

GOING DEEPER

ACTS Israel Tour 2018

DAY NINE: MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS, ROMAN BRUTALITY

Today we travel the region of the Dead Sea and several immensely important historical and archeological sites.

Dead Sea Swim. We plan to make a stop today for those who want to swim in the Dead Sea. Depending on where we stop, the shore can be rough. Bring your water shoes. We should be able to rent towels at the changing area, but we'll provide more instruction before we leave Jerusalem. **BE CAUTIOUS!** Swimming in the Dead Sea is unlike any other swimming experience you have had. Floating on your back is the best position. If you turn onto to your front and attempt to swim you may find yourself if some significant difficulty, and it can be difficult to turn over again. Don't swallow the water. The salt content is so high, more than 30%, that it is quite unhealthy. Don't get it in your eyes. It will hurt and burn. You'll feel almost greasy when you emerge from the Sea, coated with salts. A good shower is necessary and welcome. You can find some tips and experiences about swimming in the Dead Sea [here](#). I encourage you to read over these so you can be prepared. If you take it slow and with care you'll be fine and enjoy the experience.



[Journey Map for Day Nine](#)

Key Thought for Day Nine

In the time of Jesus, with Israel under brutal Roman rule, expectations for appearance of the Messiah reached a fever pitch. Essenes in the wilderness waited for a Teacher of Righteousness. Zealots hoped for a conquering king arriving with overwhelming force to drive out the Romans. Jesus stepped into this environment with a radical different message.

For more than one thousand years, Jews had been offering sacrifices for sin on the Day of Atonement. Within a few years of the death of Jesus on the cross as the final sacrifice for sin, the Temple was destroyed. It is interesting to reflect that sacrificess stopped at that point and have not been offered since.

Today we visit Qumran, where the Essences waited in peace for the Messiah, and we visit Masada, where the violent expectations of the Zealots came to a final end. The cause of Christ, however, has continued with strength for two thousand years since then, and we Christians look foward to His return, the blessed hope of our faith.

Qumran: The Essenes and Messianic Movements

The Zealots were the revolutionaries of Jesus's time, and later today we will visit Masada, the place of their final defeat by the Romans. First, on our way to Masada, we visit Qumran, the home of a sheltered Messianic community that had retreated into the desert to wait for the Teacher of Righteousness to appear: The Essenes.

The Essenes withdrew from the rest of civilization to focus on religious observance, learning, and preservation of the Scriptures. Qumran is located in the Dead Sea wilderness. The picture below shows the area around Qumran, dray and barren. It was a spartan life.

Qumran with caves in the cliffs

The photo also shows a cave in a cliff. One of the tasks the Essenes set for themselves was copying and preserving the Scriptures of what we call the Old Testament, along with other books of their own beliefs and teaching.



The Essenes

The Essenes dedicated themselves to strict observance of the law of God and scrupulous purity. The photo below shows steps going down into a ritual bathing area at Qumran. You can see the dividers on the steps that helped to separate those who were impure on the way down to the bath from those who had purified themselves climbing up.

Steps to the ritual bath at Qumran

Fearing destruction to come, the Essenes hid their books in large jars that they placed into secret caves in the surrounding cliffs.

Clay jars at Qumran

A large part of the day for many of the Essenes was work in their Scriptorium where they painstakingly copied their Scriptures. The Scriptorium is the large room to the left of the walkway in the photo below.

Overlooking the Scriptorium at Qumran

You may want to return to the page for Day Two to review what we learned about the scrolls when we visited the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum. You'll find there a [link to a short film](#) about the Isaiah Scroll from Qumran.



Qumran

An Example from the Scrolls. The DS Scrolls have very significant implications for interpretation of the Scriptures because they represent how the Essenes understood the biblical text more than 100 years BEFORE the time of Jesus. For example, it is often

said by more liberal scholars that Christian, attempting to prove that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy, distorted the interpretation of the OT texts. Psalm 22:15-16 provides an example.

In the Masoretic Hebrew text of these verses we read:

*My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and you have brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; the assembly of the wicked have encompassed me; **like a lion are my hands and my feet.***

In the standard Hebrew text the reference to hands and feet says they are like a lion. This is difficult to understand. In the DS Scroll text, however, the verse reads: “They have pierced my hands and feet.” This reading is precisely consistent with the New Testament’s understanding of the crucifixion of Jesus.

At Trinity Western University there is an Institute for the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls. I recall warmly how the late Dr. Peter Flint, a world-renowned expert in interpretation of the Scrolls would light up with enthusiasm as he described how well the Scrolls confirm our Christian understanding of the Old Testament text.

Was John the Baptist and Essene?

Some have speculated that John the Baptist may have been an Essene. In common with the Essenes, John lived in the desert, considered himself a “voice in the wilderness,” and promoted baptism and spiritual change. However, there were also many differences. Renowned evangelical scholar N.T. Wright explains the differences between John and the Essenes. Wright suspects John may have been influenced by the Essenes but that he was not one of them.



Ein Gedi: King David Hunted by Saul

As we continue south along the Dead Sea, we will visit the Ein Gedi nature reserve. It was in the wilderness of Ein Gedi that David hid from Saul.

After Saul returned from fighting the Philistines, he was told that David had gone into the wilderness of En-gedi. So Saul chose 3,000 elite troops from all Israel and went to search for David and his men near the rocks of the wild goats. (1 Samuel 24:1)



[Ein Gedi](#)

Today Ein Gedi is a nature reserve on the edge of the Dead Sea. You can see many caves in the surrounding cliffs. It is easy to imagine how David could have hidden successfully from Saul's search parties.

Cliffs with caves at Ein Gedi

It is also easy to imagine the scene where David, catching Saul unaware, showed mercy to him.

At the place where the road passes some sheepfolds, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. But as it happened, David and his men were hiding farther back in that very cave! 'Now's your opportunity!' David's men whispered to him. 'Today the Lord is telling you, 'I will certainly put your enemy into your power, to do with as you wish.' ' So David crept forward and cut off a piece of the hem of Saul's robe. But then David's conscience began bothering him because he had cut Saul's robe. He said to his men, 'The Lord forbid that I should do this to my lord the king. I shouldn't attack the Lord's anointed one, for the Lord himself has chosen him.' So David restrained his men and did not let them kill Saul. After Saul had left the cave and gone on his way, David came out and shouted after him, 'My lord the king!' And when Saul looked around, David bowed low before him.

A waterfall at Ein Gedi

Ein Gedi is also the site of some wonderful fresh water waterfalls. Children and others delight in standing beneath the falling waters to cool in the heat of the Dead Sea wilderness.

Masada: The Last Resistance of the Jews

Masada is one of the most dramatic sites in Israel, perhaps second only to the walls of the Old City itself. Deep in the Dead Sea wilderness, the Masada plateau stands alone, an ancient fortress that has become a site of legend.

Aerial view of the northern end of Masada with Herod's palace



Masada

Masada was the last fortress to fall in the Jewish rebellion from AD 66 to 73. The legend is that the final group of 900 Jewish fighters and their families entered into a mutual suicide pact rather than surrender to the Romans. At Masada many Israeli military officers have taken the oath, "Masada shall not fall again."

Today, 2,000 years later the diamond-shaped outline of the Roman siege camps and wall can still be seen from the top of Masada.

The Roman siege wall at Masada and diamond-shaped military camp

The fortress seemed impregnable but the Romans built an enormous siege ramp on the west side of the massif. Up this ramp they pulled a huge siege tower with giant battering ram and broke through the last defense. When they finally entered the fortress, they found no one left alive.

The Roman siege ramp at Qumran

On the north end of Masada you will see the remains of a magnificent palace constructed by Herod the Great. The palace had huge store rooms for food and supplies as well as enormous cisterns for water. Herod probably viewed this as final hiding place in the case of rebellion. There is some terrific drone footage of Masada on YouTube that shows the palace with three levels descending the northern cliff.

On a previous visit to Masada we captured the view below of a long-horned ibex watching with curiosity as our cable car left the lower station. So keep your eyes alert!

An ibex watches the cable car at Masada

Jericho: The World's Oldest and Lowest City

We know without doubt that Jericho at 230 meters below sea level is the world's lowest city. Many archeologists also consider it to be the world's oldest city, because excavations at Jericho can be dated back 11,000 years. Among the reasons for this are no doubt its proximity to the Jordan River and the existence of a number of fresh water

springs, fed by run off from the Judean hills to the east. Jericho is known as the City of Palms because it is an ideal climate for date palms, and you will see many in the area.

Jericho is most famous in the Bible as the first city attacked by Joshua when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River (Joshua 6).



Jericho

We passed near Jericho early in our tour when we visited Wadi Qelt and the Jordan River baptismal site. Now, as part of our return to Jerusalem we pass this way again. Jericho, was the last stop on Jesus's final journey to Jerusalem.

They were now on the way up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were filled with awe, and the people following behind were overwhelmed with fear. . . . Then they reached Jericho, and as Jesus and his disciples left town, a large crowd followed him. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus) was sitting beside the road. When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth was nearby, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' 'Be quiet!' many of the people yelled at him. But he only shouted louder, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' When Jesus heard him, he stopped and said, 'Tell him to come here.' So they called the blind man. 'Cheer up,' they said. 'Come on, he's calling you!' Bartimaeus threw aside his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus. 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asked. 'My Rabbi,' the blind man said, 'I want to see!' And Jesus said to him, 'Go, for your faith has healed you.' Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus down the road. (Mark 10:32, 46-52)

Shortly after healing Bartimaeus, Jesus called out to Zaccheus who had climbed into a Sycamore tree. (Luke 19:1-10). Sycamore's are part of the fig family of trees, and they can grow very large and old. The photo below is from Netanya, Israel. This tree is estimated to be up to 1,500 years old.

A very old Sycamore at Netanya

[View Larger](#)

In the centre of Jericho today there is also Sycamore tree, the only Sycamore tree in the city. Tourist are sometimes told that it is the very tree Zaccheus climbed.

Sycamore in Jericho

However, you can clearly see that the tree is not an ancient Sycamore. It is perhaps 90 to 100 years old. However, even if not the ancient tree Zaccheus climbed, it gives us a very good picture of what the scene on that day may have been like when the wealthiest tax collector in the city found new life in Christ.

On Day 12 we will visit the port city of Caesarea Maritima. There is some tradition that this Zaccheus became a follower of Peter and eventually the first bishop of Caesarea.

Shabbat Shalom! At the Western Wall (The Kotel)

Dress for a religious site. [Click here for an explanation.](#)

Today is Friday and sundown this evening marks the beginning of the sabbath in Israel. All across the country stores, shops, businesses and entertainments will close in early afternoon. People will hurry to complete preparations for Shabbat before sundown. At sundown in Jerusalem the Shabbat horn will blow signalling the start of this day of rest.

The Western Wall (Kotel) plaza in Jerusalem

Shabbat Shalom!

After our time on top of the Mount of Olives our bus will take us back across the valley to the Western Wall. This wall and its massive stones is what remains of the massive base of the Temple of Herod that was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. The wall is one of the holiest spots in the city for the Jewish community. You will enjoy experiencing the beginnings of the Shabbat celebration as people from all over the city, including many students from the nearby Yeshiva schools flow into the huge square to welcome Shabbat.

Shabbat in Jerusalem



The Wall, sometimes called the “Western” wall because it is on the west side of the Temple Mount, is also called “the Kotel” which is the Hebrew word for “wall.”

It is sometimes called the “wailing wall” as it can be a place of weeping for the loss of the temple. Many Jews believe that the presence of God is especially near at the Kotel. The Holy of Holies of the Temple was within the area encompassed by the Kotel.

You can view what is happening at the Kotel live at any time by visiting the [Kotel Cam](#). You can find other information about the wall at [Kotel Information](#). If you want to view the Kotel on Shabbat evening, keep in mind that Jerusalem is 10 hours ahead of Vancouver. Check the net for the time Shabbat begins in Jerusalem (it varies with place) and log onto the Kotel Cam about 10 hours before Vancouver time on a Friday.

Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday, and “Shabbat Shalom” is the greeting for the evening. “May the peace of the sabbath be yours,” would be a fair translation.

I once celebrated shabbat with a family of Jewish friends in Jerusalem. “Shabbat is like a reset for the week,” Mark told me. “All week long you have been working, perhaps worried, perhaps shouting at the children. But then, on Shabbat, it all stops. We gather to rest, to bless God and to bless one another.”

Throughout the square you will see people praying, worshipping God, and celebrating with one another. There may be singing and dancing. Soldiers often come to join in the worship.



The Western Wall (Kotel)

Praying at the Kotel

Although Shabbat is a Jewish celebration, visitors are most welcome to observe, to pray, and to approach the wall. There are few matters of respect, however, that are important.

- We will wear “modest dress.” When the time comes we will explain what that means. If you think of how you would dress modestly for church you will likely have it right. No bare shoulders. Legs mostly covered. You will see some people who are less respectful. Let’s not be among them!
- No pictures! Once Shabbat begins do not take pictures. Shabbat is for rest, even from

photography.

- No smoking. It's shabbat, and one must not light a fire.
- Turn off your cell phone and tuck it away. You can't take pictures with it anyway, and you don't want to disturb someone's prayer with calls, beeps, or alarms.
- There are separate areas for men and women, so head to the appropriate area.
- Men cover their heads with a hat or a small circular "kippah." There is a station where visitors can pick up a simple paper kippah at no cost. Look for it before you go to the wall.
- Women do not need to cover their head at the wall, although you may see some who do.
- Some people write small prayers and tuck them into the wall. God does not hear these prayers better than any others, but it is a symbolic act that may have personal meaning. If you want to bring a prayer it will need to be small. Write it out before you come.
- There are stations for hand washing. It is not necessary but you may if you choose.

Washing station at the Hotel

- Remember always that this is a place of worship and we are guests. Keep that in mind and you will be welcome and at ease.

Passages to Study for Today

Here are some passages to read as you prepare for the day.

- The fall of Jericho the armies of Joshua (Joshua 6).
- The healing of Bartimaeus (mark 10:46-52). This is the last of Jesus's healing miracles except for raising Lazarus from the dead.
- Zaccheus's entire life is changed by his encounter with Jesus (Luke 19:1-10).

Day Eight Part 2

Day Ten