

Learning in the Holy Lands

Dan Nelson – pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

Most of us grew up with phrases that seem to encapsulate certain truths such as “Experience is the best teacher!” — “A picture is worth a thousand words” and “One can’t understand until they have walked a mile in another’s footsteps.” Expressions such as these are not merely trite colloquialisms; they convey real meaning when one takes in a week like I just had. I just got back from the Holy Land.

Having heard and read Bible stories since I was a boy, and taught verse by verse for the last 12 years, the historical geography of the Scriptures is something I feel quite comfortable with. However, nothing compares with actually going there and walking the land. There is so much that we can miss when we don’t have the personal association with the landscape. I am so excited to come back and share what I saw.

When we got off the plane at Tel Aviv, just off the coast of the Mediterranean and a stone’s throw from the port city of Jaffa, where Jonah battled with his determination to rebel against the command of God, we were fascinated with the way that “the modern blends so well with the ancient.” Artifacts and art deco somehow intertwine everywhere.

Excited to head to our first adventure destination, we pressed our faces into the glass absorbing every minute of the beautiful landscape. It was a two-hour bus ride into the Negev desert and on to the place where Moses led the people around for decades. We found our way to the Egyptian border, then later to the Jordanian border, the border with Lebanon, and Syria too, before heading up to the city of Jerusalem itself. The whole country is smaller than most people can imagine, and very safe.

We hiked the amazing canyons where Abraham raised his flocks, floated on the salty Dead Sea that fascinated Cleopatra with its health and healing powers, explored the caves of Qumran from which the infamous scrolls were found, and boated across the Sea of Galilee where Jesus taught and even walked on water. Along the way, our Bibles were open to recapture the scene, the words, and the message.

The city of David caught my attention since the scope of it surprised me. The ruins of Caesarea were impressive in communicating the ominous presence of the Roman guard at the time of Christ. Walking the old city of Jerusalem was fascinating and descending the Mount of Olives as Jesus did on Palm Sunday was amazing.

One of my favorite experiences was teaching in the Garden of Gethsemane where our Lord poured out his broken heart in prayer, while his followers slept nearby.

The church that I pastor is called Calvary Chapel. Calvary is a Greek word for

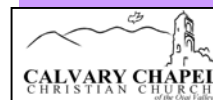
skull, the name of the rock where Jesus was crucified. The Bible tells us that in Hebrew the word is Golgotha. In essence, the name implies a worship chapel that sits at the foot of the cross. But this was the first time to actually sit at the real Calvary Hill and consider that our church name literally means “Skull Chapel.” Kind of takes the romance out of it, doesn’t it, and gets to the root of what was happening.

One of my favorite parts was to receive communion in the empty tomb where Jesus has not been since three days after they crucified him. To see where he was laid, where he rose, and where the angels came to announce what comes next, was awesome.

Great experiences are meant to be shared. I can’t wait to return to Israel, but next time I will arrive with a group from the Ojai Valley. We are already planning our next two trips. It is just like everyone always told me, as a Christian, you feel like it is your second home.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:45am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

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