

Shalom Dear Family and Friends,

March 2003

Back in August of 2002 we were made aware of a Church Leaders Educational tour to Israel. Should we even consider it? Was the situation there, too precarious? After thought and prayer we decided to pursue it. What made it even more exciting was that Karel and Myra wanted to join us. Preparation plans began, as excitement mounted. But as the date for departure neared and the threat of impending war with Iraq loomed more ominous, we began to doubt our decision, especially as friends and family expressed concern. We prayed and God continually confirmed our decision. In fact on February 21, one of our devotionals said, "Don't dig up in doubt what you planted in faith. Go ahead and do the thing you have committed to. Carry through. And never mind Satan's fury"

I can honestly say that during our ten days in Israel, I never felt a pang of fear, even when we were 200 meters from the bus bomb in Haifa on March 5. We watched as close to twenty ambulances passed our tour bus, and just about as many police cars passed en route to the devastation

Perhaps the reason I felt so secure was that I knew we were supposed to be there, or maybe because there were soldiers everywhere, or perhaps because so many of you were praying for our safety. At any rate, I knew I was being held, as always, in the everlasting arms of our Heavenly Father. It is the peace that passes understanding.

Although fifteen were killed in the bus bombing and many more injured, God used it in a powerful way in Israel. Contrary to usual procedure the Jerusalem Post carried pictures, including the Christian cross, of one little girl named Abigail Litle. She was the daughter of missionaries. Almost 1000 Jews attended her funeral, where the Gospel was proclaimed. What Satan meant for evil, God used for good.

We were treated like royalty and continually thanked for coming to Israel during these troubled times. The normally crowded streets were nearly empty because the tourists are fearful to come. As a result, Israel's economy is suffering severely. They were so blessed with the courage of our group.

It was enlightening to see and experience the stark contrast of the land, religiously, financially, and geographically, from the dry arid desert to the blooming, lush fields of date palms, almonds, bananas, oranges, lemons, watermelons, and much more. Truly the scripture that says, "They will make the desert to bloom like a rose" took on new significance.

One of the highlights for me was standing on Megiddo and looking down onto the valley below where the final battle of Armageddon will be fought. The expanse was vast and the valley was covered in beautiful blooming red poppies, the Israel State Flower. It reminded me of two things. One, the red poppy in the US and Canada is used on Veterans Day to remember all the soldiers that have died in battle. Second, one day the blood in this valley will flow as high as the horses bridles. It just seemed as the blooming poppies were foretelling the future of this valley.

What was my favorite part of the trip? How can I possibly decide? Was it the boat ride on the Sea of Galilee where we watched another boat pull in a net load of fish, similar to how Jesus' disciples would have done. It was a poignant reminder again of our call to be fishers of men.

Or was it watching the newly transcribed Torah (the first five books of the Bible) being transported to the Synagogue? It was a time of great celebration. Oh that our people would get so excited about Gods Word!

Or was it the Passover meal where we learned and experienced the significance of the lamb, the unleavened bread, the four glasses of wine, and the bitter herbs?

Or perhaps it was Yad vashem, the memorial to the six million Jews annihilated in the holocaust. Avi, our guide, summed up the experience when he said, "We can't harbor bitterness, we must forgive and move on." He stated that the holocaust was the impetus needed by the world to establish the state of Israel in May 1948, a position Israel has been battling to keep ever since.

Each day we had a devotional on the bus prior to leaving for our sightseeing. One day our was especially enlightening. Our tour driver read from Revelations 12 and explained that the reason everyone is against Israel is because Satan couldn't kill "the Man Child so he turned the nations against "the woman (mother) of the Child." The woman can only be Israel It's So hard to explain how dramatically the Scriptures have been opened up to us. I wish you could have experienced this with us.

One day Avi, our guide asked Dave and I what N-A-I-M stood for. After we explained, he said that NAIM, in Hebrew, means "It feels very pleasant." Our prayer is that our love for the Native people will feel so pleasant to them that they will desire the Jesus within us.

Todah rabah (thank you very much) for allowing us to represent Jesus to the native population of Tacoma.

Love

Dave and Diane Norman

