

Photojournal of Israel Trip 2023

I was 20 years old and on a trip around the western United States with my good friend Jerrie the first time I felt a draw to Israel. We were driving through California on the front end of a three-week ministry trip, using drama, music, and testimonies to share the gospel and encourage God's people in their faith. Jerrie mentioned that one of our friends was in Israel for "Juniors Abroad", the annual trip of George Fox College upperclassmen. I instantly felt a "tug" to go...a pull to Israel that has only built over the 29 years since. It was only a few days later that we drove into Arizona—the first time for me—never suspecting it would be my home someday.



Jerrie and I on the edge of the Grand Canyon at Sunset.
And YES, I was once that skinny! 😊

Over the years I've watched many friends go to Israel—and came close to going once before. When the Lord called me to Native work 15 years ago the burden intensified and focused: how do we take developing Native servant leaders to Israel in a way that actually *serves* the Israeli people? When my friend Mark Haughwout suggested the archeological dig last fall, I knew the Lord had presented the answer. A burden (to go to Israel) merged with a calling (to train Native leaders) the first two weeks of June 2023.

Our team (*pictured below right*) was made up of Sarah and myself, two graduate staff members (Brina and Kelly), and one current student (Aaron). All three of our traveling companions were Navajo, and none had ever left the country before, let alone gone to the other side of the world! So there was a lot of preparing, planning, and fundraising to do. The most stressful part was actually getting the passports for our three "first-timers", as the government was having lots of delays. The last passport came less than a week before our departure date!

Phase 1: Tel-Aviv (Friday-Sunday)

After a 14-hour flight from Los Angeles, our team landed in Tel-Aviv in the afternoon (local time). We enjoyed a few days of sharing local food, walking along the Mediterranean Sea, and praying together as we adjusted to the 10-hour time difference and new surroundings.



On the Mediterranean with the ancient city of Jaffa in the background.



Aaron's love for seafood is well-known at IBC, and he got to enjoy some fresh seafood in Jaffa!



Phase 2: Archeological Dig at Shiloh (Monday-Friday)



After two nights in Tel Aviv of acclimation, team building, and difficulty sleeping, we started Sunday with reading some "songs of ascent" (Psalms 124-125) which Jewish pilgrims would sing on their way up to Jerusalem. Our journey to Jerusalem was impeded by injury, fatigue, and unfamiliarity with the mass transit (which led to an encounter with the police), but we made it.



Monday through Friday we got up at 4am and headed out to the Shiloh dig site on busses. Shiloh was the home of the tabernacle during the period of the judges and was essentially the nation's capital. What a well-run operation this archeological dig is! The dig uses so many unskilled volunteers (like us) in a season that it is the largest excavation in the

world (at least by headcount)! And

most of the leaders and experts are volunteers. You can learn more about the dig organizers (the Associates for Biblical Research...ABR) at <https://biblearchaeology.org/>.



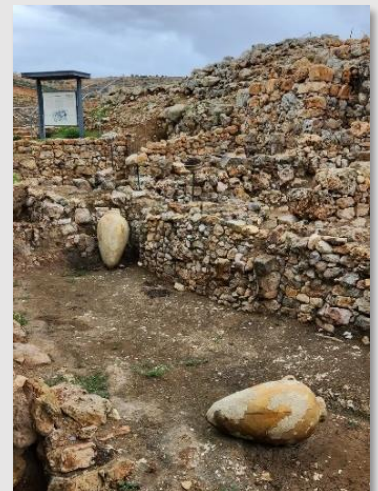
We started the week by helping to finish the excavation of a gate (*pictured left*), which might be the one Eli was sitting in when he died (1 Samuel 4:18). After doing all we could there, the team was divided up and sent in four different directions to different sites.

The pictures below show the process of excavation, dry sifting, and wet sifting. ABR is very diligent to find everything it possibly can.



Our team found animal bones and pottery shards at the various sites we excavated. The picture to the left shows several shards of pottery that Brina unearthed.

The photo to the right shows whole pots that were unearthed at the site several years ago. They were found intact under the remains of collapsed storehouses.



In the evenings we spent time in presentations (pictured below), team building and debriefing, or site-seeing. At the end of the week we were given a “graduation certificate” to acknowledge our service (pictured right).



The group picture below gives you an idea of how many people were serving the week we were there. It is truly an impressive operation and was a joy to be a part of.

Our team is pictured here (below right) with our friend Mark, who was also our tour guide for exploring Israel:



Phase 3: Exploration of Israel (Saturday-Tuesday)

The last part of our trip was spent travelling and exploring various regions of Israel: the South, Galilee, and (of course) Jerusalem.



Our day trip to **the south of Israel** gave us the chance to visit Jericho (left), Masada (below), the Dead Sea (where we had a genuine Middle Eastern feast), and En Gedi (right).



We took another day trip to the northern region of the **Sea of Galilee**, where we visited the ruins of Capernaum and had Chinese food (Brina's favorite meal) by the lake in Tiberias. This is the region where most of Jesus' ministry was carried out and many of his miracles were performed.



The team spent parts of four different days seeing **Jerusalem**.



We visited the Mount of Olives at sunset. A massive graveyard is in the foreground, Jerusalem is in the background.



Entering Herod's Gate



The Western ("Wailing") Wall. This is all that remains of the second temple. Men pray on the left, women on the right.

Concluding Observations and Response:

Aaron: The trip to Israel meant a lot to me because God revealed His Sovereignty more intimately in my life. He showed me His land and His people, and through that experience, not only showed how but why He is leading, molding me into the man He desires me to be for His purpose. This journey that I am on with my Father is beautiful. Never would I have thought that I would ever be in Israel, let alone, under a unique

purpose and alongside an amazing group whom I love and will cherish this moment in time with.



Brina: The world has its differences. Different languages, different customs, different food, different values, different scents. However, the world shares one thing in common: their need for a Savior. While our team had many new and exciting experiences during our trip, what I observed the most was that the people in Israel can be just as lost as myself and those around me, and they need someone to lead them and guide them. God is the same God on the reservation as He is in Jerusalem. The trip has meant many things to me, and has opened my eyes to new ways of thinking, including this idea that God is omnipresent and people are in need.

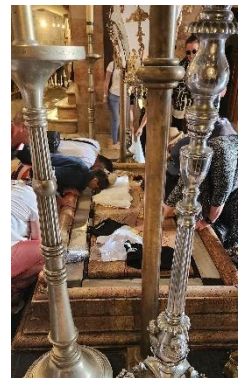
Kelly: Traveling to Israel this summer was an experience of a lifetime. I loved seeing the way the Lord brought together different passions amongst the team and myself. My highlight would be the

archaeological dig and seeing the relationships built with the other diggers. We would find opportunities in the day to day to serve the dig team any way we could. I would encourage everyone to experience overseas travel at least once in their life.



Jason & Sarah: There is so much about the trip we are still processing. Three observations and insights worth sharing at this point:

1. Visiting Israel certainly adds contour and context to the Bible's narrative, which is valuable for any follower of Christ—and especially for those who are called to teach the Bible to others. We are already planning to go back next year and take more students and alumni to "walk where Jesus walked and dig where Jesus dug".
2. It is very easy to accidentally fall into idolatry in the act of visiting Israel, worshipping the experience or even worshipping "the space". For example, on the last day we visited both of the places that claim to be the location of Jesus' burial: the Garden Tomb and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. While both clearly venerate the space, the second one encourages outright idolatry and superstition (pictured right).
3. The people in the land of Israel (Jews, Muslim, Christians) are in a strained and uneasy tension. The "four quarters" of Jerusalem Old City illustrate this in a dynamic way, as the three mono-theistic religions of the world (Islam, Judaism, and Christianity) view Jerusalem as a special site for their faith. I now respond to Middle Eastern events with much more prayerful insight.



Thank you to everyone who prayed for and gave to our trip. It was a transformational experience for everyone; we were greatly blessed to be a part.