

# GOING DEEPER

ACTS Israel Tour 2018

## DAY THREE: HEROD AND JESUS

Our goal for this day is to absorb some deeper background about Israel, Jerusalem, and the days of the great King Herod and the much greater King Jesus. We will begin our day with a trip to the Israel museum.

### Key Thought for Day Three

*The kingdoms of this world are based on power, wealth, control and fear. God's kingdom is based on truth, righteousness, justice and love. We will experience that collision of principles in a vivid way today as we visit Herod's great fortress of the Herodion which stands near Bethlehem not far from where Jesus was born a baby in the arms of a young peasant mother. Who is the greater king? Today, Herod is remembered only as footnote to history, a corrupt and brutal ruler. Jesus is worshipped and loved around the world, a powerful loving Saviour. We can ask the question, 'What makes a ruler or a kingdom truly great?'*



[Journey Map for Day Three](#)

## The Shrine of the Book

At the Israel Museum we will visit The Shrine of the Book, the specially constructed facility designed to house the Dead Sea Scrolls. On Day 9 we will visit Qumran where the scrolls were written by the Essene Community more than 100 years before the time of Jesus.



[The Dead Sea Scrolls](#)

The Essene Community, remote in the Judean wilderness, lived apart waiting for arrival of a Teacher of Righteousness who would reveal the hidden things. In the end of times, there would be a great war between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness. The Essenes observed a strict and simple life. Some scholars believe that John the Baptist may have spent time in the Essene community.

The exterior of the Shrine of the Book has been built to symbolize that belief with a large white dome facing a tall black basalt wall.

*Black basalt wall faces the white dome at Shrine of the Book*

When we visit the Shrine you will definitely see the dome, but many visitors miss the wall and never realize its significance. Look for it.

The dome is shaped like the lid for a clay jar of the kind in which the scrolls were hidden. The main exhibit inside the dome is a display of the Isaiah Scroll, the most fully preserved of the Dead Sea scrolls. Scrolls, of course, are rolled up, and the display is shaped like the handle for a roll of scrolls.

*The great Isaiah Scroll display at Shrine of the Book*

The Isaiah Scroll itself is written in ancient Hebrew script.

The scroll you will see is a copy, the original being much too fragile for permanent display and far too valuable to be at risk in a public display. However, you can go by video into the high security vault at the Shrine of the Book where the real scroll is stored.



[Go Into the Isaiah Scroll Vault](#)

If there is time you can also slip down the stairs to the lower floor of the Shrine of the Book where is told the story of the Aleppo Codex, the oldest and most complete version of the Hebrew Bible, dated from the 10th century.



About the Aleppo Codex We should

also have time to visit the incredible

*Canaanite burial jars at Israel Museum*

archaeological collections at the Israel

museum, a vast storehouse of antiquities and information about the history of this area of the Middle East stretching back many thousands of years.

## **The Magnificence of King Herod's Great Temple**

I think you will enjoy very much visiting the enormous outdoor model of Jerusalem in the time of Jesus. It's the best visual aid you'll ever see to gain a sense of the layout of Jerusalem in those times.

*The huge scale of Herod's Temple at the outdoor Jerusalem model*

The picture above shows the view from the east, looking west across the Kidron Valley toward the Temple. The people in the foreground are standing as if they were on the Mount of Olives and that's exactly the view Jesus would have seen from there. Notice how the Temple dwarfs everything else in the city. Nothing else comes even close to it in size or beauty.

*The southern steps of the Temple on the outdoor model*

The picture above show the view from the south, a view of what are today called the "Southern Steps." On Day 8 we will visit the Southern Steps. Sometimes people ask if there is anywhere in Israel that we can know beyond any doubt that Jesus walked. The answer is yes, and this is one of those places.

Do you see the two pairs of doors in the middle at the bottom of the wall? Those were the main doors that led up through tunnels into the temple area. Jesus would have often walked through those doors, and we will visit them.

To give you a better idea of the size of this huge area, the picture below shows a

satellite image of the Temple Mount with 23 football fields superimposed. The yellow square is approximately the size of the Great Pyramid at Gizeh in Egypt. Estimates are that as many as 200,000 people can gather on the Temple Mount at a time.

*The size of the Temple Mount compared to football fields*

Now, with all that in mind, move your mind back in time to the first century B.C. and try to imagine the impact of climbing the slopes of the Judean Hills toward Jerusalem and coming over the top of the hills capturing a view of this magnificent structure in its full grandeur. The Temple Mount would have been one of the most amazing and magnificent man-made sites in the world of that time.

*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.*

And then imagine the response of this listeners when Jesus said,

*The time is coming when all these things will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!" Teacher," they asked, "when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to take place?"(Luke 21:6-7).*

On Day 8 we will visit an ancient street where the massive stones thrown down still rest in tumbled confusion.

Before leaving the model of Jerusalem, notice also the three tall towers rising above at the back of the Temple. These are the Antonia Fortress that held a garrison of Roman soldiers ever on the watch for trouble. Where was trouble most likely to arise? On the Temple Mount, of course, and so the fortress was directly connected to it so that the authorities could flood the area with soldiers at any sign of disturbance.



## The Temple Mount

Also on Day 8 we hope to visit the Temple Mount. I say "hope to" because security is sometimes an issue at that site, and it can be closed by the authorities with little or no

notice.

## **The Power of King Herod's Fortresses**

Leaving the Israel Museum we will head south from Jerusalem, heading toward the astonishing desert fortress and palace of King Herod. It bears his name: The Herodion.

Ancient Kings, like modern despots, had to be ever on guard against rebellion and assassination. It should not surprise us that Herod not only build a great Temple but also a great fortress, several of them in fact. On Day 9 we will visit Herod's palace and fortress at Masada. But today we visit his tremendous fortress near Bethlehem: the Herodion. It was at the Herodion that Herod was eventually entombed.

The photo below shows the steep slopes of the man-made hill where Herod constructed the Herodion. His engineers began with a low existing hill and then sharply raised it height and the steepness of its slopes. Imagine the labor involved in doing all of this with hand tools!



*The hill of the Herodion, King Herod the Great's palace and fortress near Bethlehem*

The true power of the Herodion can be seen best from above. The fortress and luxurious living quarters were dug deeply into the mountain. Huge store rooms held supplies and massive cisterns collected and stored water.



## The Herodion

Only few kilometres from Jerusalem, Herod could rest secure in his fortress, well-protected and secure from all but the most determined attack.

[Click Here for a Larger View](#)

The view from the top of Herodion is amazing. Looking north your eye travels outward toward Bethlehem and on toward Jerusalem. The road to Bethlehem is a tiny ribbon far below. The great King Herod, terrified at the news that a “King of Jews” might be born in Bethlehem would have been too high in his fortress to see a poor peasant couple, Mary and Joseph, pass on their way.

*View toward Jerusalem from the top of the Herodion*

## **The Shepherd’s Fields**

From the Herodion, a place of earthy power and glory, we will head toward the traditional site outside of Bethlehem where the angels of God announced the birth of Jesus.

This is a perhaps a good place for a note on “traditional sites.” What does that mean?



## Note on “Traditional Sites”

So, are these fields we see around us the actual fields where the shepherd’s heard the

*Church at the Shepherd’s Fields*

angelic announcement. The best is probably, “Stand and look around.” This is area where it happened. Maybe this field. Maybe the one a bit more distant, but Bethlehem is nearby. This is the place!

*That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. ‘Don’t be afraid!’ he said. ‘I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.’ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.’ (Luke 2:8-14)*

**Dress for a religious site.**

*Angel over the door of Shepherd’s Fields Church*

There is a small church located at the Shepherd’s fields. A bronze angel hangs over the door to the church. Inside the church is decorated with a round of murals depicting the angelic announcement. A small cave nearby, where perhaps shepherds would take shelter, is used for worship services by many groups, but we will not stop there today.



[The Shepherd’s Fields](#)

*The angelic announcement*

## **Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity.**

We will travel into Bethlehem itself to visit the Church of the Nativity. Bethlehem is in a Palestinian area of Israel, and we will pass through security to get there, one of the marks of division and tragedy that are too common in Israel today. The barrier wall is covered with graffiti, some of it by Banksy, the famous graffiti artist. A politically charged picture called “Banksy’s Christmas Card looks like this, a reminder that although Jesus is the Prince of Peace,

*Famous graffiti artist Banksy imagines the wall of separation blocking Mary and Joseph from Bethlehem*

the world will not know that peace in full until He returns.

We sing “O Little Town of Bethlehem” in the well-known carol, but Bethlehem is little no more. Bethlehem itself has a population of about 30,000 and the adjoining towns add another 50,000. So it has become a city large enough to have its own “Stars and Bucks.”

*The Stars and Bucks in Bethlehem*



## Bethlehem

Our stop in Bethlehem will not be for coffee but for the Church of the Nativity. The large citadel-like church adjacent to Manger Square which covers the cave where tradition holds Mary gave birth to Jesus. The entrance to the church is a small, low door.

Why did God choose to have Jesus born in Bethlehem? To answer this question, recall that King David was from Bethlehem.

*Now David was the son of a man named Jesse, an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Jesse was an old man at that time, and he had eight sons. (1 Samuel 17:12)*

The Messiah who came to inherit the throne of David, therefore, would be born in the “City of David” (Luke 2:11).

**Dress for a Religious Site.**

*Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem*

*The low entrance door*

The church is entered through a low door. Two explanations for the designs are common. The first says that the door was made low so that pilgrims would have to bow with respect upon entering as a symbol that this is not a place for pride. The other is that the door was made low so that

invaders would be unable to enter with their weapon at ready, and the defender inside the door could quickly subdue them! Perhaps both are true.



## Church of the Nativity

It is easy to have high expectations of the experience of visiting the place of Jesus's birth. In our minds are images of Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus surrounded by donkeys and sheep and kneeling shepherds and wise men. But inside the Church of the Nativity is the light is dim. There are several altars, many lamps, and crowds of pilgrims. The image we see is not at all what we've

*Highly ornate altar inside the Church of the Nativity*

had in our thoughts. And then there is security wall and its graffiti and the modern, somewhat gritty town all around.

As a result, I am often torn when visiting Bethlehem and this church. To go to Israel on a Jesus tour and not visit Bethlehem would seem wrong. And yet you will find that many other places on our tour give you a much closer sense of Jesus and his world.

I recommend that you set aside your expectations and free your mind from comparisons. **In Bethlehem, you may feel, "This is not what I expected."** You had in mind a more spiritual, even romanticized expectation. I certainly did when I first visited.

If you do feel this way, then you are probably feeling just as Mary and Joseph did when they arrived, tired from travel, worried about the impending birth, and very much alone.

Allow the experience to be what it is and what God makes it to be for you. What you may find is that across all the years there is still something true to be learned for, you see, Jesus was born also into a gritty, commercialized world. When Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem it was no more a place of beauty and peace than it is today. Crowds had flowed into the city for the census. They could not obtain proper lodging.

Vendors were all over the town selling whatever they could to the crowds. The Scribes and Pharisees of the day also had a religious system that was often not friendly to visitors, certainly not to peasants from the remote areas of Galilee.

### **Passages to Study for Today**

Here are some passages to read as you prepare for Day Three.

- The birth of Jesus as Matthew tells it. Matthew 2: 1-18.
- The birth of Jesus as Luke tells it. Luke 2: 1-20.

### **Jesus and the Family of Herod**

Rulers named Herod figure large in the New Testament. Herod had ten wives and many lovers. The result was a vast, sprawling, feuding family. There are so many of them it can be confusing. The New Testament contains references to six different Herods

- **King Herod the Great.** The only references to him are those above.
- His son **Archelaus** who became King in Judea. Mary and Joseph had been warned to take the baby Jesus into Egypt. After the death of Herod the Great they returned to Israel but fearing that Archelaus might be a threat they did not stay in Judea but traveled north to Galilee. Matthew 2:22.
- His son **Herod Antipas** who became ruler (tetrarch) in Galilee. Herod Antipas was responsible for the execution of John the Baptist (Matthew 14: 1-12) and most of the gospel references to Herod and Jesus are to him. Jesus called this Herod “that fox” (Luke 13:31-34). After Jesus’s arrest, Pontius Pilate, probably hoping to free himself from a problem, sent Jesus to this Herod . Herod questioned him in depth, but Jesus remained silent, refusing to give him any answers. Herod had his soldiers mock and mistreat Jesus and then sent him back to Pilate (Luke 23:7-12).
- His son **Phillip**. Phillip was married to Herodias, who left him to become the wife of Antipas (above). John the Baptist’s condemnation of this marriage led to his execution by Antipas.
- His grandson, **Herod Agrippa**, who had James the brother of John put to death by sword (Acts 12:2). He also arrested Peter and planned to execute him as well, but

Peter was miraculously rescued (Acts 12:6-19). Eventually Agrippa died in great agony after claiming the glory of a god (Acts 12:20-25).

- His great grandson, **Herod Agrippa II**, son of Herod Agrippa, before whom the Apostle Paul appeared to defend himself against the charges of the Jews (Acts 25 and 26).

A full family tree of Herod's wives, children, and descendants would be very large, but I have included here an abbreviated tree covering only the Herod's referred to in the New Testament.



### An Abbreviated Herod Family Tree

**Day Two**

**Day Four**