

## MY EXPERIENCE IN JERUSALEM



In October 2022, a group of nine students from the Pontifical Biblical Institute Rome (Biblicum) made their journey to Israel. I count myself among the blessed few to be part of this academic endeavor. I therefore feel indebted to share my experience. It was an academic program of one semester exchange program between The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Pontifical Biblical Institute Rome. Although the journey was purposely academic, it also served a good opportunity for spiritual enrichment in

the areas of the Bible where the mysteries of our salvation took place. The following were the courses taken during this one semester program:

### A. At the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

- (i) Biblical Hebrew A and Biblical Hebrew B.
- (ii) Archaeology and Geography of the Land of the Bible
- (iii) The Making of the Bible: From the Earliest Fragments to Sacred Scriptures
- (iv) Expectation of the End in the Late Second Temple Period: Qumran, Nascent Christianity and Beyond.

### B. At Pontifical Biblical Institute of Jerusalem

- (v) Greek A,
- (vi) History of the Old Testament (The Southern Levant 13<sup>th</sup> –5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE).
- (vii) History of the New Testament (The First Century Context of the New Testament).

The first month (October) was field study in the most important biblical places. Below is a summary of summaries of my notes taken during field trips and lectures.



### 1. THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

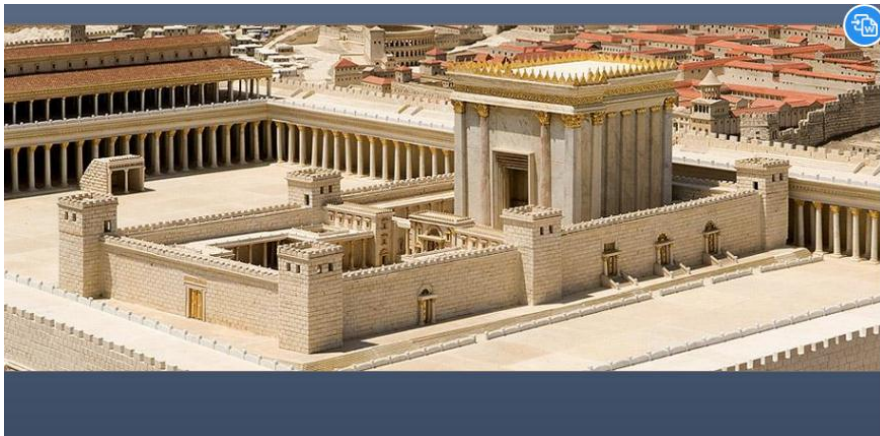
This is a very famous place in which we find the holiest sites of the three great religions of the world. These religions are: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The holiest places are: The Holy Sepulcher for Christians, the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque for Islam found on the Temple Mount, and the Western Wall/Khotel for Judaism.



*The Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount.*



*Believers at the Western Wall, the holiest place of the Jews*



*The place where the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque stands now, is where this magnificent Jerusalem Temple used to stand. What now remains of it is the Western Wall. The Temple came to its final destruction in 70AD by the Romans.*

### *The Holy Sepulcher*



*The Holy Sepulcher in the Christian Quarter, this is the burial place of Jesus. In 400 AD, Emperor Constantine built a Basilica on it. Inside the huge basilica are found Mt. Calvary (the place of Crucifixion), St. Helen Chapel the Tomb of Joseph of Armathea and the site where Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene after resurrection. The Holy Sepulcher is co-owned by the Latin Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Coptic Church, the Armenian Church and the Syriac Church. This is normally the finishing point of many Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem.*

The old city of Jerusalem is divided into four unequal parts called quarters. These are the Christian Quarter for Christians, the Moslem Quarter for Moslems, the Jewish Quarter for Jews

and the Armenian Quarter for Armenians (Armenia being the first country to accept Christianity). The Moslem Quarter is the biggest.

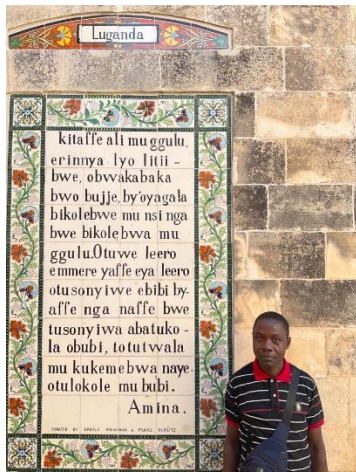
Despite Mount Zion being outside the old city of Jerusalem, the place is very important for the following:



We find there the place of denial of Jesus by Peter (St. Peter Galli Cantur). We also find there the place of the Last Supper (the Cenacle) and the Tomb of David.

## 2. MOUNT OF OLIVES

Mount Olive is yet another place visited. The place is famous for the following: we find there the place where Jesus taught his apostles the Pater Noster. This place is managed by the Camelite Missionaries.



In this place are inscribed the Our Father in many world languages. I was impressed to come across “*Kitaffe ali Muggulu*” in this holy place. The place of Ascension of Jesus Christ, the Tombs of the Prophets, the *Dominus Flevit* (the place where Jesus cried for Jerusalem) Chapel. In its low-lying area are found the Gethsemane Church and the Garden of Gethsemane as well as the place of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

## 3. THE KIDRON VALLEY

Below Mt. Olives, one passes through the Kidron valley in which are found the tombs of king Jehoshaphat, Zecharia and Abshalom, the Gihon spring which was the major source of water for Jerusalem as early as Middle Bronze Age (1550-1200BC—Canaanite Period). The Kidron valley leads one to the Pool of Siloam and the Siloam Tunnel which was constructed by King Hezekiah

in preparation for Assyrian siege of 701BC as found in 2Kgs 20:20. As mentioned in Jn 18:1, the Kidron valley was the pathway of Jesus and his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane from where he was arrested. It was the same pathway after his arrest to the house of Caiphas in Mt. Zion (Galli Cantur).



*The Kidron Valley and the tombs of Jehoshaphat and Abshalom. The Kidron valley connects to the Hinnom valley (Gehena) west of the city of David and together run to the Dead Sea.*



*The pool of Siloam was constructed by King Hezekiah in preparation for the Assyrian siege.*

#### **THE POOL OF BETHSEDA (JN 5:1-5)**



The historical valley of Bethesda was suitable for collecting rainwater. In the reign of King Herod the Great (37-4BC) two large pools were constructed, separated by a dam and surrounded by five porticos. The southern pool had steps and was destined for pilgrims who wished to immerse themselves gradually, preparing for a ritual bath or seeking relief from sickness. This was the site of the healing of the paralytic as mentioned in Jn 5:1-5.

The pool of Bethesda is besides a Church which was built to commemorate the healing of the paralytic. Now is found a Basilica of Sts. Joachim and Anne, the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The place is managed by the White Fathers and is believed to be the birthplace of Mary.

Outside Jerusalem, the following were places of interest for both academic and spiritual enhancement.

## OLD TESTAMENT

### 1. MEGIDDO

Archaeological findings show that Megiddo existed as early as Neolithic period (7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> millennia BCE) and Chalcolithic period (5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> millennia BCE). During the Canaanite Period (Bronze Age), Megiddo flourished as an urban center attested by the impressive remains of a monumental temple. During the reign of Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III (15<sup>th</sup> C BCE), Megiddo belonged to the alliance of Canaanite cities that rebelled against Egypt.

During the Israelite period (Iron Age)—the period of the Bible, Megiddo is mentioned in the books of Joshua and Judges as one of the Canaanite cities that the tribe of Manasseh was unable to take over (Jos 17:11-13; Judg 1:27).



However, Megiddo is also mentioned in the list of towns whose Canaanite kings Joshua defeated (Jos 12:21). The Bible also mentions King Solomon's building of Megiddo together with Hazor and Gezer (1Kgs 9:15).



Near Megiddo, the Israelite king Jehu slew King Ahaziah of Judah after Ahaziah fled “*by the way of the garden-house*” (2Kgs 9:27). Megiddo was also a spot on which king Josiah of Judah was killed on the orders of the Egyptian Pharaoh Neco (2Kgs 23:29-30).

*In a somber mood after having about how King Josiah was slain by Pharaoh Neco in this place (2 Kgs 23:29-30).*

### 2. TEL HAZOR

The city of Hazor was in existence as early as Bronze Age Period. The name Hazor is first mentioned in the Middle Bronze Age (18<sup>th</sup> C BCE) in the Egyptian documents known as Execration Texts. During the Late Bronze Age, the city continued to flourish and is mentioned in

the list of military campaigns and conquests of the Egyptian kings and in a number of letters found in el-Amarna in Egypt.



The Bible relates that King Jabin of Hazor went out at the head of an alliance of Canaanite cities to fight against the settling Israelite tribes led by Joshua. The Israelite victory led to the destruction and burning of the city (Jos 11:1-12).

### 3. BEER SHEVA

Beer Sheva was one of the most fascinating biblical places for me. Located east of the modern city of Beer Sheva near the communities of Omer and Tel Sheva. In 2005, UNESCO listed Beer Sheva together with other biblical cities as a World Heritage Site. Beer Sheva is identified with the biblical region of “Negev of Judah”. Together with Arad valley, they divide the Judean Mountains in the north from the Negev Highlands and the Sinai in the south. Beer Sheva is associated with Abraham and Isaak (Patriarchal narratives). The Hebrew name בְּעֵר שָׁבַע (Beer Sheva) means “seven wells” or “well of Oaths”. Why wells? For nomadic tribes to get water

since patriarchal stories are nomadic stories.



Scholars suggest that this well at the gate is connected to the one mentioned in Genesis in the story of the alliance of Abraham and Isaak with the Philistines at Beer Sheva. The oath sworn at the gate gave the city its name (sheva means “seven” and “oath” in Hebrew).

*“Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech and the two of them made a pact....hence the place was called Beer Sheva, for there the two of them swore an oath... (Gen 21:27-32). The city was heavily damaged by earthquake and scholars link this earthquake to the one mentioned in the book of Amos: “the words of Amos...who prophesied concerning Israel in the reigns of Kings Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake” (Amos 1:1). The prophet Amos also denounced the temple which was built at Beer Sheva (Amos 8:14).*



*This is a general view of Beer Sheva from the observation tower.*

#### **4. ARAD**

Arad is a Canaanite city located in the eastern Negev encompassing the remains of a Canaanite city from the Early Bronze Age. Arad is mentioned in the Bible as a powerful city in the eastern Negev that blocked the entry of the Israelites from the Kadesh Barnea through the Negev directly to the Judean Mountains: *“the king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the south, heard that Israel was coming on the road to Atharim. Then he fought against Israel and took some of them prisoners”* (Numbers 21:1).



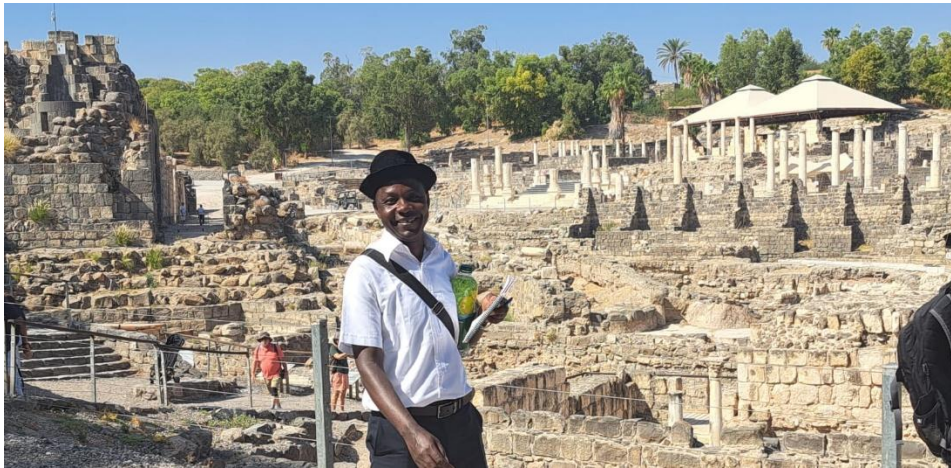
The king of Arad appears in the list of Canaanite kings who were defeated by Joshua during the conquest of the land (Jos 12:14). The Bible also tells of the Kenites who settled in Arad (Judg 1:16).

*This is part of Arad showing dwelling quarters and the city wall.*

#### **5. BET SHEAN**

The settlement of Bet Shean first began in the fifth millennium BCE. In the Late Canaanite Period (16<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE), the city became the seat of the Egyptian rule. The Israelites never succeeded in conquering this city. The city is associated with King Saul. After the battle waged at Mt. Gilboa, the Philistine lords of Bet Shean displayed the bodies of Saul and his sons on the city walls. The city was later taken by King David along with Megiddo, becoming the

administrative center of the region during King Solomon's reign. The site was destroyed in 732 BCE, with the conquest of the northern part of the country by the Assyrian King Tiglath Pileser III.



*The ruins of Bet Shean, the monumental colonnades running along Sylvanus Street.*

## 6. THE CITY OF DAN

This was another fascinating place for me. It is found in the extreme north of Israel. Stepping in Dan is like stepping in a wonderland. The place is covered with evergreen vegetation and streams of fresh waters ever flowing, associated with the welling waters from the temple in the book of Ezekiel.



In it is found a place associated with Eden. Even at noon of a hot summer's day, the place is cool. It was indeed Eden for me. In it is found the three sources of River Jordan, the Dan stream is the largest and most important.

*The Dan Stream and part of the evergreen flora of Dan.*

Dan is identified with the city of Laish, captured by the tribe of Dan. The tribe of Dan found it difficult to deal with the Philistines and therefore decided to move northwards as attested in the Bible: *“they proceeded to Laish...and they put them to sword and burned down the town...they rebuilt the town and settled there, and they named the town Dan, after their ancestor Dan who was Israel's son. Originally however, the name of the town was Laish”* (Judg 18:27-29).



*This is the Canaanite gate which has existed from the eighteenth-century BCE, completely intact, with an*



*arched entry, one of the oldest complete arches in the world.*

### *The Canaanite gate or Abraham's Gate*



One of the impressive discoveries from Dan is a piece of stone tablet from the ninth century BCE. It is a Canaanite inscription notable for possibly being the most significant and perhaps the only extra-biblical archaeological reference to the “House of David”. On it are found the inscription of Hazael King of Damascus boasting of his victory over the king of Israel and the king of the house of David.

This is the first time that the words “house of David” were discovered outside the Bible. Unfortunately, archaeologists have yet to find the inscription in its entirety.

## 7. MOUNT GERIZIM AND THE SAMARITANS

Mount Gerizim is located south of Shechem and the Roman city of Neapolis. The name of Mount Gerizim occurs in the Torah from the beginning of the Israelite experience in the Land of Canaan. In the Torah, the children of Israel are commanded to conduct the ceremony of blessing and cursing upon Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal after entering the Land of Israel: *“when the Lord your God has brought you into the land that you are entering to occupy, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal”* (Deut 11:29).



Mount Gerizim is again mentioned in the parable of Jotham, of whom it is said “...he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim...” (Judg 9:7). Mount Gerizim is associated with the Samaritans who believe that they are the true Israelites of the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and

Levi. According to the Bible, after the destruction of Samaria and the exile of Israel in 722 BCE, a small group of Israelites survived the destruction and continued to believe in the sanctity of Mt. Gerizim.



Presently, the Samaritans number to around 625 individuals living in two centers: 301 at Mt. Gerizim and 324 in Holon (2000 statistics). The head of the community is a High Priest, a lifetime position held by the eldest priest. The Samaritan theology is summarized as: 1. *One God*, 2. *One prophet*,

*Moses, son of Amram*, 3. *One Holy Scripture—the only five books of the Torah* (Samaritan Pentateuch), 4. *One holy place—Mount Gerizim, and not Jerusalem*. They celebrate all the holidays prescribed by the Torah and every year during the three pilgrimages, they ascend to Mt. Gerizim and at Passover, carry out the Paschal sacrifice there. Their calendar is based upon the number of years that have passed since the entry of Israelites into Canaan following the death of Moses. They keep Sabbath and pray in their synagogues on sabbath and holidays but do not lay *tefillin* or place *mezuzot* on their doorposts. Mt. Gerizim and the Samaritans were of great interest to me because we see a number of differences between them and the Jews in as far as Judaism is concerned.



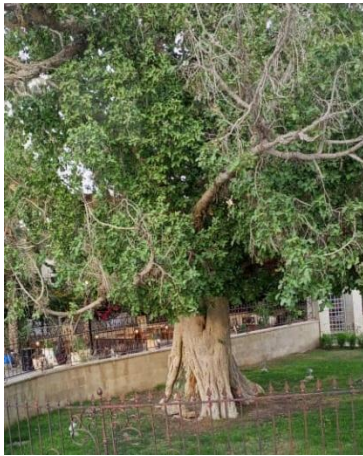
*While on top of Mt. Gerizim, one is able to see the town of Shechem in the lower land. At Shechem is found the well of Jacob where Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman (Jn 4). Unfortunately, we did not reach the place as it is in the fighting area of Jews and Palestinians.*

## 8. JERICHO

Another name of Jericho is Tel es Sultan. This is the oldest city in the world whereby archaeological finds reveal that there existed permanent structures at Jericho as early as 8000BCE. This outcompetes even the 2500 BCE Egyptian pyramids. The city is characterized by the pre-pottery neolithic stone wall which still stands today. There are also double walls of mud bricks which emerged in Early Bronze Age. The city is located in the disputed West Bank region of Israel, it has been ceded to Palestinian control as part of recent treaty agreements.



The pre-pottery neolithic stone wall at Jericho. Jericho is remembered for the story in the book of Joshua regarding its destruction by the Israelites. In the New Testament times, Jericho was a “pass-through” place for travellers to Jerusalem coming either from the east, across the Jordan river or from the north, parts of Galilee.



Jericho is also famous in the New Testament for the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus took place there (Luke 19:1-10).

*The tree which is believed that Zacchaeus climbed. It is in the city.*

## 9. QUMRAN



*The site of Khirbet Qumran, behind it are the caves where the Scrolls were discovered.*

The site of Khirbet Qumran is located on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea, twenty kilometers east of Jerusalem and twelve kilometers south of Jericho. The place is famous for the discovery of scrolls in eleven caves near the site. The scrolls contain the books of the Bible and Sectarian documents of the *Yahad* (community of Qumran). Only the Book of Esther was not

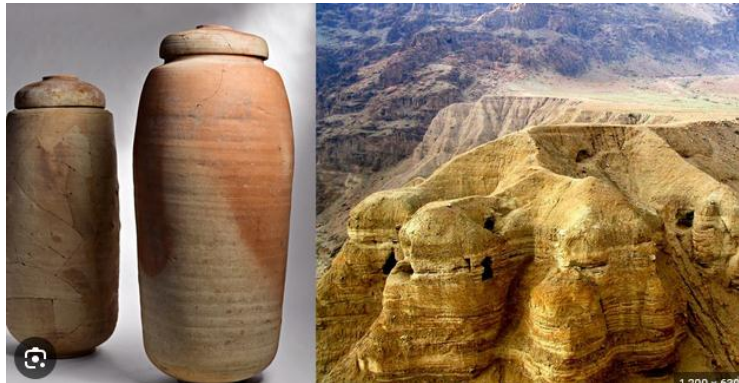
found in the caves of Qumran. It is believed that these scrolls were hidden there in fear of their destruction during the 68CE Roman war against the Jews. There are many theories surrounding the scrolls and the site. The one I find more convincing is that the scrolls were hidden there by Zadokite priests who had broken away from Jerusalem establishment, having anticipated the destruction of Jerusalem, they decided to take these sacred documents to the desert for hiding. In turn, they could not hide the scrolls at Qumran in fear of its eventual destruction (which indeed happened in 68AD). They decided to hide them in the nearby caves. The conditions in the caves were favorable for the scrolls because the place is very hot. Imagine the scrolls which were hidden in 68AD and discovered in 1947 (a period of 1879 years).



*Cave 4 is the nearest cave to the site of Qumran. Majority of Biblical scrolls were discovered in this cave.*

The first scrolls were discovered in 1947 by the Bedouin shepherds. Almost 90% of them are written on parchment from animal skin, 10% are written on papyrus

and one unique document which is Copper scroll is incised in metal. There is no doubt that many of the scrolls discovered are related to the site of Khirbet Qumran. For example, the cylindrical scroll jars that were first discovered in Cave 1 have also been found at the site of Qumran in the settlement itself. Even much of the pottery found in the caves may be dated to the same time as the various phases of the site, also the typology of the pottery in caves is very similar to the pottery found in the settlement.



*The cylindrical Scroll jars inside which were hidden the scrolls. Some of the caves from which the scrolls were removed.*



*This is part of the manuscript of the Isaiah Scroll discovered at Qumran. It is written in Qumran Hebrew, without vowels. The texts*

*are arranged in columns.*



*This photograph is of the Shrine of the Book. It is a house where the Great Isaiah Scroll (one of Qumran Scrolls) is kept in the Israel Museum. The black wall represents “sons of darkness”, and the white lid of the shrine represents “sons of light”. This language is common in some sectarian documents discovered at Qumran.*

Who were the people residing at Qumran? This question is not simple to answer. Several theories have been advanced about the Qumran community, that is, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots, and the Essenes. The Essenes take the highest score. This is because most of the sectarian documents discovered in the caves describe the way of life of the Essenes. Such documents include the Community Rule (IQS), Rule of the Congregation and Testimonia.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls revolutionized the understanding of the Bible especially in the field of Textual Criticism. There are several differences and similarities when the Dead Sea Scrolls are compared with Masoretic Text hence providing rich material for textual critics. Important to note is that the Dead Sea Scrolls are also important for the study of the New Testament because several sectarian documents share with the NT books the language and style. St. John the Baptist is at times identified with Qumran community. It is believed that documents which were controversial at Qumran, were eaten up by mice at Qumran.

## **THE NEW TESTAMENT PLACES**

Besides the places which are important for the Old Testament, several New Testament places were also visited and studied.

### **1. MASADA**

Masada is not mentioned in the Bible but the place is important for the understanding of Judaism. The story of Masada was recorded by Josephus Flavius, who was the commander of the Galilee during the Great Revolt and later surrendered to the Romans at Yodfat. Masada is located

on the eastern fringe of the Judean Desert near the shore of the Dead Sea, between En Gedi and Sodom. It was the last bastion of Jewish freedom fighters against the Romans.



In fact, the fall of Masada signaled the violent destruction of the kingdom of Judea at the end of the Second Temple Period (70 CE). Masada was previously a Hasmonean palace, rebuilt by King Herod the Great. It was a spectacular looking

fortress in the style of the ancient Roman East. The remote location of Masada and its natural defenses were the advantages that transformed it into a fortress during the Second Temple period. Masada used to be a place of refuge and a winter palace for the Herodian family in times of war. According to Josephus, Masada was the last rebel stronghold in Judea in 74 CE when the Roman army led by Flavius Silva laid siege to it.



*While on top of Masada hill, one can view the whole of the Dead Sea region.*

## 2. NAZARETH

*“Nazareth, can anything good come from you?”* (Jn 1:46). Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth under the care of his parents Joseph and Mary. On our visit to Nazareth, two distinctive features were explained to us: There are two churches of Annunciation as memorials for the mystery of incarnation as presented in the Gospel.



The first church belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church and represents the first annunciation. The first annunciation took place when Mary was at the well collecting water: *“blessed are you among women”* (Lk 1:42).



kitchen.

The second church belongs to the Latin Church and is built on the footprints of the Crusader church. It is the home of Mary, and the second annunciation took place here: *“do not fear, you have found favor with God”*. Beneath the Latin Church are two caves: one is the house of Mary and Joseph and the other is her



*The Kitchen of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

We spent three days in Galilee, lodging at the shores of Lake Tiberias. The following were the places visited around Lake Galilee. These places on the lakeside are very important in the New Testament because Jesus’ ministry was centered around them.

**Tabgha** is one of the places: it is the place of the Multiplication of bread, where Jesus fed the multitude: *“and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set them before the crowd”* (Lk 9:10-17).



In this place stands a Church from the Byzantine period. In front of the altar is a mosaic with two fishes and loaf of bread representing multiplication of fish and loaves.



**The Mount of the Beatitudes:** the place where Jesus taught his disciples the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-10). On this mountain are the remains of the Byzantine church. The place is historically more important

than the present-day Sanctuary of the Beatitudes built by the Franciscans.

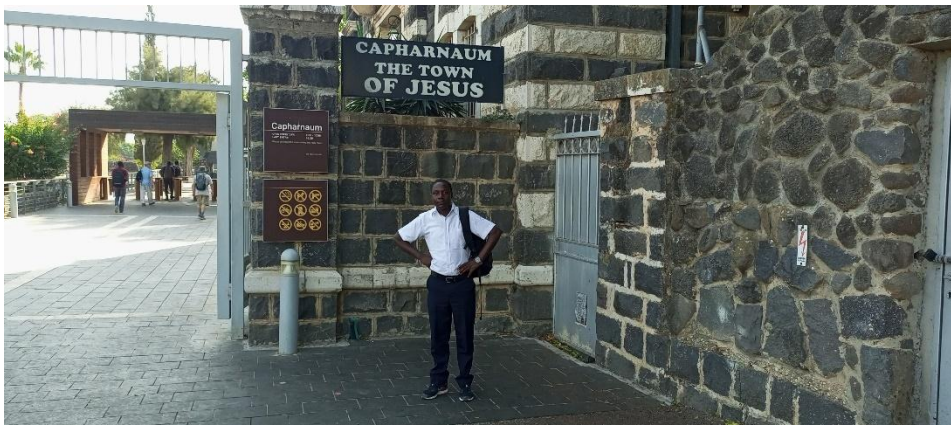
*The sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1-11) took place here.*



**The place of the Primacy of Peter:** this is the place where Peter received authority from his master over his Church as presented in Jn 21:1ff. The first story does not happen here but rather the second. The second happened at the sea (Do you Love me?)

*“Upon this rock I will build my Church”*

## CAPHARNAUM



*“And you Capharnaum, will you be exalted to the heavens? No, you will be brought to the hades” (Matt 11:23).* These were the words of Jesus on Capharnaum. It was a thriving town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, where many events in the earthly life and public ministry of Jesus Christ took place.





Jesus chose five apostles from Capharnaum: fishermen Simon (Peter), Andrew, James and John and the tax collector Matthew. He performed many miracles here, notably, the healing of the paralytic lowered through the roof of Peter's house and the feeding of the five thousand with just a few loaves and fishes. Jesus preached the famous, "*I am the*



*Bread of Life*" discourse in the Capharnaum synagogue (Jn 6:35) and delivered the Sermon on the Mount from atop in the nearby Korazim plateau. The evangelist Matthew calls Capharnaum "*His own city*" (Mt 9:1), Jesus' adopted hometown after Nazareth.

When the Gospel tells of Jesus entering or leaving the house, they are usually referring to St. Peter's family home in Capharnaum where Jesus used to stay. Capharnaum at that time was also a key transit point between the lands of Herod Antipas and that of his brother Philip; it earned substantial revenue from taxes and import duties. In the succeeding centuries, the town was an important pilgrimage center for the early Christians but the aftermath of the 746AD earthquake, Capharnaum began to fall into ruin. The town had completely faded by the sixteenth century.

Capharnaum was rediscovered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was acquired by the Franciscan Friars of the Custody of the Holy Land in 1894. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, friars archaeologists excavated and brought to light again many of the ancient ruins of this Holy place—including the house of St. Peter. Capharnaum is indeed a very important place to visit—the place where Jesus spent most of his time while here on earth.

*At Capharnaum, we were able to celebrate Holy Mass at the Lakeside of Galilee.*

**Bethsaida:** This was a major city of the biblical kingdom of Geshur (the homeland of King David's wife Ma'acah and a refuge of their son Abshalom). During this period, the Sea of Galilee

covered the plain below the mound. Destroyed in the Assyrian conquest of Israel in 732 BCE, Bethsaida was rebuilt and inhabited through the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.



According to the New Testament, the apostles Peter, Andrew and Philip were from Bethsaida. 4<sup>th</sup> century sources indicate that the apostles James and John, the sons of Zebedee, lived also in that place. From the town of Bethsaida, Jesus was seen walking on the waters of the Sea of Galilee. Ultimately, Jesus

condemned Bethsaida because its citizens refused to repent: “woe to you Bethsaida...Matt 11:20).



**Korazim:** At Korazim are the remains of the Jewish town mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud (Menahot 85a), as renowned for the good wheat grown there. In the New Testament (Matthew 11:21, Luke 10:13), Korazim is mentioned as a city

condemned by Jesus together with Bethsaida and Capernaum.

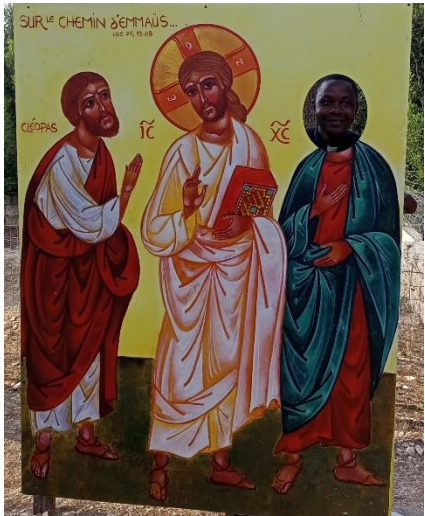
**SUMMARY:** the cities around the Sea of Galilee are very important in the New Testament study. This is because Jesus carried out most of his ministry around them. The question is: why did Jesus choose to come these cities? For ministry on the lakeside. And why did he prefer the lakeside ministry? Because of its abundant population. Most of the people were concentrating on the lakeside. This we call the **Evangelical Triangle of Jesus** around the Sea of Galilee



*The Evangelical Triangle of Jesus.*

## EMMAUS NICOPOLIS

This is the place where Jesus broke the bread. The site lies on the fertile plain of the Shephelah on the route leading from Mediterranean to Jerusalem. In antiquity, it was known as a place of delicious waters, a pleasant oasis. The Emmaus itself comes from the Hebrew “Hamot” meaning “hot sources of springs”. In the third century AD, the town was given a new name, Nicopolis, “City of Victory” in Greek.



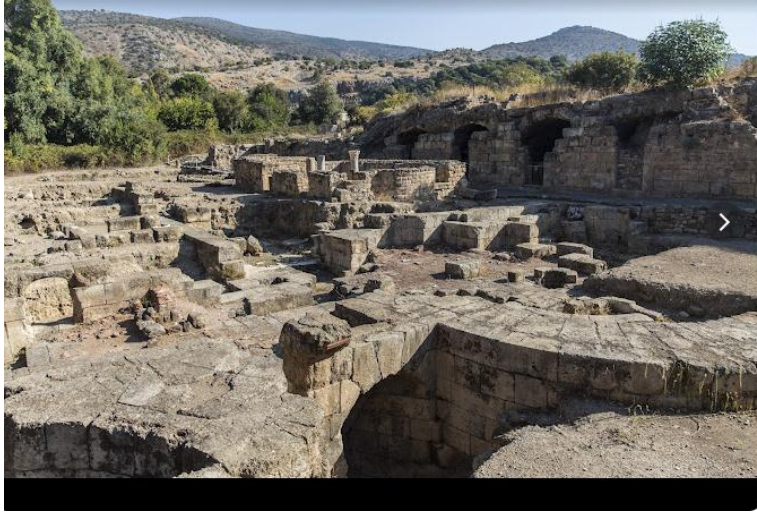
The rich history of Emmaus is marked by the passage of many conquerors and historical figures. The book of Joshua tells us how the sun stood still over the nearby Ayalon Valley while Israel fought against her enemies. Close to Emmaus, Judas Maccabee won an important victory against the Greek troops of Nicanor 165BC. This opened the way to Jerusalem and made it possible for the Jews to purify the Temple and to re-establish the divine service, a victory celebrated by the feast of Hannukah every year. In the late 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC, the town of Emmaus was burnt down by the Romans and is mentioned only in the Gospel of Luke as a simple village. It was here that Jesus after his resurrection, met two of his disciples who recognized him in the breaking of bread (Lk 24:13-35).

## CAESAREA PHILIPPI (BANIAS)

Caesarea Philippi is found in the extreme north of Israel. The name of the place was originally Panias (Banias, according to the Arabic pronunciation). It was taken from the name of the deity Paneas. Paneas first appears in the works of the historian Xenon of Rhodes. He tells about the battle that took place at Paneas in 200BCE between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies, who were fighting for control of the Land of Israel.



*The remains of the Temple of the god Pan who lived in nature.*



At the end of the first century BCE, the Romans annexed Paneas to the kingdom of Herod the Great. After Herod's death, his kingdom was divided among his three sons. The north and the Golan heights were rewarded to Philip who made Paneas the capital of his kingdom in 2BCE. He called the place Caesarea Philippi, although the popular name Paneas persisted. Josephus Flavius recorded that Agrippa II made the city very

luxurious, adorning it with a large palace and statue-studded temples.

According to Christian tradition, the most significant event occurred at Caesarea Philippi. This is the place of Petrine Confession—Peter stated that Jesus was the Messiah, and Jesus answered him: *“Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church and the gates of the hades will not overcome it”* (Matt 16:17-18). At this time, Jesus gave Peter the keys to heaven (Matt 16:19). The Church Fathers also identified Paneas as the place where Jesus healed the woman who had been subject to bleeding (Mk 5:25, Lk 8:43). In gratitude, the woman placed the statue of Jesus at the doorpost of her house. It was apparently the first statue of Jesus ever made.

### **CAESAREA MARITIMA**

On our journey to Caesarea Maritima, our professor Josef Mario Briffa informed us that we are heading to the capital city of Israel during the Roman Period. Caesarea Maritima is situated on the Mediterranean coast in north Sharon, between the Crocodile and Hadera river mouths. During the Persian rule (586-332BCE), the Phoenicians built a settlement on the shoreline. The place flourished during the Hellenistic period (332-37BCE) and is first mentioned in the Zenon Papyri (a document from 259 BCE) under the name of Straton's Tower. In 103 BCE, the town was conquered by Alexander Jannaeus and annexed to the Hasmonean kingdom. In 37 BCE, the village was awarded to Herod the Great who ruled between 37-4BCE.



Herod the Great transformed this village into a large port city and used it to carry out his ambitious plans. He named the city Caesarea in honor of his patron Octavian Augustus Caesar. In Josephus' Jewish War (1:21,5) it says: *“and he chose on the coast one forsaken town by the name of Straton's Tower...which thanks to its favorable location was suitable for carrying out his ambitious plans. He rebuilt it entirely of white stone and adorned it with a royal palace of unique splendor displaying the brilliance of his mind”*.



Herod the Great planned well this city with a network of crisscrossing roads, a temple, a harbor, a theatre, amphitheatre, markets and residential quarters. It took 12 years to complete and great festivities were held to mark its completion in 10/9BCE. By the year 6BCE, the city became the headquarters of the Roman government in Palestine. Pontius Pilate was living in this city not Jerusalem during the time Jesus. The first Jewish Revolt broke up at Caesarea Maritima in 66AD.



*Caesarea Maritima was a setting for the decisive turning point in Christianity: here the Apostle Peter converted the first 'gentile', Cornelius, the Roman Centurion (Acts 10).*



*This was the Hall of hearing of the case of St. Paul by Agrippa and Bernice at the command of Festus as mentioned in the Acts of Apostles (Acts 25:23).*

In 58BCE, the Apostle Paul accused of having caused a riot, was sent to Caesarea to be tried by the governor. Being a Roman citizen, Paul demanded to be heard at the Emperor's court. He

sailed to Rome from Caesarea's harbor. There he was tried and a few years later executed.

## HERODIUM

This is the burial place of King Herod the Great and is found southeast of Bethlehem. The history of the place stems from 40BCE when Herod had to flee for his life from Jerusalem and the clutches of the Hasmonean ruler Matathias Antigonus. After Antigonus made a treaty with the Parthians, he pursued Herod and his entourage, catching up with them southeast of Bethlehem. Herod barely survived the desperate battle and the events of that unforgettable day are what seem to have led him to build his tomb at the battleground. In the third decade BCE, Herod began to build Herodium, apparently as a government and administrative center in Judea, leaving Jerusalem mainly as the religious center. He named his daring, magnificent project after himself.

Herod build his palace at Herodium and it was the largest in the Roman world at the time. It consisted of three parts:



*1. The mountain palace-fortress—a unique combination of palace, fortress and outstanding landmark.*



*2. Lower Herodium, containing an extravagant entertainment area, administrative center and the king's funeral complex.*



3. *The mountain slope, on the northern part of which, alongside a ceremonial staircase, Herod built his tomb and a royal theater.*



*Shortly before he died, Herod ensured he would never be forgotten by building an artificial mountain that could be seen for miles around. All these features made Herodium one of the most important structures in the ancient world.*

## **BETHLEHEM**

*“But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days” (Mic 5:2).*



Bethlehem is the birthplace of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Going to Bethlehem was going to Palestinian territory. It is a Palestinian town located south of Jerusalem in the West Bank. As a biblical birthplace of Jesus, it is a major Christian pilgrimage destination.



*The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is marked by an inlaid silver star in a grotto under the 6<sup>th</sup> century church of the Nativity which shares a Manger square with the 15<sup>th</sup> century church of St. Catherine.*



*Celebrating Mass in a Manger as a group was a very spiritually enriching moment in Bethlehem.*

Tradition has it that while Joseph and Mary together with the child Jesus were fleeing from Herod to Egypt as was commanded by God through an angel, Joseph hid Mary in a nearby cave at Bethlehem. While she was breastfeeding the child Jesus in the cave, the breast milk fell on a rock and suddenly turned white. This cave came to be called the Milk Grotto.

### **Other Places visited**



Beit Sahur; the shepherds' field and grotto, in neighborhood with Bethlehem. Some shepherds amongst the most despised of the Jewish people, went to adore Jesus. Dazzled by a great light, an angel brought them the tidings of joy and the long-awaited savior had been born (Lk 2:8-20).

Ein Kerem is a place of the visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Elizabeth. It is the birthplace of St. John the Baptist.

Besides the academic experience, spiritual exercises were inevitable



at large.

### ***1. Participation in the celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Palestine.***

This feast is celebrated on every 17<sup>th</sup> October. We participated in the Liturgy of the day where the Latin Patriarch led the Mass. The Feast brings together all Christian denominations in Israel, praying together for peace of Jerusalem and Israel



### ***2. Visitation to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem***

*With His Beatitude Pier Battista Pizzabala, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.*

The Roman Catholic Church in Jerusalem belongs to the Latin Patriarchate. A visit to the Latin Patriarchate was inevitable.

### ***3. Celebration of Mass in the Cenacle.***



*In the place where our Lord instituted the Sacraments of Holy Orders and the Eucharist as well as the place of Pentecost event.*



4. Participation in the Holy Sepulcher liturgies, that is, Sunday vespers with the Fransiscan Friars, Way of the Cross on Fridays from Antonio Fortress in the moslem quarter up to Golgotha in the christian quarter, Night vigils at the Tomb of Jesus.

5. Participation in the celebration of Christmas Vigil Mass in Bethlehem. It was an opportune moment that we celebrated Christmas Vigil Mass of 2022 at Bethlehem. Mass was led by the Latin Patriarch who at the end gave Plenary Indulgence to the congregants.
6. Paricipation in the Jewish Feasts: the New Year's Day, Yom Kippur, Sukkoth and Hannukkah. We entered Israel during the period of celebration of their major holidays.
  - (i) The New Year's Day (ראש השנה): this occurred on 25<sup>th</sup> September. Although we did not celebrate with them this day, we found fresh memories of the day in the street of Jerusalem. There were placads showing טובה שנה that is "Happy New Year". This is according to the Hebrew Calender that the new is celebrated in the month of Aviv. The Hebrew Calender is five or six days less than the Civil Calender. Thus after every five years, they add in one month to make 13 in order to match with the civil year. According to Professor Steven Fassberg, the Hebrew professor at the Hebrew university, on the New Year's Day, apples and honey are served at celebratory meals to symbolize a sweet New Year.
  - (ii) Yom Kippur: this is the Day of Atonement on which every Jew is supposed to observe fasting in atonement for his sins. Yom Kippur takes place on the final day of the 10 Days of Awe, which begins with *Rosh Hashanah*. Yom Kippur began at sunset on Tuesday, October 4, 2022 and ended at sunset on Wednesday October 5, 2022.



*An ultra-orthodox Jew praying on the Western Wall on the Day of Yom Kippur.*

- (iii) **The Feast of Sukkoth/Tabernacles:** This is an eight day celebration commemorating the wandering of Israelites and their forebearers in the wilderness. During this period of celebration, the Jewish families shift from their permanent house structures and dwell in temporary structures outside. These structures are called sukah/sukkot or Tabernacle.



*This is how a modern Tabernacle looks like in the present day celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in Israel.*

- (iv) **The Feast of Hannukkah:** this is a Jewish Festival that reaffirms the ideals of Judaism and commemorates in particular the rededication of the Second Temple of Jerusalem by the lighting of a candle on each day of the festival. The feast lasts for eight days and on each day a candle is lit. this festival is not a “High Holy Day” like Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah but is a joyful celebration that recounts the story of a miracle. The eight candles commemorates the miracle of the little oil that was discovered in the temple and it burnt for eight days without being finished. The Jews observe this feast even though it is not found in the Hebrew Bible. It is only found in the Book of Maccabees. The final day of Hanukkah falls on 25<sup>th</sup> December, the day of celebration of Christmas.



*We were able to attend the last day of Hanukkah celebrations on the Western Wall.*

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*Professor Josef Mario Briffa, the Director of Biblicum Jerusalem and Professor Tamir Shafer Rector of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.*



*Sharing light moments with Professor Steven Fassberg of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem after Hebrew lesson. Professor Fassberg teaches Phoenician, Ugaritic, Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew.*



*With some of our group members at the Hebrew University.*



*The course ended in February 2023 with a mini graduation at Rotberg International School.*

***Chronological Table of the History of Israel***

<b>DATES</b>	<b>PERIODS</b>	<b>Trad.Biblical Chronology</b>	<b>ANCIENT EAST</b>	<b>NEAR EAST</b>
8300-5500	Pre-Pottery Neolithic		Neolithic Jericho	
5500-4500	Pottery Neolithic		Neolithic Jericho	
4500-3300	Chalcolithic		Telleilat Ghassul	
3300-2200	Early Bronze Age		Old Kingdom Egypt	
2200-1550	Middle Bronze Age	Patriarchs?		
1550-1200	Late Bronze Age		New Kingdom Egypt	
1200-587	Iron Age	Exodus, United Monarchy, Divided Monarchy,	Neo-Assyrian Empire	
587	Babylonian		Neo-Babylonian Empire	
332	Persian	Return (Ezra-Nehemiah)	Rise of Persia	
332-167	Hellenistic		Alexander the Great	
167-37		Hasmonean Rule		
37BC-70AD	Early Roman	Herod, Jesus	Julius Caesar	
70-132		First and second Revolt		
132-324	Late Roman			
324-638	Byzantine Period			
638-1099	Arab Period			
1099-1291	Crusader Period			
1291-1561	Mameluke Period			
1561-1917	Ottoman Period			
1917-1947	British Mandate			

***Other experiences***

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After field work experience, it was now time for classes. Lectures began in the last week of October when all the Jewish feasts have been celebrated. At the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, we met and studied with many students from all over the world. It was indeed a multicultural experience.

Every Class at the Hebrew University could begin with singing of a psalm in Hebrew. This helped us to deepen further our knowledge of Biblical Hebrew.

We were introduced to Hebrew names; each one of us was given a Hebrew name and this became his name at the campus for the rest of our days there.

Tasting some Jewish food on Hanukkah: a special type of bread that is eaten on the feast of Hanukkah. It is called in Hebrew סופגניות (suphganayah).

Experiencing worship in other Christian religions: at times in the Holy Sepulcher, we could join other Christian religions in prayer. Such as the Greek Orthodox Christians, The Armenians and the Coptics.

Participating in Synagogue worship: on the eve of Sabbath, we could go at times in a synagogue. The Rabbi introduces the theme of the Sabbath celebration for that week.

### **Challenges**

At first the journey seemed a failure because the embassy of Israel in Italy had almost failed to give us visas for religious-political reasons. But thanks be to Mr. Valentino Carlo the Secretary General of Biblicum who worked tirelessly to ensure our going.

Tension between Palestine and Israel: while in Israel we could be alerted of abrupt attacks between the Palestinians and the Jews. We were always exhorted to move with our passports.

### **Appreciation**

Appreciation goes to the following sectors:

1. The Pontifical Biblical Institute of Rome for granting me this scholarship.
2. Professors at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Biblicum of Jerusalem
3. My Classmates with whom I went for their great assistance in sharing information.

*Compiled by Fr. Toby Musinguzi*

*Pontifical Biblical Institute Rome-Italy*

*Fr. Toby Musinguzi is a diocesan priest of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Portal-Uganda-East Africa.*

*He is currently a Student of Licentiate in Sacred Scriptures at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.*