of Jerusalem or the golden dawn on the mountains of Moab as in Tiberias. That combination of table service and self-service with two good meals daily and the packed lunches combined with those veranda evenings - lizards playing on the ceiling and cups of tea made in our rooms- replenished until devotions over we talked ourselves tired-those would be memories- such rich lifelong memories.

*Precious memories how they linger
How they ever flood my soul
In the stillness of the midnight
Precious sacred scenes unfold.*

Megiddo



The trumpet shall sound

At Megiddo's "Intellectual Theme Park" you get to 'cut the cake' of history whose slices tell of Tutmoses, the Babylonians, Philistines, Persians, Greeks, Parthians Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, Turks and the British under Allenby. Zeev Margalit who is in charge will tell you he is speaking about "Culture not Quiche" and he will introduce a 14 multimedia show running all day. It all centres on Joel 2.1-2 "Let all who live in the land tremble for

the day of the Lord is coming like dawn spreading across the mountains-a mighty army comes such as never was or ever will be in ages to come”

We rejoiced to be in the land promised to Abraham and to be in the day of grace and amnesty for sinners. The land of the book is truly the setting for the final war that will happen under human government and its culmination will be the battle of Armageddon (Har Megiddo)-and

here our penultimate stop would be-surveying not the Somme fields but the battlefield of the last days in-one of three great valleys that crosses the Holy Land-the Hulah, the Jezreel valley (& Megiddo) and Aijalon to the south. The great and good men in the 1839 party included that prolific hymn writer Horatius Bonar who wrote the memoir. He said of McCheyne “The secret of the Lord was with him-in 6 years he was the instrument of saving more souls than others in half a century” This is the man who said “What a man is on his knees before God –that a man is-no more no less!” Four years after the trip purposed to speed the evangelization of the Jews and reach Hungary’s ghettos Murray



McCheyne of Dundee went to see Jesus while revival fires burned brightly in his parish. Six year later Bonar wrote the memoir. These men looked for the day –fighting over-when the golden age of Messiah-the millennium would open over all the earth. Bonar quotes Isaiah 62.6-7 in this connection “I have set watchmen on your walls O Jerusalem, who shall never hold their peace day or night-you who remember the Lord-keep not silent, and give him no rest until he establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth”. Between these deeply biblical men and us there stands the establishment in 1948 of the state of Jerusalem. Some day Christ will take His bride away-unparalleled sorrows will ensue but “behind the dark unknown standeth God keeping watch above His own” and Israel shall never be defeated any more-but brought to

her knees in prayer in the great Megiddo field of latter day battle. When Zion travails Christ shall appear in glory. That's the story up ahead. But the narrative and reminiscence we are following of our 1996 Tour saw us alight once more at the Megiddo centre-inspect the stable facility of Solomon who caused war to cease by a powerful military and mighty economy that taxed all goods moving north-south on the King's Highway and the Way of the Sea. The king kept one in ten of his 4000 horse at Megiddo which then and now holds the key to the Holy Land, itself the land bridge between Asia and Africa.

Our tour party grasped the momentous history behind and before ere we left this awe inspiring place-but a simpler more sunny memory must be our last Hurrah to the Holy Land-the town of Netanya.

Netanya

Many a party leader chooses this seaside city as his or her southern base. We drew into Independence square where shops and seafront converge.. By the sandy seafront we enjoyed a little more of that Mediterranean bracing air that countered the heat of the day. We were right on that straight strip of coast we were soon to see from the air as we flew away. Aeneas who is mentioned in Acts 9.35 was cured of paralysis by Peter and Peter walked from Lod (Lydda) to Netanya on his way to Caesarea –though I guess he was transported by chariot on the final stage of his journey to witness the Holy Spirit poured on the Gentiles. We would travel the other way and we live 2000 years on during the same era of grace when the Spirit is moving. How long till the days the prophets spoke of and the holy men of 1839 sought? We departed Lod (Lydda town of Dorcas) on Monarch flight 1215 leaving by 1750hours Israeli time flying with the sun and arriving in Gatwick at 2100hours GMT.

We took away two lasting impressions (1) of a lovely land and people and (2) of a loving Lord who visited and redeemed His people.

*Sweet Rose of Sharon blooming for me
Jesus it is the emblem of Thee
Beautiful Flower fairest that grows
I'm glad that I found Thee sweet Sharon's Rose.
Song of Solomon 2.1(Author unknown)*

From the cistus or rock rose abounding on Carmel comes its characteristic sweet herbaceous musky scent. From the Pure life of the Lamb of God streams that sweet-smelling sacrifice that atones for us and ours. By extension the anointing of the Holy Spirit comes from His hand and by New Birth and the Baptism and Fulness of that glorious Spirit our mission like that of McCheyne is made possible. **The devotion that lives on and the instrumentality of our lives owned of God is the only fitting thanksgiving for all our Lord has done. Remember McCheyne's Saviour still walks with us and talks with us-let it be said of us "The secret of the Lord was with them!"**

FINIS



**ISRAEL TOUR GROUP OF 1998 –MINA IN CENTRE-BOB AT BACK
8 MEMBERS RETURED-11 WERE NEW-ITINERARY EXPANDED**