

Harding University Greece, Fall 2010 (Report #5)

Dale W. Manor; 25 Nov 2010

OK; this is the last installment. We're celebrating Thanksgiving Day today (and we're the odd people in Greece, but the celebration seems to be catching on among some of the Greeks; there will be almost as many Greek folks with us as Americans—maybe we can spread a little of America's *positive* culture around).

The last report ended with the trip from Mt. Saint Catherine's at the foot of one of the traditional Mt. Sinai designations. We made our way through the forbidding desert to the border between Egypt and Israel. We were scheduled to leave Egypt, take a 15-20 minute ride in Israel to the border of Jordan—talk about modern politics! One never knows how long or what will happen at the Israeli border. Their security system has minimal predictability—not that they are not regularly secure, you just cannot anticipate what they will do, which is part of the reason they do it so well, it is difficult for terrorists to anticipate Israeli behavior. Our transition from Egypt to Israel went relatively smoothly. However, on the Israeli side of the border we experienced some tense moments. Sharon and I were standing between two of the border checks when a loud thud occurred. Sharon asked what was that—I said it sounded like someone hitting a box really hard. Suddenly we heard an announcement in Hebrew and saw Israelis running toward the Israel side drawing their pistols and raising their rifles. Sudden goosebumps!!!!

We were outdoors and nothing was said to us, but some of our group were still in the building behind us; the Israeli personnel in the building yelled for them all to get down. After about two minutes, the Israelis were returning to their regular posts, some of them clearly affected by the adrenaline rush! Turns out there was a tire blow-out. While this can be quite disconcerting, on the other hand you realize they do their job well!

Our bus trip to the Jordan side was about 15 minutes, but our wait to get out of Israel into Jordan was about half an hour and then our wait on the Jordanian side to get to the bus was about an hour! Finally, after dark we managed to get on the bus headed to Petra where we ate and spent the night.

The ancient site of Petra was our destination on November 11. It had been at least 30 years since I had been there, and it was amazing how much had changed. Thirty years ago there was no town; now it is a bustling city of some 20,000. Thirty years ago there were relatively few tourists; today we were just a few among thousands. Thirty years ago there was basically only one place to eat, today there were eating establishments all around (although not many available to handle an ad hoc arrival of university students). Thirty years ago you could ride the horses all the way through the Siq into the ancient ruins; today because



of the masses, they only take you about half a mile and not even into the Siq (of course it is probably good since the narrow path would become heavily laden with “horse residue” [if you know what I mean]).

Part of what has propelled the site to popularity is its prominence in the Indiana Jones *Last Crusade* movie. Apart from that, though, the site is still very impressive. It was a cultural center for the ancient Nabatean empire which specialized in the spice trade. Allusions to its presence appear in 2 Corinthians (11:32-33) where Paul mentions King Aretas IV who controlled Damascus when Paul was converted (cf. Acts 9). Some have suggested that the so-called “Treasury”—also known as the Khazneh among the Arabs—is the tomb of Aretas IV (I’m trying to find better determination of this). The Khazneh is the impressive façade that appears at the end of the long cleft of the rock (the Siq) through which you travel to get to the ruins. It is the part that was featured in *The Last Crusade*.

Having skipped the climb up Mt. Sinai, I made my way to the high place at Petra. There is evidence that this location was venerated as a place of sacrifice in the earlier Edomite kingdom (connected with the book of Obadiah), but the remains that you can easily see come from the Nabatean period. The view from the top is incredible. In the photograph, you can see some of the monuments in the middle of the photo and people as specks to the left. The high place of Petra was part of my dissertation discussion and hence it was a priority item for me to visit and it was not a disappointment.



From Petra, Amman was our destination for the night. Our hotel was quite luxurious and the city of Amman was so clean. The next morning included a quick visit to the traditional Mt. Nebo. This, too, had undergone a lot of development over the last 30 years. The weather, however, was sufficiently hazy that it was somewhat of a disappointment.

Our next stop was the site of “Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan,” which is a fairly new discovery and development thought to be the location where John the Baptist performed his baptisms (and hence where Jesus may have been baptized; Jn 1:28; 10:40). Some ancient remains exist and a clear, very early tradition of veneration at the site, but beyond this assessment, there is probably no way to identify the specific location. It was rewarding, however, to visit the general vicinity of John’s ministry and to get a feel for the environment. Sadly, the Jordanians and the Israelis have corrupted the site by building baptism steps and stalls. It was ironical to see the two facilities immediately opposite each other—literally less than 10 yards apart. I wondered if anyone had ever attempted to be “born again” from one nation to the other (sorry for the cynicism).

Finally we crossed into Israel, across the famous Allenby Bridge (so-called because of the impact of Lord Allenby in World War I). It is no longer the quaint wooden bridge from the old photographs—it is now a modern, concrete bridge. The Jordanians refer to it as King Hussein Bridge.

Our Israel trip began with lunch at En-gedi and the students going for a float in the Dead Sea. Such a “float” is something everyone ought to do at least once—it is such a unique experience as you bob in the water. If you extend your feet vertically below you, you bob with the water line about mid-chest!

We were too late to enter the nature preserve, but instead visited a synagogue at En-gedi, which dated from the 3d-4th centuries AD. Later we made our way to Jericho where we spent the night.

Our tour of the ancient site of Jericho went rather quickly and I had to be the guide since no one was present to serve as our guide. Afterward we made our way northward to Dan and Caesarea Philippi.



Dan was one of the places where Jeroboam son of Nebat set up a golden calf as a rival of the Temple in Jerusalem (the other site was a Bethel; cf. 1 Kgs 12:25-33). The platform of the high place still exists (the part with the steps leading to the top). The massive space-frame “altar” is based upon the footprint of the foundation as well as the size of one of the “horns” that was discovered in the excavation. Jeroboam’s innovations were never forgotten by the Lord who constantly assessed the sinfulness of the northern kings against the sinfulness of Jeroboam.

Our trip to Caesarea Philippi, which is only about 3 miles from Dan, brought us into New Testament activities. This is where Jesus’ question to his disciples of his identity prompted Peter to affirm Jesus’ deity (cf. Matt 16:13-20). The locations of Dan and Caesarea contrast starkly with the barrenness of the southern Jordan Valley. It is easy to understand why the people of Dan would choose to settle down in a region that had such a copious supply of water.

That afternoon we cruised on the Galilee and enjoyed a devotional on the sea and a magnificent sunset. The scene is toward the cliffs of Arbel. Jesus would have passed the cliffs in his walks from Nazareth to Capernaum.



On Sunday, we checked out of our hotel in Tiberias and the bus driver told us we had a flat, which necessitated going to a shop to get it repaired. Fortunately it did not take too much time. We proceeded to worship with the brethren in Nazareth, which was a great experience as we had a bi-lingual worship service. Recently the congregation has installed elders for the first time in its history. There were about 60-65 people present and it was encouraging to see that the brethren in Nazareth have a fairly even spread of ages represented—it is not a dying church of old people. Quite a number of upper teens and early twenties people were there!



After worship we traveled to Megiddo. Megiddo has been the scene of numerous battles through history. Its location at the junction of north-south and east-west trade routes gave it a strategic importance. Our guide said that Megiddo probably would win the prize for the most battle fought in its vicinity of any site in the world—perhaps arguable, but notable nonetheless. Probably this history prompted Jesus to use Armageddon as the image of the conflict between God and Satan (“Armageddon” literally means “mountain of Megiddo;” Rev 16:12-16; in the picture Sharon here is driving her chariot at the

site).

Caesarea Maritima was our next major destination and on the way, we had a blow out on the bus. The same tire that had been repaired earlier in the day. The first flat was the result of a puncture; the second was tread separation in a different location from the earlier repair! Fortunately they were not on the front, steering tires, but on the dual rears. We were fairly near Caesarea when the blowout occurred so we crippled in where the driver dropped us off and had the tire replaced while we were touring the site.

Caesarea Maritima is on the coast of Israel and is a town that Herod the Great built in honor of Caesar Augustus. He built a harbor at the site which became the major port along the eastern Mediterranean coast. While there had been a town there earlier, it was relatively insignificant and Herod’s building program overwhelmed the earlier remains with brand new layout and construction. One of the highlights for the students was a report that Leonardo DiCaprio and his Israeli actress/model girlfriend, Bar Rafaeli, were visiting the site. They ran to find him and saw him from about 200 yards. In the final exam, one of the students summarized the history and ruins of the site, mentioning that he had been there (I objected that DiCaprio is not an antiquity—after all, he’s a lot younger than I !!).

After the DiCaprio dust settled, we got back to business and visited the remains of Herod’s palace part of which appears in the photograph. The photo shows part of the pool that extends into the ocean. Paul is described as having been housed in the praetorium (Acts 23:35). It is not

clear where that would have been in the palace, but perhaps Paul's confinement was not always as harsh as we often assume.

The remains of a hippodrome parallel the coast. One can imagine chariots attempting to negotiate the sharp turn at the end of the circuit only to be caught in the congestion of traffic and crashing. The insatiable appetite for action and blood seems timeless and universal.



Our long day ended with Jerusalem. In Jerusalem we visited Bethlehem and fought the crowds to see the disappointing location claimed to be the birthplace of Jesus. I think the quaint scene that students see on the Christmas cards crumbled with this visit.



We visited the Old Testament City of David which rests on the slopes of the hill in the right of the photograph. The red arrow on the left points to the location Gihon spring which was the water source for Old Testament Jerusalem and is where Solomon was anointed to succeed David as king (1 Kgs 1:32-48; the spring is inside the building). The arrow on the right points to the approximate location where Adonijah was simultaneously being anointed as the next king with Joab's sponsorship (1 Kgs 1:5-10). The rival anointings created some political tensions—somewhat characteristic of

politics in general!



We descended through some of the ancient water system and passed a relatively newly exposed access tunnel to the water system dating from the time of the Patriarchs of the Bible. Further down, our tour transitioned to the tunnel that Hezekiah dug to secure the water supply in the face of the Assyrian advance in 701 BC. Brief references to his engineering enterprise appear in 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30; and Isaiah 22:9-11.

We visited many sites, but the tour culminated with visits to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

and the alternative sites of Gordon's Calvary and the Garden Tomb. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre almost certainly is the location of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, but it is so encrusted with ritual and icons that it mutes the spiritual atmosphere for many people. The alternatives of Gordon's Calvary and the Garden Tomb are almost certainly *not* the locations associated with Jesus' final days, but their visual effects are much more conducive to reflection and meditation. Fortunately, for the believer, the issue is not so much knowing where he died and rose, but the fact that he did.

Our 19-day journey took us from the bondage of Egypt, across the Red Sea into the wilderness and eventually to the culmination of salvation with Jesus' death and resurrection. Fortunately it was not a forty year trip, but the nineteen days, while exhausting, were fruitful.

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