

Aaron Melton's Israel Trip

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[0:00] Thank you.

No, he turned it off. Test, one, two. Is it on? Okay, cool. All right. Well, good morning.

It is great to be back in the States. A lot of you probably knew that I was stuck in Toronto for four days on the way back, so I got a little tired of the Toronto airport.

But God was good, and he got us back home safely. And I'm excited to be able to share with you guys some of the things that we got to do and the places I got to see in Israel.

All right, so full disclosure. I have a lot of information that I can give, but for sake of time, I'm going to be moving very quickly through a lot of the slides up on the screen.

[1:08] So if you see something, you're like, whoa, I had a question about that. I want to know more about that. Please see me at the service, and you can ask all sorts of questions, and I'll be happy to talk to you for hours if you would like.

So I'll be moving very, very quickly. But yeah, please, if you have questions, come to me afterwards, and I'd be happy to answer them.

Overall report of the trip, it was the greatest trip in my life. So it was an amazing opportunity to be able to go and walk in the places that Jesus walked and see the things that you read in the Bible, and it does really come to life when you're there.

And then the opportunities and the friendships that I built while there as well was amazing. So I'm excited to share to a lot of you who helped me get there, and kind of so you can see a little bit of what you were able to be a part of.

My goal in sharing with you this morning is that you would be able to see a glimpse of what I had the privilege of seeing in Israel, and that your faith would be strengthened as mine was strengthened, because the places mentioned in Scripture are real places, and the stories in its pages really happened.

[2:24] And I hope to share with you just some of the archaeological evidence, because I was on an archaeology trip, an archaeology evidence that supports what we see in the biblical text. God's word is reliable, and it's trustworthy, and so we can trust him knowing he's going to be faithful today just as he has been faithful in the past.

So without further ado, I'm going to be moving really quickly. I went to 20 different locations in five days, all over the country of Israel, so I'm going to be moving very quickly and trying to kind of highlight some things at each location.

But, okay, first place, just like a second we landed in Israel, like 10 a.m., we drove to Ashkelon, which is like a 45-minute drive from Tel Aviv, and this is the first location that I went to.

Every location, I'm going to have all the Scripture references, at least the ones that my professor provided. On the location, so you're probably not going to have time to write all those down if you're interested.

If you want to keep them, you can take a picture, I can give them to you after the service. But several Scripture references to Ashkelon in the Bible. It's one of the five cities in the Pentapolis, the Philistine Pentapolis.

[3:33] So it's a Philistine city, one of the major Philistine cities, on the coast, the Mediterranean, as you can see here. One of the things I got to see at Ashkelon is a middle bronze gate, which basically, when you get into the periods, middle bronze is about the time of Abraham.

So you have like, this gate would have been there when Abraham was walking around in the land. And this is, we got to visit it, and we got to touch it.

And basically, yeah, it's still there today. And so that was really cool. This is basically from 4,000 years ago, about 2,000 B.C. Next place we went up to visit was Joppa.

There's some references to Joppa there. Basically, Joppa is a port city. This is about a little bit further north of Ashkelon. If you're interested, I have a map in the very back.

There's a table back there, just to the right of the exit. And I have a map of like Israel, and I have the route like drawn on the map, so you can see kind of like the route that I took.

[4:44] But this is just north of Ashkelon. You're looking kind of at the modern city of Tel Aviv right here, but it's another coastal city. This is a city that like Solomon, the materials for Solomon's temple would have come into this city.

And then you also get, this is where Jonah fled when he was fleeing from the Lord. Instead of going to Nineveh, where he was called to go, he fled to Joppa, gone in a boat.

And then off the coast of Joppa, somewhere out there, is where you get the story of him being swallowed by the great fish and everything like that. So a very familiar story. That would have happened just off this coast.

This is also the place where Peter raised Tabitha from the dead in Joppa in Acts chapter 9. And then also kind of the place where Peter was when Cornelius, who was up in Caesarea, sent messengers to him telling him to come and preach the gospel to him at Caesarea.

But Peter was here. This is where he saw the vision of the animals being lowered in a sheet. It would have been here at Joppa. So there's the city, the skyline of modern Tel Aviv in Israel.

[5:56] Okay, Caesarea. I wanted to spend a little bit of time in Caesarea because it was a really cool location. Basically, it's mentioned all over in Acts. Acts is like lots of references to Caesarea in Acts.

This is an amphitheater at Caesarea. There's my professor, Dr. Rodriguez, who is leading the trip. You can look here. This is also on the coast.

This is actually the remains of Herod the Great's palace. Basically, Herod built this palace, and it would have been kind of like the main place that the governors in the land would have stayed.

So not only was it a place that Herod the Great would have stayed, but also probably would have been the place that Pontius Pilate would have stayed as well. He would have been in Jerusalem maybe for the Passover feast, but he probably predominantly resided here.

And this is the palace at Caesarea. And this is his swimming pool. Like literally, this perfect rectangular shape, they say, is like the swimming pool that Herod the Great would have had in his palace.

[7:05] And so we got to walk around that, splash our hands in it a little bit. This is me and my roommate, Cade, at Caesarea. And then I want to get to this picture.

This picture, you can see, this is one of the students on the trip, Haley. She is standing in the room, this kind of like rectangular room here, that is a very possible location for where Paul appealed to Caesar.

This is kind of like a hearing room in Herod's palace. And we read in Acts, I think it's chapter 25. Yes. Acts 25, Paul appeals to Caesar. And they think it's possible that it would have been in this actual room right here. So very cool. And then the coolest thing that my professor kind of talked about with Caesarea that I never really thought about, it's really kind of the location of like where salvation for the Gentiles kind of started.

Because you have Cornelius' house is here in Caesarea, and it is where the Holy Spirit fell on Gentiles for the first time, which you read in Acts chapter 10.

[8:22] So Peter came from Joppa, walked up to Caesarea. For us, it was like a 30-minute drive. But he came up to Caesarea and preached the gospel to Cornelius and his household, and the Holy Spirit fell on them.

And this is kind of like salvation for the Gentiles. And so praise God that God is gracious enough not only to offer salvation to the Jews, his people, but also grafting us in as Gentiles to save us as well. So that was really cool for me. So yeah, this is the wall of Caesarea, ancient wall, very cool, and just one of my favorite places that we visited.

Just outside the city to the north, we visited Herod the Great's aqueduct that he built that bring water from Mount Carmel area to Caesarea. And I won't go into detail on that, but it is actually a really cool feat of engineering, like how it brings water to the city.

And it was just very, very impressive, and I can tell you more about that later if you want. Mount Carmel, I mean, I have two back-to-back favorite places here.

[9:34] They were all great, but Caesarea and Mount Carmel were one of my favorite places that we visited. Mount Carmel, because it's one of my favorite places, because you get the story in 1 Kings chapter 18 of Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

And that has always been one of my favorite stories. If you know the story, you're familiar with the story, you know, you have Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to meet at Mount Carmel. It says, you know, you call upon your God to rain down fire on the altar, I'll call upon my God, whichever answers is the true God.

And of course, the God of Israel rains down fire, burns up the altar, and that's the basic part of the story. So it's one of my favorite stories in the Bible. And this is Mount Carmel, like from the top of Mount Carmel, looking kind of east towards the Jezreel Valley.

And something really cool about the Mount Carmel area is like, they can more or less get a very good guess of like where this event actually happened on Mount Carmel.

So there's this kind of like this field that's kind of like at the base of the mountain here. Well, it's on the mountain, but it's kind of at the base of the slope. And it's like a nice flat area.

[10:54] It's relatively open now, but there's not really a whole lot of areas where you can gather like a large group of people. And so this area is one of the locations that you can like, you can easily gather like a whole bunch of people together.

I mean, if you think about it in the story, you know, where you read that there's 450 prophets of Baal, 400 prophets of Asherah, and then there's like the peoples from the villages and stuff that are coming to watch the spectacle. Like it would have been really a large group of people that are gathering together.

And then you also get like Elijah tells them to pour water on the altar like three times. And you're like, okay, if you knew the context of the story, it's in the middle of a drought.

It's like, where are they getting all this water from? There's not going to be like natural rainwater just laying around. They had to be, you know, getting us water from somewhere. There's a natural spring just off the edge of the picture right here that is still there today that you would be able to get large amounts of water.

And so it's possible, not for sure, but possible that this little location down here is the site where this event actually happened. You have a nice big area that you could gather large amounts of people.

[12:07] You have a spring that you can get large amounts of water from. And so it was just really cool to read the story and kind of look at this here and think, man, this happened, if not right there, it happened really nearby.

And you can also, later in the story, you have Elijah and he tells his servant to run up the hill and look towards the sea and tell him what he sees.

So you can see down here, this is kind of like the field that I was talking about. We're kind of sitting up top here. If you have the servant running up the hill to where we are, and then you turn to the right here and you look towards the sea, you can't really see it in the picture.

You can kind of see it. This is the Mediterranean Sea out here. So you can see the sea. You can just imagine him running up the hill to where we are, looking out towards the sea.

He says he doesn't see anything like the first two times. He goes back the third time and he's like, I can see like little white wispy clouds. And it just so happened that that's what was above the horizon on that day.

[13:15] Those little tiny white wispy clouds. And he's like, okay, prepare for rain. It's coming. And anyway, it was just like one of those stories that really came to life for me while I was there at Mount Carmel.

Next location is Megiddo, which is just down the hill from Mount Carmel on the edge of the Jezreel Valley. A couple things I want to highlight with Megiddo is one of the cities that Solomon fortified during his reign, which we can read in 1 Kings 9.

But something that's interesting, kind of ties some archaeology in here and how archaeology supports scripture, is you have, basically we're told that Solomon, well, Solomon fortifies three cities in his reign in 1 Kings 9.

It says Hatsor, Megiddo, and Gezer. And interestingly, we find the same six-chambered gate at all three locations that date to the sign of Solomon.

And so if you think about, like, oh, you're wanting to fortify a city, what's one of the things you probably want to fortify that's, like, known as kind of, like, the weakest point of the city, a gate?

[14:30] It would, you know, it would be the gate. And so it's just kind of interesting that, you know, we find the same fortification of, you know, gates at all three cities, and then the scripture says just that.

You know, he fortified these three cities. So something that's just kind of cool. It's called the six-chambered gate because you have six chambers on, three on each side. That one's kind of filled in there. But, yeah, so that we got to see that.

This is the Jezreel Valley. One cool reference of Megiddo is that you have, basically in Revelation 16, 16, you have a reference to Armageddon.

Which can be translated to Tel Megiddo, or I forget the exact wording of it, but it's basically Tel Megiddo. And so it's said in Revelation 16, 16, that it's going to be the location of the final battle, kind of between, like, God's people and evil.

And so that's going to be where it all happens. And we were right there looking at this valley where that final battle is going to happen.

[15 : 43] And so that was really cool. And here we are getting to walk through the water system at Megiddo as well, which was really cool. Bateshon. I won't explain much about Bateshon.

We didn't actually go into the park. We just basically had time to... The park had closed. We were kind of overlooking it. But this is Bateshon.

Main significance of Bateshon in the Bible, when Saul was killed on Mount Gilboa, his body was taken and hung on the wall at Bateshon. And it also gives me a chance to kind of talk about what a tell is.

So in archaeology, we use the term a tell very often. Basically, it's an artificial or man-made hill. You have, like, somewhat of a natural hill here that maybe a civilization, ancient times, builds a city on top of.

But then that city gets destroyed, and then another civilization, or the same, just later, comes and builds a city on top of that, the ruins. And it basically used to have civilization upon civilization upon civilization over time, and it creates this artificial hill that we call a tell.

[16 : 58] And several places can have many, many layers of occupation. Like, for instance, Megiddo, which I just talked about, has...

Archaeologists have found 26 layers of occupation at Megiddo. So... And generally speaking, the more recent civilizations are going to be on top, the later civilizations are going to be on the bottom. But you do have kind of like a more recent Roman city, kind of at its base. But like the city during the Philistines, during Saul's day, would have been up here on the top of the hill.

So... Arbel Cliffs, that was something that we kind of just briefly... Let's see, got my notes out of order here.

Arbel Cliffs are something that we just briefly had a chance to kind of go to. There's not really any major significance or direct references in the Bible to them.

[17 : 58] But they overlook the Sea of Galilee. And so it is in kind of like the northwestern corner of the Sea of Galilee. This is where the northern end of the sea right here that we're looking at.

And we're looking kind of at the plains of Gennesaret. So we're looking where a lot of Jesus' Galilean ministry would have happened. So Magdala is actually just right down here, kind of, I think, maybe a little bit behind the rock.

But that would have been the city that Mary Magdalene is from. Capernaum is just kind of in the haze back there, way back there somewhere. And so you can't really see it. But it would have been in that area.

But it's almost for sure, like this is a major route that would have been traveled a lot. So Jesus would have walked right through here. And that's just really cool. And so we got good views of the Sea of Galilee, of the Sea of Galilee region, CCU flag there, the team.

And then we got to literally climb down the cliffs. It was a rather sketchy climb at times. But we all made it down safe. And it was a lot of fun.

[19 : 14] And we also got to explore some Ottoman Turk ruins from the 17th century. So not nearly as old, but still cool. Okay, then we went to Capernaum.

Capernaum was also really cool. So it's the town that Jesus chose to be the base for his ministry in Galilee. It's the hometown of Peter. And there we are, posing at the gate to the Capernaum town of Jesus.

We ought to visit a 4th century synagogue, 4th century AD synagogue, which actually stands on the foundation stones of the 1st century synagogue.

So if you look here, you have the white stones on top. That's from the 4th century synagogue. The white stones are not from the area. Like, they had to have imported them.

But the black stones are like basalt. And they are very common in the area. And this would have been the 1st century stones. And so this is the foundation of the 1st century synagogue, which would have been there during the time of Jesus.

[20 : 24] Jesus did preach in the synagogue. He cast out a demon in the synagogue in Mark chapter 1. And he claims to be the bread of life in the synagogue.

He makes that claim in the synagogue in John 6, 48. And so these stones would have hurt all that. They would have been there when that was happening.

And that's what this is sitting on. This synagogue is sitting on these stones. And so that was really, really cool to be able to see stones that would have been there during when Jesus was right there. And then if you read in the passage, it says that in Mark chapter 1, transitioning to Mark chapter 2, Jesus says he leaves the synagogue and walks over to Peter's house.

And it seems like there's some proximity there, like really close proximity. And archaeologists have found a building. So this is a modern church that is actually built on top of the ruins of what archaeologists think is Peter's house.

[21 : 35] And I could go into why they think that. I think the argument is pretty good. It's actually very possible that Peter's house would have been right here.

And that's the synagogue. And so if Jesus may be leaving the synagogue and walking over to Peter's house, it's very, very close. And inside Peter's house, so this is one major room inside Peter's house.

This is like the modern building built on top of it. But this is the remains of the biggest room in Peter's house. This could have been...

It's falling off. Excuse me. There we go. This could have been the remains, or this could have been the room that the paralytic that was lowered from the ceiling and was healed in Peter's house, that could have been the room that he was lowered into right there.

Don't know that for sure. That's an educated guess, but it is a possibility. So that's just, yeah, again, really cool. And it is really close, right next to the Sea of Galilee.

[22 : 51] Sea of Galilee is basically in Peter's backyard. So there's a view of that. So now we're going to go to Caesarea Philippi. This thing is giving me trouble.

Caesarea Philippi is way up north. I'm not going to spend much time here, but basically it's the location of where Peter makes the Great Confession. You know, Jesus says, you know, who do people say that I am?

He's like, oh, John the Baptist or Elijah. And then he's like, well, who do you say that I am? He's like, Peter says you are the Christ, the son of the living God. And this is where that confession would have, or around the area where that confession would have happened.

Today there is a temple to like a Greek god there. We got to kind of look at that. But it is also like the location of one of the major springs that feed the Jordan River.

There's six major springs that feed the Jordan River, and this is the second largest spring there. So we got to see that. Nimrod's Fortress. Nimrod's Fortress is a crusader fortress.

[24 : 01] It was built by the Muslim forces, so from the time of the Crusades. But it's located on Mount Hermon, which is the tallest mountain in Israel, and is a good guess for the location of the transfiguration of Jesus.

If you read in, let's see, I think it's Matthew 16, and then going to Matthew 17, I think the start of Matthew 17, it's just like six days after being at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up onto the high mountain, and it's like, well, you don't get any indication that they moved anywhere in that time.

So they're at Caesarea Philippi, maybe, and then he goes up to the high mountain. The high mountain, it's like Mount Hermon, it's like right there. So it's possible that he would have gone up Mount Hermon, and that's where he was transfigured before his disciples.

And so this is the fortress that's there. It's just a really cool place. But then this is Mount Hermon, and kind of like the slopes of it. So the transfiguration of Jesus may have happened in this area. So I wanted to share that with you. And then Dan, I won't say much about Dan, but it was very green, very lush. This is the location of the largest spring that feeds the Jordan River.

[25 : 24] And it's also the location of Jeroboam's high place. It's a story that not a ton of people know. But basically Jeroboam was a king in Israel that erected two golden calves for Israel to worship.

And he erected one at Dan and one at Bethel. This is the one at Dan. This is the location of where that golden calf would have stood. Also got to see another gate.

This is an early bronze gate, which is before the time of Abraham. This would be probably around 2500 to almost 3000 BC. So this is before Abraham.

This gate would have been there. Jericho. Jericho. Okay, so Jericho was cool. So Jericho. Jericho was...

So before going to Israel, I didn't even know that you could actually still see the remains of the city that Joshua actually conquered.

[26 : 31] But you can't. I thought that they were gone, obliterated, whatever. But this is actually the remains of the city that Joshua would have conquered.

This is the tell. I kind of explained what a tell is already. But this wall that you can see my professor pointing to, this right here, this is a retaining wall that would have held up the actual wall that fell in the conquest of Jericho in Joshua chapter 6.

And so something that's kind of interesting, I thought... Let's see. I'm going to do it. I'm going to turn to there. And you can as well if you want to use your Bibles. You didn't expect that, did you?

But if you turn to Joshua chapter 6, I'll just kind of read a little bit of the story and kind of talk about, kind of some insight, give you some insight here, kind of like what some of this passage means.

So you'll see in Joshua 6 verse 5, it says, and when they make... This is God speaking to Joshua.

He says, and when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, every one straight before him.

[27 : 54] Now, my Bible has a footnote next to down flat. The walls fell down flat. And then if you look at the bottom, mine says in Hebrew, the better translation would be, the wall fell under itself or beneath itself.

And archaeologically, this makes sense because archaeologists actually found basically a pile of mud brick that was just at the base of this retaining wall.

So if this retaining wall was holding up the actual wall and the wall fell, it crumbled to the base of this retaining wall. So it's kind of like, in a sense, like falling beneath itself.

And then it also created a ramp for the Israelites to go every man straight before him into the city.

And so that was actually secular archaeologists that found that rubble that is at the base of this retaining wall.

But this retaining wall would have heard the trumpets that Joshua and the Israelites blew to conquer the city of Jericho. And it was just really, really cool.

[29 : 11] And there's lots of different evidence as well of the conquest of Jericho and how it's supported archaeologically. I could go into that, I think for sake of time.

I won't, but I encourage you, if you are interested in hearing a little bit of the archaeological evidence for the conquest of Jericho, I'll be happy to tell you about that I learned. It was one of the topics that I learned about in my archaeology class this last semester and then a little bit in Israel as well.

But I wanted to make mention of this. This here is what we're standing on, this structure. This is a tower that dates to the Neolithic period.

And that, depending on kind of like how old you believed the earth to be, this is like the oldest you can get. This is from about 8,000 B.C. So this is like possibly 10,000 years old and it is the oldest building in the world.

Like there's nothing, no other structure or anything that archaeologists have found that predates this. So this would have likely been built by the people a few civilizations, or a few generations after like the time of Noah.

[30 : 28] And it's the oldest building in the world making Jericho the oldest city in the world, you know, post-flood. So that's really cool again.

And I got to stand on top of it. Now I'm going to move to Qumran. Qumran, not mentioned in Scripture directly, but it is the location where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.

This is, I believe, a copy. I don't think this is an actual Dead Sea Scroll. But the Dead Sea Scrolls were found here at Qumran in 11 different caves.

It also is kind of like the wilderness of Judah. We're looking into the wilderness of Judah. And so when you kind of think about Jesus' temptation and like he goes out into the wilderness and for 40

days, I mean, it probably would not be too far off to think of this.

Like this is like kind of like what he was in for those 40 days without any food or water. And so you can imagine it doesn't look very pleasant. Very dry. And we also got to see one of the caves that the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in.

[31:44] Like I said, there was 11 of them. But this is cave number four, which they found fragments of fragments of Deuteronomy, First Kings, Isaiah, Psalms, and Lamentations in that cave.

This cave and that cave are the same cave. But this room here is actually thought to be a room where a lot of the Dead Sea Scrolls were actually written in. They found lots of like ink cartridges of some sort and indicated it might have been a room of like some sort of scribe or something like that. So it's possible that a lot of the Dead Sea Scrolls were actually written in that room. And it was hot. It was very hot. That was my roommate dying of heat stroke nearly.

And that's the Dead Sea behind him. Speaking of Dead Sea, we went to Dead Sea and we swam in the Dead Sea. You can't really swim. It's more like float. And it was very, very hard to like not float. So that's some of the students on the trip that are floating in the Dead Sea having lots of fun. I wasn't going to say much about the Dead Sea. It was just a fun outing that we got to do.

[32:55] And it was pretty. Masada. Not a whole lot of to mention about Masada either. It was a really cool place.

Basically, it's this giant mesa that just is like cliffs on all sides. And then they built a fortress on top. And it is really impressive.

And I was told by my professor, it's like when you think, when David says, when David writes like, God, you are my rock and my fortress, it's possible that he is actually thinking of Masada because it is like an impenetrable fortress.

You got cliffs on all sides and you're just like, you're way up high. If you look in this picture, I'm sitting on top of Masada on the mesa. And you can see kind of how high we are above like the surrounding like valley.

This is like looking down on like a Roman camp that actually would have been like a lot farther below where I am. But it's like, you kind of like think of Masada as like, when we think of like, God, you are my rock and my fortress, I don't know, I kind of think of like, it's a stone, you know, it's hard.

[34:08] But like this is one of the places that kind of being there was really cool to me because it was like, I can be like, you know, God, you're my Masada because it's like, it's just, you have this image of like impenetrable fortress and that was really cool.

And we are looking north towards the Dead Sea there, kind of on the right hand side. And this is kind of outside of Masada, this is some, just a little bit further south, but you can see the Dead Sea kind of behind me there.

Almost, almost there, almost to the end here. We're getting to the, all the places that I visited. Went to Arad, Arad is a, is really cool because it's a city that is actually like an early bronze site.

And so early bronze, like I said with the early bronze gate earlier, it's like 3000 BC. So it's like a thousand years before Abraham. And so a lot of like these structures that you see here are date to about 3000 BC.

And so this civilization or this, you know, this city would have been built and then destroyed before Abraham even came along. And so we got to kind of explore that site.

[35:24] It's a really large site. And they also do have, one of the locations they have a Iron Age fortress, which is like the time of Solomon that we got to kind of go around as well.

Inside the Iron Age fortress, there's like these little, this little temple and there's these stones that are kind of erected, kind of symbolizing like deities. Basically, when you, when you read like, you know, depending on whether the king was good or bad in like 1 Kings or Chronicles, it says that, you know, he knocked down the high places or he, you know, erected the high places depending on whether or not he was a good or bad king.

That's probably kind of like what they mean. Like you have like these standing stones that would like represent a deity or something, a high place and like they would knock those down if it was a good king or erect them if they're an evil king.

But, this is a, just a traditional house that would have been used in the time of the early bronze city. Beersheba, this is the last place that we went to on our five day tour.

Lots and lots of references to Beersheba in the Bible. It is the town of, the hometown of Abraham and the patriarchs, although this city that is here in these pictures is actually an Iron Age city, so like about a thousand years after Abraham.

[36:55] But, it would have been the area of the home of Abraham and the patriarchs. And, this is also, they have an altar there that's not really part of the site, but they have, it's what, it's called a horned altar.

And, it has like these horns on it. And, I forget the exact reference, but it's like you have the story, I think it's Solomon and his brother or something, where he, his brother like flees to the, the altar and cleans to the altar thinking that my brother, like he won't kill me here.

And, I think Solomon just says, yeah, go in, drag him away from the altar and kill him. and, so we were reenacting that, just that, you know, Joseph here is, you know, hanging on to the horns of the altar and the guards are taking him away from, to, to put him to death.

So, just something funny that we decided to do. But, this is the gate of Beersheba. This is the Iron Age well.

It's 70 meters deep. It's like 260 feet deep or something like that, which, if you think you're, like, you're digging that by hand. And, so it's a really, really deep well.

[38:06] Everybody's peering into it. And, then, we got to go into the ancient water system and kind of walk through that. So, that was really cool.

And, yeah, that was, that was Beersheba. So, all right, so now Jerusalem. I'll say some brief thing about Jerusalem and then I'll wrap up. So, Jerusalem, really cool.

How am I doing on time? Okay, getting, getting long here. But, Jerusalem, we went to the Western Wall. This is the Western Wall here. It was on Shabbat, so the Sabbath.

So, we were there when all the festivities were happening. And, that was exciting to see but also kind of sad because you have, like, all these Jews that are, like, praying for the Messiah to come and you're like, he is, he came.

He was right here. You know, he walked right, right by here and you rejected him. And so, it was just kind of somewhat the solemn thing to see but it was really cool to kind of just see the Western Wall there.

[39:12] This is kind of like on the quiet side of the Western Wall where these, all these stones that were thrown down from the Temple Mount. Jesus makes a prophecy when the, the disciples say, like, or admiring the stones of the Temple and everything and of the Temple Mount.

And he says, you see these stones? Not one stone will be left on top of another that will not be thrown down. And these stones are the stones that were thrown down from the Temple Mount in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed the Temple.

And apparently, they have not been moved since they fell. But these, this road that they're laying on is one of the major roads that would have been a way to access the Temple Mount.

So it's very likely that Jesus would have walked right on this road right here. It may have been on this road that he made the prophecy about the destruction of the, the, of Jerusalem. This is the Church of Holy Sepulchre right here.

You have Jaffa Gate, Hezekiah's Broad Wall, all places that we visited. We got some time to kind of speak with some Jews and just make friendships.

[40:20] You know, had some gospel opportunities with them in that regard. But here, we're looking at the City of David. This is what Jerusalem would have been in the time of David.

Over here, you kind of have the edge of the Mount of Olives. This is the Mount of Olives here. So this would have been the, the hill that Jesus would have come down during his triumphal entry.

Inside the City of David, they actually have the remains of what they believe to be David's palace. It's at the top of the City of David. They found, like, these capitals that are kind of symbolized, like, royalty, with these structures here.

And so it's possible that this was actually David's palace. They also have this retaining wall that is here as well that would have been holding some sort of large structure up as well. So that's why, another reason why they think this is David's palace.

Got to visit that. And we also got to go through Hezekiah's tunnel. And I'm not sure how well you know the story of Hezekiah's tunnel, but basically it was dug by King Hezekiah as a way to bring water from the Gihon Spring into the city.

[41:31] So that way they would have water in the time of, like, the Assyrians attacking Jerusalem. And so we got to walk through the tunnel that Hezekiah dug.

It's about three-quarters of them, or a half mile, or three-quarters of a mile, something like that. So a pretty long walk. And it's very tight. There's water that comes up to your knees, sometimes your thigh.

There's still water flowing through it today. And at times it's like 15 feet high, kind of like, looks like what it is here. And other times it's like five feet high and you're having to bend over.

So it's a little claustrophobic, but we made it through. Another place that we went, Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which is the traditional location for the location of Golgotha, the site of Jesus' death and resurrection, Church of the Holy Sepulcher is one of the locations that they think it could have happened.

Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus was betrayed. There's a garden there today. And there's a church of all nations that we were able to visit as well. Kind of had some quiet time there.

[42:40] That was really nice. We also went to the garden tomb. It's a tomb that would have been very similar to the tomb that Jesus would have been laid in.

So it's like this kind of tomb in the rock. And then you have this place where his body would have laid here, kind of underneath this, what they call an archosolium kind of like burial place.

So that was really cool. Went to the Israel Museum. Got to see the House of David inscription indicating that David was a real person and that he had a dynasty.

I got to see the Great Isaiah Scroll, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls here. I think, again, this was a copy. I think the real one is in like a, like in a, forget the word for it, but it's like in an archive or something like that.

Big model of the city of Jerusalem. Really cool stuff. Got to see Pontius Pilate inscription also indicating that Pontius Pilate was a real person. This is actually the bone box or the ossuary of Caiaphas, the high priest that tried Jesus, also indicating he was a real person.

[43:53] This was kind of cool. This is a bone with a nail going through it. This is like the wrist bone showing that execution or, you know, that crucifixion was a method of execution in that time and just kind of shows a little bit of like, you can just imagine like the pain that that would have caused.

It's just kind of something that was kind of amazing to see. But we did go to the Temple Mount, saw the Dome of the Rock, place where the temple would have stood, and got to kind of peer inside through a hole.

I wasn't allowed to go inside. But, yeah, so got to see that. Got to see the kind of like some stones in the Temple Mount that could date to like the time of Solomon.

Like everything else would date to probably the time of Herod the Great, like 500, or time of Herod the Great, which is like, you know, around the time of Jesus.

But like this one, maybe 10th century B.C., like the time of Solomon. Okay. I'll wrap up. I talked a little longer than I wanted to, but that's, I hope I didn't bore you too much.

[45:06] Gospel opportunities. The reason why I went to Israel, right? So we had several opportunities for the gospel while in Israel. Funny enough, one of the greatest opportunities for the gospel that we had the entire trip was actually at a laundromat in Jerusalem.

So nine people from the group, myself included, needed to do laundry and we decided to walk to the laundromat. We ended up carrying our laundry through like crowded streets for over a mile and then rode like a train for like another mile before we even got to the laundromat.

And we finally got there and it was tiny and we had to pack all this, all of our laundry into like one machine and it did not get clean. But as we waited, we got to talking with this young man named Ryan.

He was originally from Hong Kong but was going to boarding school in the States. He was in Israel, oddly enough, on an archeology dig at Megiddo. He was only 17.

He came to Israel completely by himself. He said that he was a Christian but admitted that his faith was wavering and we kind of asked him why and he's like, well, I think mostly because it's like there seems to be contradictions in the Bible and so we kind of explained to him like best we could like, you know, God's word is reliable, it's inerrant and we gave him the gospel.

[46:29] The Lord really seemed to be working on his heart. You could just see there's like a level of sensitivity there to what we were saying and I think all nine of us just like we said something, we added something to like the gospel and like what was, well, not adding to the gospel but added

something to kind of encourage him and Sam, one of our group, had a Bible with him that he wanted to give away while in Israel and he felt like this was the best time so Sam gave Ryan the Bible and Ryan gratefully received it and said he would read it and we invited him to our worship night together but he never came.

However, just got back on Tuesday and I think it was on Thursday, Emma, who's another person in our group, actually got Ryan's contact information on Instagram and she told us that Ryan had messaged her and said that he really appreciated our discussions and encouragement to him at the laundromat.

He said that we, he truly felt his faith had grown stronger and he also felt that he was, and he also said that he was reading the Bible that Sam gave him and this was such an unanswered prayer and it was so cool to see God work in that way.

Like, we're going to a laundromat in Jerusalem, that's where we met this guy and had one of the greatest opportunities to talk to the gospel with him. Like, God works in mysterious ways. So that was really cool.

We also had many opportunities with people at the dig which, here's some sites, here's some of the pictures of the dig that I worked at for three weeks. Some of the things that we found, some figurines, some pottery with like imprints and stuff like that, some cool stones with designs on them, a jawbone, all sorts of really cool things, full vessels of pottery, inscriptions, like just lots and lots of cool things that we found.

[48:17] But it was really cool just kind of getting to meet the people and we had a group of Swedish girls that joined us.

So this is Tilda and this is Philippa. They were from Sweden. They were not Christians. But we did have, one of the things that we did as kind of like a ministry to kind of help, kind of help spread the gospel is that every night we would have worship nights where we'd just sing songs and then we would basically have like a little devotional or something like that.

and we invited everybody to come but they did end up actually coming several times and we really saw like some sensitivity in their hearts of just kind of to the gospel and a lot of people had some really great discussions with both of them, especially Tilda.

She seemed especially sensitive to the gospel and it was just really encouraging to kind of like see them kind of God working in that. And so our hope is that, you know, like seeds were planted, maybe some seeds that had already been planted were being watered and that some may begin to be harvested for Christ's kingdom as well.

one of the things we got to do is also we got to be on the streets of Jerusalem and we got to sing hymns on the streets of Jerusalem and several people walking by would actually join us in singing those hymns and we got to talk to one man who was a Ukrainian refugee named Vitaly.

[49:55] He, his family had actually been kidnapped according to what he was saying. His family had been kidnapped by human traffickers and he was trying to figure out some sort of court case issue to see them again.

His English was really not great but we were able to communicate with him fairly well and we got to pray for him as a group with him and then he actually stayed and sang several hymns with us and we had several great opportunities with the gospel and with talking to people that just came and, you know, started singing.

We would kind of have like a method where it was like, you know, 80% of the group would continue singing and then one or two people would go out and try to talk to these people and try to share music with them and kind of get to know them and that's how we kind of got to know Vitale and got to pray for him and we continue to pray for him even now.

And then we also just strive to be a witness for Christ through how we worked and what we did. We were at an archaeology dig with Israelis, not necessarily believers, that we were there for three weeks and working with them and so we just tried to focus on working hard and were quick to do whatever was needed of us.

Everyone at the dig gave us great reports about the CCU students and said that they were far better than the group that had volunteered with them last time who happened to be primarily unbelievers. So we tried to be a witness to those around us in every possible way.

[51:16] We focused on being ambassadors for Christ and all as we're called to do. Our hope is that seeds were planted, like I said, seeds were planted, planted seeds were watered and then some may begin to be harvested for Christ's kingdom.

But to wrap up, last paragraph here. I can honestly say that this trip was the greatest trip of my life. The memories I made and knowledge I received through going to Israel would be with me for my entire life.

I also sincerely hope that the relationships I built with my fellow students will also grow and last forever. We have all expressed how much we love the group and how much we want to stay in touch.

We've already started planning ways to get back together to come the new school year. But I am truly astounded by how close we seem to have become in such a short time. I will never read my Bible the same way again.

When I read a passage of scripture, especially with lots of geographical locations in it, I have an image that pops up in my head because I've been there. It's so cool.

[52:16] And the imagery I have now is a blessing I pray I don't take for granted. So not only will my Bible reading be affected but I also know how I view different cultures has also been affected and I know how I can better pray for the country of Israel.

And of course the trip has affected my relationships but not just by making new friends but also strengthening my own relationship with the Lord. Through the theological discussions that we had as a group which we had a lot of theological discussions and the devotional times and the worship through singing together the places we visited and the testimonies of others.

I have felt convicted many times about where my relationship with the Lord is. I'm not in God's word as often as I want to be. I'm not in prayer as often as I want to be. I want to be more intentional and disciplined in how I spend my time.

And that conviction I felt on this trip is something I wish to reflect on now that I'm home. And the Lord has really given me time to kind of do that. And I don't want to ignore what the Lord is teaching me.

And I think you guys really, the people that kind of sent me there to Israel and helped support me you allowed me an opportunity for the Lord to really work in my life, my personal life and my relationship with him as well.

[53:26] As well as being able to proclaim the gospel to some of these people. So that's it. I'm sorry I went long. I said I was going to try to shorten it.

I don't think I did that at all. But a couple of things. I do have a table that's in the back back there, kind of on the right side. And it has some of the things that I brought home.

I have pieces of pottery back there that I've actually dug up on the dig. And I have quite a bit of pottery.

So I don't think, maybe, I don't know if I have enough for everyone, but that pottery is actually for you guys to take. It is not really dated, but it is likely from either the Iron Age or the Late Bronze Period, which is like 2,700 years old to 3,000 years old.

So it's just a piece of pottery, but it is really cool that it's that old. And you guys can take it if you're interested. I'm thinking maybe one per family or one per couple or whatever, one per person.

[54:42] But, yeah, you can feel free to take that. I've got some shekels back there. I have some stones that I actually took from the Elah Valley, which is where David fought Goliath. And so, lots of cool things to look at back there if you're interested.

But, anyway, yeah, again, if you have questions, feel free to talk to me and I'll be happy to talk for many more hours. So, thank you. And I think I'll go ahead and close in prayer.

Father, I thank you for the opportunity that I had to go to Israel and the opportunities with the gospel that I was able to have, Lord, with several people. I pray, Lord, for Ryan and Vitaly and Philippa and Tilda, those other people that we talked with, Lord, that we had opportunities with the gospel with.

I pray, Lord, you continue to work on their heart that you would convict them and help them run into the army.