

Hope for Israel Tour 2006

By Michael Long

If there was ever a time for patience, and perseverance in being patient, I would have to say that between finding out about the tour to Israel in August 2005 and going to the airport in March 2006, this was a decidedly long term call for patience! Not the patience of frustration. Oh no, not that. But the kind of anticipation which was like that a child who is waiting anxiously to go to recess in the playground after a long morning of being in home room! The kind of anticipation that I often feel when preparing to get on the starting line for a motocross race! The butterflies are wild in my stomach, the adrenaline is flowing, and my awareness is on full alert! All this anxiousness is just waiting for the gate to drop to let the race begin!

It was because of accepting this invitation to go to Israel, to go have a uniquely Jewish experience, that I am writing to you today. I had heard it said that going to Israel would be a life changing event. I never really pondered what kind of change I might experience prior to going, but I also never set any expectations either. I only knew that I wanted to go and see what God would have for us, the “Long clan - myself, my wife Donna, and my Mom Shirley.

For me the tour really started once we arrived in Tel Aviv Saturday evening. We started with a walk on the beach that first night which was along the Mediterranean Sea. It was there that we first met our tour guide Simon (pronounced shay-mon) and he walked us down the coast and by some familiar signs – McDonalds, Harley Davidson. It was night time so there wasn't a lot of light, but our tour guide, Simon, was exceedingly good at bringing light to what he speaking about. Yes we were in for a treat, but little did we know that we were actually in for a blessing that can only be described as divine.

Moran's theme for this first Hope for Israel tour was, “What are you going to take back with you?” He made this suggestion early and often for all of us to be reminded of what was going on between ourselves on the tour but also between us and the people with which we would interact with. For me, having a response to this has been difficult, but only from the standpoint of where do I start? Let me explain.

The tour was composed of going to places that most “tourist” companies do not go to. In fact things were so different that I often felt like were on some kind of extended field trip. How can I explain to someone that we “off-roaded” the bus just so we could get a glimpse of a very unique flower that only occurs in a particular part of the state? How can I describe the workings of traveling through tight city streets with a large tour bus and find the bus going three blocks up a one way street with the tour guide out in front directing traffic? Have you ever wanted to ride a camel? Did you ever want to see what the bible calls the wilderness? Did you ever want to sit down and talk about “life” with people from another culture? Did ever want to know how Israel became a nation? Have you pondered what Israel is really like? What's a kibbutz? How is the Sabbath celebrated every week in Israel? Have you wondered why the Jewish nation in general still rejects the Messiah? Did you ever want to see the sites that our

Messiah saw and walk where He walked? Do you really believe what you see on television about Israel, or is there another story to be told? Have you wondered about the Messianic Jewish movement? Have you wondered about the impact on Israeli life with regard to news events? So many people, places and things... which one holds your interest?

For me the most compelling story is the geography of the land of Israel. I suggest that if you could take all the highlights from America, the deserts of Arizona, the forests of Appalachians, the Grand Canyon, the Colorado River, farm land from California, Nebraska, Kansas and Ohio, beaches from the Gulf coast and compress all the various geographical diversities into a little strip of land, I would say that's Israel to me! We saw the wilderness desert in the southern part of Israel, mountains with snow, well developed and organized farm land throughout Israel, beautiful beaches along the Mediterranean and replenished forests. Furthermore, there was a huge contrast along the borders of Israel, where across the borders you can see the undeveloped and untamed desert and mountains home to Israel's neighbors. It's quite one thing to read the promise of God about the land flowing with milk and honey, and it's quite another to see the work that He's doing is what used to be forgotten desert! What an awesome God we serve!

If you've ever wondered about going to Israel, if you've ever had the curiosity to explore a culture, if you wanted to touch, taste and feel God's chosen land, I encourage you to go and find what the Lord has for you! I am confident that you will find your needs quite fulfilled indeed!