

# KeizerCommunity

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## Notes from a holy land

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*Of the Keizertimes*

I recently traveled to Israel on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. While there, among other things, I learned what the word pilgrimage meant.

We saw many "holy sites" or places where things took place in the Bible: Caesarea, the Mount of the Beatitudes, one of the Roman Decapolis cities, but my favorite part was going to Jerusalem.

We started the trip in Tel Aviv and traveled north to the Sea of Galilee. From there we went southeast into Jordan and then finished the circle by going northwest into Jerusalem.

We saved up for a year to pay for this trip—in many ways, the entire year felt like it was leading up to Israel; upon getting there, the entire trip felt like it was leading up to Jerusalem.

On the second day of the trip we visited the Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized. Several members of our group, including my mother, sister and I, were baptized. Baptism is symbolic of being washed clean or made pure.

This was one of the first things we did, which was interesting, because when the Jews would come to the Temple (in Jerusalem) to offer their sacrifices they had to take a ritual cleansing bath before they could go onto the Temple Mount. That ritual was intended to purify them before they entered the presence of the Lord.

We visited a replica of the Tabernacle (the place where God dwelled before they built the First Temple) that explained how the temple was to be set up and the significance of every piece inside, ev-



Submitted  
An outside view of the Petra Treasury, a temple built in the 1st Century AD.

ery component was designed to foreshadow the coming of Christ.

The other things we saw were incredible, but when we drove into Jerusalem I nearly cried. Not because it was beautiful, though it was, but because this was the center of the faith that I've built my life around.

Driving to the Mount of Olives we could see the entire city stretch out beneath us.

A collective gasp went through the group. The walls of the old city stood high and proud, the modern city sprawled out around them, it was breathtaking.

We stood on the Mount of Olives and for the first time I saw the Eastern Gate, the Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock.

The Eastern Gate is where the Messiah is supposed to return through. In 1541 the Ottoman Empire sealed it closed in hope of preventing the return.

Outside the Eastern Gate is a Muslim graveyard. The working theory is that they built it there so that no one will walk through it and so that the Muslims buried there will be the first to welcome the Messiah.

The Western Wall, which we got to visit later on, is commonly referred to as the Wailing Wall—though our guide informed us that the Western Wall was the retaining wall on the West side of the Temple Mount and the Wailing Wall was outside of the building where they pay taxes.

When the Muslims took over the Temple Mount they built the Dome of the Rock on top of where the Holy of Holies (the sanctuary of the temple where God appeared) was supposedly located. Jews are not allowed to worship up on the mountain so they congregate at the Western Wall, the closest they can get, and worship there.

We saw several replicas of the Temple, each time we did our guide reminded us that when the Temple was still standing the Western Wall was of little significance—it was merely part of the border around the Temple and was no different than the eastern or northern parts.

Standing on the Mount of Olives and looking at the Dome of the Rock brought several of our group members to tears. This is an Islamic shrine built on top of the old Temple and is not to be confused with the Al-Aqsa Mosque, where Muhammad was taken up to heaven, they are separate buildings and only about a minute apart.

The location of shrine has no significance to Islam other than the fact that it's on top of an important place in Christianity and Judaism. Several group members expressed anger that it couldn't have been built 100 feet to the right or left.

As a rule of thumb, if there is a known religious site, chances are there is also a church, synagogue or mosque on top of it (technically the Dome of the Rock is a shrine not a mosque).

The exception to that rule was the Sea of Galilee, a place where Jesus spent a lot of time; the water is one of the few places you can't build a religious site and it has remained relatively untouched.

While the view from the Mount of Olives was incredible, walking through the city was even better.



Submitted  
Reporter Lauren Murphy (second from left) with other members of her group that traveled to Israel in September.

On our last day we walked along the walls of the old city—it was the sabbath so there were not many people in the streets which gave it a peaceful, quiet feel.

The people we did meet were wonderful: shop owners who brought us to tears with their kindness, a tour guide who took care of us when we

Both Russian Jews and Ethiopian Jews immigrated to Israel between the late 1970s to the early 1990s. Older immigrants struggled with learning the language and finding jobs in their chosen field. As a result, they took jobs like babysitting or cleaning that paid very little and did not offer pensions.

They receive a minimal amount of social security from the government and are, in some cases, forced to resort to begging to pay their bills. The Yad LaKashish non-profit was started to return dignity to the elders of the community.

From there, we saw the Southern Steps, which lead up to the Temple. Oftentimes rabbis would sit on the temple steps and teach the people, it's possible that Jesus did the same thing.

We went to the portion of the Western Wall where people gather to pray, which was an incredible sight. We also visited the Western Wall tunnels, which were excavated under the West-



Submitted  
The City of Jerusalem as seen from the YMCA Tower.

ern Wall.

When we left for the airport our guide taught us the prayer, Next Year in Jerusalem, which has several meanings. The most obvious being, "I will see you again."

Even though many here questioned my desire to intentionally travel to the Middle East, and the amount of walking and stairs made me sore, I fully intend to return. Walking in the place where Jesus walked and seeing where Biblical events took place brought scripture to life in an unreal way. The modern-day culture and people were so bright and vibrant, I could spend an eternity walking the city.

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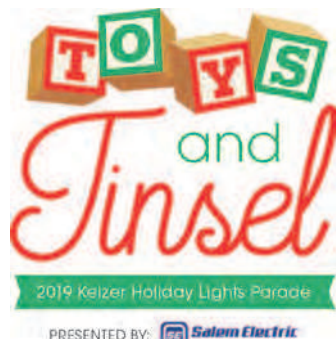


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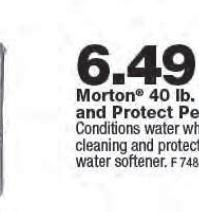
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