



2024 Israel Pilgrimage with First Presbyterian Church Led by Rev. Darin Travis and Dr. Jim Parker \$5100 from New Orleans, May 2-11, 2024, 10 days

Day 1, Thursday, May 2: depart for Israel. Anyone wishing to fly from an airport other than New Orleans please contact the tour organizers.

Day 2, Friday, May 3: morning arrival in Israel to meet our English-speaking guide and board the deluxe coach for the drive up the Mediterranean seacoast to **Caesarea Maritime**, artificial harbor and city built by Herod the Great. A restored Roman theater, where proof of the historical existence of Pontius Pilate was found, is a highlight, along with a Crusader fortress and an aqueduct built by Herod the Great. Continue north to **Mt Carmel** and the Carmelite monastery *Muhraka* for a breathtaking view of the Jezreel valley from the spot where Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal. Drive to **Megiddo**, always strategic city in biblical history and biblical Armageddon (Rev. 16:16). Megiddo is the setting of a highly recommended historical novel, James Michener's *The Source*. Drive through the Galilean hills to Nazareth, stopping at the precipice overlooking **Nazareth**, Jesus' boyhood home, at the spot where his neighbors assembled to hurl Him to His death for the "blasphemy" of claiming to be Messiah. Check in for three nights at a lovely hotel with spacious lawns and gardens situated right on the **Sea of Galilee**. Full breakfast and dinner are included each day in Israel throughout the tour.

Day 3, Saturday, May 4: be blessed by a sail on the **Sea of Galilee** in an enlarged version of the boats used by Jesus and His fishermen disciples--

and see an actual boat from the time of Jesus as marine archaeologists raised it from the lake. At **Caesarea Philippi**, center of Roman might and pagan worship in Jesus' time, explore the ruins of Herod Agrippa's palace. In this setting, Jesus challenged His disciples then and now, "Who do men--and who do you--say that I am?" Caesarea Philippi is also where the headwaters of the **Jordan River** meet at the foot of **Mt Hermon**. Continue to the northernmost city of biblical Israel, **Dan**, and see the actual excavated gates that Abraham entered as he first journeyed through the Promised Land. Explore the Dan Nature Reserve, an easy hike, including rushing rivers, massive trees. Take a thrilling 4-wheel drive tour over the lush hills and valleys, vineyards, orchards, and gardens of the **Golan Heights**, with an expert guide to explain the geographical and geopolitical aspects of The Golan. Time permitting stop at **Magdala**, hometown of Mary the Magdalene, where Jesus certainly visited and worshipped in the recently-excavated synagogue.

Day 4, Sunday, May 5: Re-experience the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount of the **Mt of Beatitudes** chapel. At **Capernaum**, where Jesus based His 18-month Galilean ministry, stand within the foundations of the synagogue where He preached and healed and see the house of Peter's family where He stayed. **Tabgha's** ancient mosaic remembers the Miracle of Loaves and Fishes and recalls where the risen Jesus fed His disciples after a miraculous catch and gave Peter his commission to "feed my sheep." Perhaps did

your hand in the spring at Ein Harod, where the Lord ordered Gideon to winnow his troops in a unique fashion. Marvel at lovely mosaics (including “The Mona Lisa of the Galilee”) and a 1500-year-old synagogue in the ancient city of **Sepphoris**, which some believe carpenter Joseph and his apprentice son helped construct.

Day 5, Monday, May 6: walk the streets of **Bet Shean**; a Decapolis city in Jesus’ day, Bet Shean was both destroyed and preserved by an earthquake—and archaeologists have now done a fantastic restoration. Head south along the Jordan Valley, stopping first at the banks of **Bethabara**, thought by many to be where Jesus was immersed by John the Baptist. Crossing the lunar landscape of the Judean wilderness, come to **Qumran** on the shores of the Dead Sea, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. Ascend by cable car to **Masada**, the fortress-palace built by Herod the Great overlooking the Dead Sea, where zealous Jews resisted Rome after the 70 AD destruction of the Temple. View the date palm oasis of **En Gedi** where David spared King Saul. Then it’s “Up to Jerusalem,” perhaps singing a Song of Ascent like Psalm 122: “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD’” to Jerusalem, the Holy City. Our deluxe hotel for the rest of the tour is within walking distance of the Jaffa Gate into the Old City, the Ben Yehuda pedestrian shopping mall, and the colorful outdoor Mahane Yehuda spice, fruit, and vegetable market.

Days 6-9, Tuesday, May 7-Friday, May 10: all this . . . and more!

Starting from the summit of the **Mt of Olives**, walk down the **Palm Sunday path** where Jesus rode the donkey and heard the hosannas from the crowds. Stop at **Dominus Flevit** where “Jesus wept” and view the Eastern or Golden Gate through which Messiah rode. At the bottom of the hill, in the **Garden of Gethsemane**, surrounded by olive trees still growing from roots dating to Jesus’ time, pray as He did for strength to face the ultimate tests of life.

Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum, is a contrasting study of the evil humankind can do and the strength of faith that can allow men and women to become victors over evil.

Travel through **Shepherds’ Fields** to **Bethlehem** and to the oldest-continually serving church in the world, the 4th century Church of the

Nativity, where a silver star marks the traditional spot of Jesus’ birth.

Pray for loved ones back home at the healing **Pools of Bethesda**, then marvel at the acoustics as you sing in the **Church of St. Anne**. Stand on the pavement where soldiers tormented Jesus in the **Judgment Hall of Pilate**. Walk the narrow streets of the Old City, much as when Jesus carried His cross. See remains of the original 4th century **Church of the Holy Sepulcher** in the **Russian Orthodox Church**, adjoining the current structure guarding traditional sites of Calvary and Empty Tomb. See the actual steps up which Jesus was dragged from the Garden of Gethsemane to his first imprisonment in the **House of Caiaphas**, high priest, where Peter denied His Lord thrice before the cock crew.

Orient yourself to Jerusalem in Jesus’ time by studying the incredibly-detailed, large-scale outdoor model of The Holy City at the **Israel Museum**, where you will also view actual scrolls and artifacts discovered in the Dead Sea caves.

Pray at the **Kotel** or Western (Wailing) Wall, leaving scrolls of your prayers in the giant stones remaining from the Temple, from where Jewish tradition says prayers go most-directly to heaven. Actually go *under* the Temple area exploring the famous **Rabbi’s Tunnel**. Up on **Temple Mount**, Muslim mosques deface where Solomon and Herod the Great built the First and Second Temples.

Outside the city, explore **Herodion**, the artificial mountain that was one of Herod the Great’s palaces and recently-discovered tomb. Time for lunch on your own in **The Jewish Quarter** with shopping in the Old City bazaar and the restored merchants’ street called **The Cardo** or “The Heart” of Roman Jerusalem.

Highlight of the tour: a service of Holy Communion at **The Garden Tomb**, a lovely site overlooking a hillside nature has carved into what many see as a skull, Golgotha, and setting of an empty tomb with the stone rolled away.

After dinner at the hotel May 10, to the airport for the flight home, arriving back in the USA on **Day 10, Saturday, May 11**.

Security note: despite media reports of “trouble in the Middle East,” Israel has always been safe for Christian pilgrims. *Not one Christian on an American Christian group tour has ever been harmed by violence in Israel—not one, not ever.*