

GOING DEEPER

ACTS Israel Tour 2018

DAY FOUR: FOUNDATIONS FOR JESUS'S MINISTRY

On this day we leave Jerusalem and travel east through the Wadi Qelt, down to the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized, and then north to Galilee.

Key Thought for Day Four

Now grown and mature, Jesus makes a public commitment in His Baptism and is proven righteous under temptation by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus did not need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, and the Father knew he would be faithful under all temptation. Why, then, did the Lord begin his ministry in this way? First, he did these things to give us an example of how life as one of his disciples must begin and continue. Initial commitment is necessary to inaugurate our new life in Christ, and faithfulness to God as we live out that commitment is to be our pattern.

Second, in these acts he fully identifies with us and becomes a saviour we can trust.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

If we followed the Bible order we would visit the baptismal site on the Jordan River first and then go into the wilderness.



Journey Map for Day Four

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven

was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted v by the devil. (Matthew 3:16-4:1)

However, to keep our travel moving in the same direction we will stop first in the Wadi Qelt, a rugged desert area typical of the wilderness environment where Jesus was tempted.



[Wadi Qelt](#)

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In Wadi Qelt we will have opportunity to look across to the Monastery of St. George. It seems to be perched precariously on the edge of the Judean cliffs, but it has existed in that location for 1,500 years.

St George's monastery on the cliff's edge in Wadi Qelt



[Monastery of St. George](#)

From the monastery we will travel to the Kaster El Yehud Baptismal Site on the Jordan River. The name means “Castle of the Jews,” perhaps in reference to the castle-like appearance of the monasteries in the area and the tradition that this is the spot where the Israelites under Joshua crossed the Jordan River into the promised land.

The Jordan River is the boundary between Israel and Jordan, and in the photo below you can see the Jordanian flag on the opposite side to the river. In John 1:24 this location is referred to as “Bethany on the other side of the Jordan.”

Jordan River baptismal site



For those who wish, it is possible to arrange here for baptism or re-baptism in the Jordan River. There is no spiritual need for anyone to be baptized a second time. However, just as some couples repeat their wedding vows on the occasion of a significant anniversary, some believers appreciate the opportunity to affirm again their loyalty to Christ with a ceremony in the same river where Jesus was baptized and was Himself baptized. We'll need to arrange this ahead of time so before we leave we'll circulate a note asking for interest in the baptismal possibility.

A baptism in the Jordan

Following the Ministry of Jesus North To Galilee

From the baptismal site we follow the pattern of Jesus and head north toward Galilee. The ministry of Jesus in Galilee over almost the next two years is sometimes called His "Ministry of Power" because during this phase he performed most of the great miracles recorded for us in the gospels. After our time in Galilee we will return to Jerusalem, just as Jesus did, to study the final phase of His ministry, sometimes called his "Ministry of Suffering." The focus in that phase shifts from revelation of his power and glory to emphasis on his death and crucifixion.

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum. . . . From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 4:12-17)

Over the next several days we will visit many of the sites where Jesus preached and worked miracles.

Galilee, Isaiah, and the "Way of the Sea"

At this point it is useful to stop for a moment and consider the significance of Capernaum. When Jesus settled in Capernaum, he was positioning himself along a major trade route that was called "the way of the sea." Look again at the quotation from Matthew.

He went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

‘Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.’

Whereas Jerusalem and the region around it was substantially Jewish, Galilee was an area of very mixed population. Hundreds of years earlier Isaiah could refer to it as “Galilee of the Gentiles” and the land of the “Way of the Sea.”

The “Way of the Sea” (in Latin the Via Maris) refers to the major trading route that passed right through Galilee.

The Via Maris, the ‘Way of the Sea’

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Caravans and traders would bring goods from the areas we today called Syria, Iraq and Persia down the Way of the Sea into Galilee. They would skirt the Sea of Galilee, passing right by Capernaum, and then cut across the Jezreel Valley toward the coastal plain along the Mediterranean or down the Jordan Valley toward Jerusalem. From the coast the trade route continued south into Egypt, and of course the reverse was true as well, goods and traders from Egypt would flow north through Israel toward Tyre, Sidon, and Turkey as well as east back into Mesopotamia.

But the Way of the Sea was not only a trade route, it was a military route, and over thousands of years invading armies had rampaged from Egypt north and from Assyria, Babylon and other regional empires south. Right in the middle of all of this was the land of Israel, and in the middle of that route was the town of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, the place Jesus chose as the main base for his Galilean ministry.

Beth Shean: City of the Decapolis

On our way north we will visit one of the best preserved ancient cities in Israel, the city of Bet She’an. Bet She’an was one of the “ten cities,” the Decapolis, which is mentioned in the gospels where “great crowds” followed Jesus during the early stages of his ministry.

And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. (Matthew 4:25)

The Decapolis was a gentile area heavily influenced by Greek ideas and culture. Bet She's also known as Scythopolis was the leading city of the Decapolis, the ten cities.



Bet She'an

Galilee on the western side of the Sea of Galilee was largely Jewish. The eastern side of the Sea of Galilee was mostly gentile.

Map of the Decapolis

In Mark 5:20 the demoniac who was healed by Jesus went and proclaimed Jesus throughout the Decapolis region. Finally, in Mark 7:31 Jesus passed through the Decapolis region on his way from Tyre and Sidon to the Sea of Galilee.

View looking over the Roman city of Bet She'an

View of Bet She'an. Notice the wide main street at right with its rows of columns.

Public Baths in New Testament Times

As we visit Bet She'an you may see the public bath facility which has an excellent wall display explaining how the baths functioned.

You may also see how the floors of the bath facility were heated. A fire on the outside would send hot air through a network of columns that would support the stone floor. In floor heat is not a modern invention!

Pillars support a floor over the draft area for hot air to warm the floor

Belvoir and the Crusaders

From Bet She'an we continue north toward the Sea of Galilee. We stop on the way to visit the amazing fortress of Belvoir, constructed by the Crusaders. In 1099 armies from

Europe succeeded in wresting control of the Holy Land from Muslim control. They moved quickly to establish a Christian kingdom in the Holy Land, building fortresses as they went. Belvoir is one of those fortresses. The Crusader kingdom had been intended to be permanent but in the end it lasted barely 100 years. The forces raised against it eventually became overwhelming. Belvoir fell to the Muslim armies in 1189.

Aerial view of the Crusader fortress of Belvoir

The fortress was very strong because it was really two fortresses, one on top of the other. The front of the fortress in the picture above is seen at the back of the diagram below.

How Belvoir looked originally



Fortress of Belvoir

From the top of Belvoir we can look north over the beautiful Jordan Valley and catch our first glimpse of the Sea of Galilee. The fields of the Valley are lush and fertile as silt from the river settled over thousands of years, providing rich soil for crops.

View north to the Sea of Galilee from Belvoir

The Crusader period and the wars associated with it remains even today very much part of the story of Christianity in the Middle East. From the perspective of our tour's focus on Jesus, we point out how the badly misguided attempt to establish a Christian kingdom in the Middle East through military conquest has impacts that last to this day as part of the hostility between Islam and the Christian world. The Kingdom of God on earth will be established when Jesus returns, not before.

Tiberias

We will finish our day, arriving in the city of Tiberias.

Modern city of Tiberias on Galilee. Mount Hermon's snow cap in the distance



Tiberias

Many towns existed in this favourable location along the lake. Tiberias was founded in 18 AD by Herod Agrippa, son of Herod the Great, the man whom Jesus called “that fox.”

That fox was clever enough to know that his continued rule depended on support of the Romans, and so he named the city Tiberias, after the Roman Emperor Tiberias Caesar.

As he ministered around Galilee, Jesus became well known to the people of Tiberias. As we can imagine, news of his feeding of 5,000 people in an open field spread like wildfire, and people from Tiberias took to their boats to search for Jesus.

On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

Tiberias will be our home for the next several days of the tour.

Passages to Study for Today

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

- The baptism of Jesus: Matthew 3:13-16
- The temptation of Jesus: Matthew 4:1-11.
- Ministry around the Sea of Galilee Mark 3:7-12

A large portion of the gospels are about the ministry of Jesus around Galilee and the Lake. These passages are an introduction. Focus your thoughts on Jesus entering this exciting phase of ministry when the great crowds sought him out. In this phase he called out his disciples, taught them and trained them. He would end his ministry rejected and abandoned, but those events were still far ahead.

It is interesting to observe that of his twelve chief followers, eleven of them were

from Galilee where his message was received with enthusiasm. Only one of the twelve, Judas who betrayed him, came from the region of Judea and Jerusalem.

Reflect on the verses from Isaiah 9 that refer to Galilee of the Gentiles, the Way of the Sea, and destruction of the tools of war. Isaiah makes plain to us that it was Galilee that would see the ministry of Jesus first and most brightly.

This evening we arrive in Galilee, the place where the great message of the gospel finally arrived for the first time in full sight and with power.

- The dawn of salvation comes to Galilee Isaiah 9: 1-7.

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Day Three

Day Five