

Day 4

The bus left the Nazareth hotel very early – at 7:00 am ... which meant early awake ... early to dress ... early to breakfast ... and best of all ... early to our first location! Rula really knows the process. We arrived well before any other group and managed to stay ahead of the crowds almost all day!

Laura Katherine opened the day with The Travelers Prayer and Todd led us in singing *Open My Eyes*. I failed to mention – we have a shepherd each day to help us stay together as a group – and even more importantly – be certain no one gets left behind! Our first day shepherd was Chris Kiper, Day 2 was Beth Rosko, and today was Jack (and ably assisted by Beth) Rosko. Our chaplain for the day was Tim Clapp.

While on the initial 90-minute ride to the first stop, we learned more about the country of Israel from Rula. The upper area is predominantly Jewish and the lower is primarily Arab. There is diversity in religion – Jerusalem is a prime example with 13 different churches in that one location.

There are three main industries.

Tourism – primarily to the Holy Lands which is where 3 monotheism, worshiping one god, religions of Jewish, Islamic, and Christian began. Between the Holy Lands and the beaches, approximately 2 million visitors come annually (down since the pandemic from almost 5 million). For 2 years, tourism was virtually non-existent but is slowly returning.

Agriculture – With the fertile valleys and farming methods that allow an almost year round growing season, farmers have adopted sustainable methods to increase the yield. A crop rotation system is used, three different crops on a 2-year planting routine, with the fields allowed to remain fallow for the 7th year. Greenhouses and shade netting are used to ensure continuous production. Flowers, particularly roses, have become a major export for the country. A drip system is used to conserve water as it is a most precious resource.

Diamonds – While no diamonds are mined in country, uncut stones are imported and Israel has become famous for cutting and polishing techniques. The country is known of its expertise in the 'princess' cut. The only stone mined in Israel, found in the city of Eilat, is green malachite, also called the King Solomon stone because it was used in parts of the second temple.

Two other important industries are fish breeding/raising in contained ponds, and medicine/hi-tech research.

In the 16th century, after being conquered by the Ottoman Empire, people were taxed based upon the number of trees on their property. Consequently, much of the land was timbered and became barren. The Jewish National Fund (JNF) began a reforestation program in 1901 which has resulted in a man-made forest. Since inception, JNF has planted over 240 million evergreen trees in Israel. Tourist can even leave a legacy in the country by volunteering and/or paying to plant a tree.

It is expensive to live in Israel. Minimum income is \$1,500/month. Income tax rates are 40%, plus a value added (VAT) tax of 17%. [note – Bethlehem is exempt from the VAT]. Apartment owners and renters pay property taxes. Electricity and water are in short supply and are expensive. Even farmer who have a 99-year land lease have to pay property tax until the land is returned to Israel.

Social security and health care for provided to all citizens. School are both private and public, both Jewish and Arab, and a few 'joint' schools. There are several colleges and university, with the large Hebrew University located in Jerusalem. There are three recognized languages - roads signs are printed in all three – Hebrew, Arabic, and English.

Population is about 9 million; 80% Jewish, 18% Arab, and less than 2% Christian. Since established as a country in 1948, the government has encouraged immigration for Jews. The first 6 months, the government subsidizes income, assists in finding employment, and exempts the people from taxes for 3 years.

On Day 2 we visited Caesarea Phillip – today we went to the actual city of Caesarea, located on the coastal plains. The ancient city was destroyed, but a new city has been constructed. It is beautiful and expensive – it even has one of only two golf courses in the entire country. The prime minister has a home here – as well as Jerusalem.

The city of Caesarea Maritima was built in Roman-ruled Judea by King Herod the Great beginning around 22 BCE. Herod ruled for 40 years and was responsible for ordering the killing of all baby boys in Judea as a means of killing the baby Jesus. The 12-year construction included a deep-water harbor, the king's palace (with an in-door swimming pool), amphitheater, hippodrome, and a 17-mile aqueduct system to bring fresh water from Mt Carmel to the city. The city was surrounded by limestone walls and a moat system during the crusades. The ruins of that construction are visible around the outer edge of the city.



We were able to sit in the amphitheater and walk the grounds of the excavated properties.

HEROD'S THEATER

Herod's theater, built between 22-10 B.C., was the first of its kind in Israel. Throughout the Roman and Byzantine periods the building underwent several alterations. Sometime during the 3rd or 4th c. A.D., the orchestra was converted into a large basin for staging nautical games. Apparently offended by the licentious entertainment the theater offered, the Christian Byzantine rulers closed it down in the 5th c. A.D.





Excavation began in 1930 and continues today with the recent discovery of a prison. In 1961, the 'Pilate Stone' was discovered, the only archaeological item that names the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate. Writings by Eusebius, a 4th century Christian bishop and historian were discovered in a dry well on at this site.

We gathered to hear Laura Katherine read from Acts 10 the story of the centurion Cornelius' conversion at Caesarea. Once again, the scriptures became open as we stood in the exact place where this event took place. It was a turning point for Christianity as it marked the first

baptism of a gentile without having to convert to Judaism. This is the scripture that confirmed Jesus was sent to save everyone, Jew and gentile alike.



We left Caesarea, stopping at the aqueduct ruins on the beach – I haven't mentioned – Caesarea sits on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. This strategic location was selected by Herod as it provided shipping access to supplies needed to construct the temple. The Sea was a beautiful bright blue – the day was perfect for our visit!



Leaving the aqueduct, we rode about an hour toward Mt Carmel. On the ride, Tim Clapp shared a devotion taken from Matthew 11 – beginning with verse 1 – 6 where John instructs the disciples to “go back and report what you hear and see”. Timm applied this to our current pilgrimage – how we should share the impact this trip will have on the faith of each of us. Verses 25-30 are the words ‘come you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest’. Tim shared how we are all in need of healing and rest – and following in the footsteps of Jesus will help us find that solace.

Mt. Carmel is a 2,500-foot mountain with 2 peaks – one overlooking Haifa and the other the valley of southeastern Judea. Carmel comes from two words – Carm (Vineyard) and El (God) – the Vineyard of God.

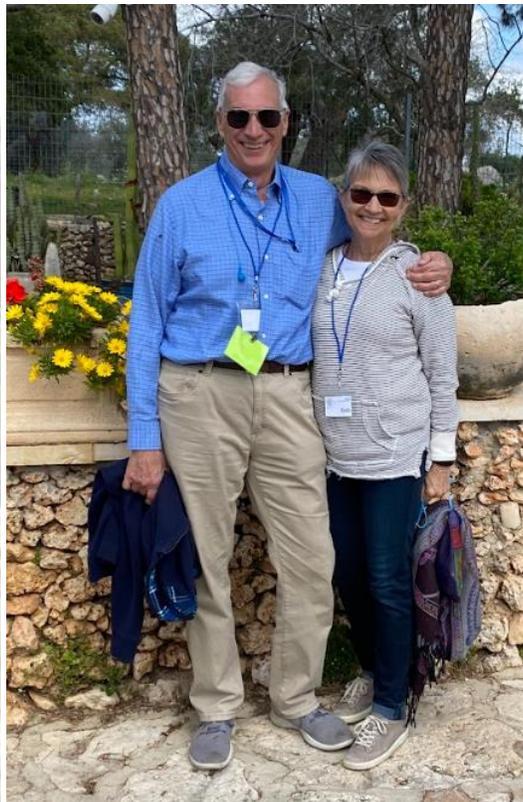
The eastern side of the mountain is described in Revelation 16:16 as the place where Armageddon will take place. Rula named at least 10 known OT battles that occurred in that area – ex the battle of Deborah and Barak.

The mountain top is where the prophet Elias fought the forces of Baal in 700 BC after King Ahab married Jezebel and she brought the false prophets to the valley. Rula told the story of the challenge which resulted in Elias destroying 450 false prophets and rains returning to the valley after a 3-year drought.



A statue sits in the garden at the entrance to a Carmelite owned and maintained church property on the top of the peak.





The church was constructed in the 12th century, Muslims expelled the Christians who later returned in the 18th century and built the current church.



The roof of the church is an observation desk that affords a 360-degree view of the valley.





We left Mt Carmel and returned to the city of Nazareth where we were treated to a very interesting lunch at Nazareth Village is an open-air museum that reconstructs and reenacts village life in the Galilee in the time of Jesus. The meal consisted of only food that would have been available at that time and place. Actors reenact farm, domestic, and craft work as it would have been performed two thousand years ago. The property is located in sight of urban Nazareth, but is build to remove those distractions and place you on paths up and down hillsides like Jesus would have walked.



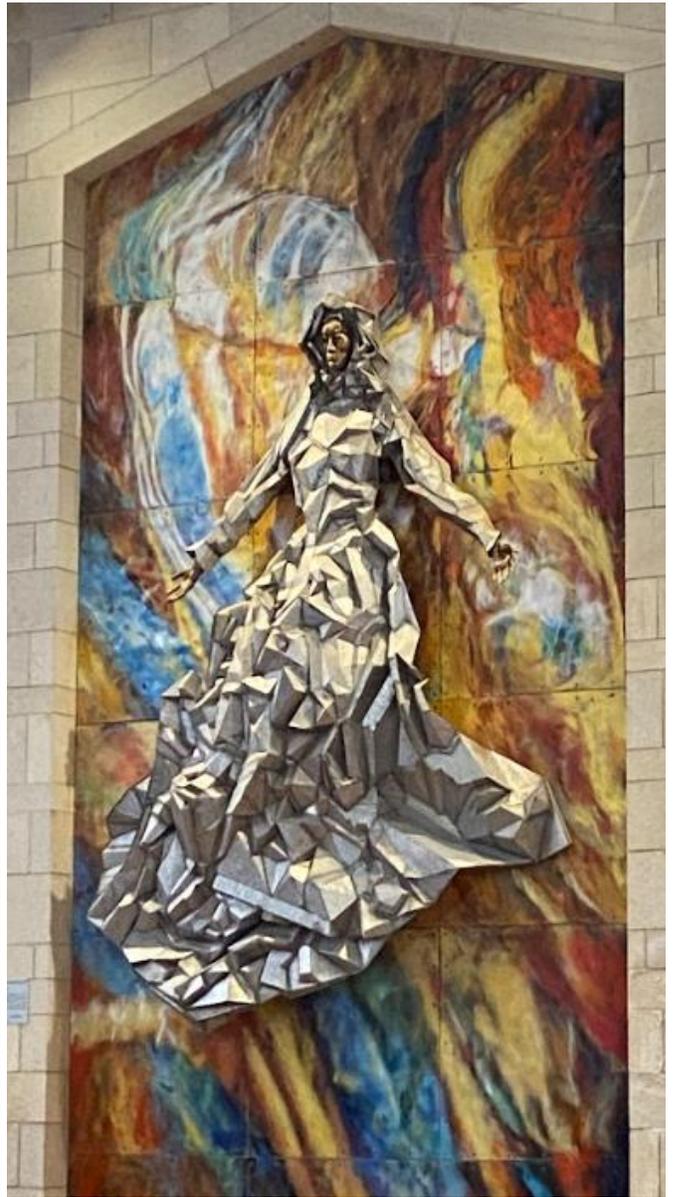




Our last stop for the day was at the Church of the Annunciation built over what Catholic tradition holds to be the site of the house of the Virgin Mary where angel Gabriel appeared to her to announce she would give birth to Jesus. Helen, mother of Constantine, helped build the first structure around 325. That structure was destroyed at some point, rebuilt by the Crusades in 1100, destroyed in 1260 by invaders, rebuilt in 1620 when the holy grotto venerated as the house of Mary was enclosed. For the 4th time the church was rebuilt in 1730.



Following a visit by the Pope, the old church was completely demolished in 1954 to allow for the construction of a new basilica which was completed in 1969. It contains easy access to view the grotto and nations from around the world have provided artistic representations of the Virgin Mary.



We ended the day back at our hotel with an unbelievable sunset and some socializing time 😊 before another fabulous meal.



As we prepare for tomorrow – we will be moving hotels for the last time, heading to Jerusalem. We are switching daily itineraries – going to Bethlehem tomorrow rather than Friday due to a marathon on Friday that will close down many of the street we need to use. We love that Rula has advanced knowledge, we do not have to worry about such logistics, and we can relax this evening knowing she has it under control!