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From Dan to Beersheba

by Larry Jaffrey

“And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.” 1Kings 4:25

Over the years as I have taken tours and ministry trips to Israel, a sad reality has struck me. Most Christians who visit Israel “only” see the places mentioned in the Bible “from Dan as far as Beersheba.” Their trips are packed with going here and going there but not really seeing the Land or meeting and getting to know the people of the Land. The opportunity to both see the historical places of the Bible and to get to know and minister to the people of Israel is one thing that makes our ministry trips to Israel so special.

John Bell, Dan Harder and I just returned from a week in Israel. This was not one of our ministry tours to Israel--just the three of us traveled there to teach and meet with some



of the Christian leadership in the Land. What made this trip extra special was the people we met while we traveled from Dan to Beersheba. Israel is a country of over 7 million people scattered over a land mass the size of the state of New Jersey. It is easy to be overwhelmed with the fact that this is the land of the Bible. Yet, it is also easy to overlook the fact that among the Jewish population of 5.2 million there are only 10-15,000 believers in Jesus. Or, as in the Haifa metropolitan area of 800,000 souls, only about 1,000 are believers. Truly, the people of Israel need to hear about their most popular historical figure, Jesus.

THE PEOPLE WE MET

Now I want you to meet some the believers we spent time with during our stay in Israel. Please note that I

am using pseudonyms as there are groups in Israel who are determined to harass and cause trouble for those doing ministry in the Land.

We arrived in Israel on New Year’s Eve. We were looking forward to welcoming in the new year in Jerusalem. After checking into the hotel, we walked down to Ben Yehuda Street to see how Jerusalem welcomed in the new year. The area was packed with young people. At the stroke of midnight a few balloons were let go and that was it. What a disappointment! The next morning (New Year’s Day) was just another work day in Jerusalem.

Stan Goodenough in his blog “Jerusalem Watch” put it this way, “It’s a strange feeling. I watch on Sky News and Fox News as 2009 flickers out and 2010 is ushered in “all around us” and think – not for the first time, about how out of step Israel is with the rest of the world; in another, more serious sense, how alone.”

After spending the night in Jerusalem, we drove down to Pitah Tikvah to spend time with Sammi and his congregation. What a joy it was to also see Sammi and Jerry again. Jerry is one of elders of the congregation who also has a ministry of helping the homeless and addicts living on the streets of Tel Aviv. He immigrated to Israel from Russia where he was a glass sculptor. He has a very interesting testimony of how he came to believe in Jesus and how God challenged him to work among the street people of Tel Aviv.

Jerry is burdened to plant a congregation among the men he is working with on the streets. While that may be surprising to hear, many of these men are professionals who have fallen on bad times and

turned to drugs as a crutch. Jerry is seeing how Jesus is turning these men's lives around and how a congregation of transformed men could have a tremendous impact on the street people of Tel Aviv.

The seminar on Saturday was to begin at 3 pm and go until 9 pm. That meant that John Bell and I had the morning free, so we drove back up to Jerusalem to meet an Arab pastor friend. We have known him for years but we had never seen his church in Bethlehem. He picked us up at the Jerusalem YMCA so he could drive us through the checkpoint into Bethlehem. Barry was born and raised in the Old City of Jerusalem. He came to the States to receive his Bible training and went back to Israel to plant a congregation in Bethlehem. Though an Arab, he believes Israel is a work of God and the Jews have a special place in God's plan for the last days. Being an outspoken Arab Christian in a now mostly Muslim town and a supporter of Israel on top of this, he and his family have received much persecution including physical attacks. His son, Stan, who has just started a congregation in East Jerusalem, joined us for tea and lunch.

Stan drove us back to our car in Jerusalem. This meant we had to once again pass through the Israeli security checkpoint at the edge of Bethlehem. This went very quickly. Since one would expect more of a hassle at a checkpoint into Israel, John asked Stan if it was common to have such an easy passage. Stan said it was quite uncommon. He went on to share that he goes through this checkpoint a least four times a day. Each time he is asked to get out of the car to be questioned and have the car searched. When asked why we went through so quickly, he said he told the guards that we were American guests. Not wanting to make a bad impression on the visiting Americans, the soldiers let us through without any trouble. In spite of the usual harassment, Stan still loves Israel and the Jews. We then drove back down to Pitha Tikvah to prepare for that evening's seminar.

The church planting seminar was conducted over the next two evenings and then we drove up to Haifa. Our contact there was Jim who is a friend of Dan Harder. Jim, who attended the first day of seminars in Pitha Tikvah, was so moved by the material we presented that he rearranged his schedule so he could

take us to meet with a couple of pastors in Haifa. Jim is not Jewish and came to Israel out of college to work on a kibbutz. He met and married a young Israeli woman and stayed. Today he is considered the evangelist of Haifa. He regularly puts together teams of volunteers to hand out tracts in the Haifa area. Recently, he has been greatly burdened for

planting new congregations in Israel and believes our seminar is much needed in the Land.

The first pastor we met was Alexie. Alexie was born and raised in the former Soviet Union. While in the military, he was in an accident which left him unable to walk. This began his search for the meaning to life and ultimately to finding Jesus. In answer to prayer he was miraculously healed. He then immigrated to Israel and started sharing Jesus with his people. The result is a congregation which is today maximizing the facility they are renting in the heart of Haifa.

We then walked over to a nearby Arab Church where we met Joseph, the pastor of a Russian congregation using the facility. Again, we were deeply moved by how God was moving among the Russian Jews of Israel. Joseph shared that weekly he and a congregation member drive up to the Lebanon border to conduct a Bible study and prayer meeting. Already they have too many people for the facility they are using so they are praying for a new building.

The next morning we had breakfast with Jim to discuss future plans for seminars in the Haifa area. We then drove five and a half hours down to Eilat to meet with a couple that has a hostel and an international congregation in that resort city. We truly went from Dan to Beersheba. Space does not permit me to go into more details about our visit with them.

It was a great trip and we thank you for your prayers. We discovered that these pastors and spiritual leaders are very open to us coming back to present more seminars on congregation planting. Wherever we shared a summary of the seminar we presented in Pitha Tikvah, the people asked when we were coming back. We were also asked to challenge the church outside of Israel to be praying for a great spiritual awakening in the Land of the Bible. Please join us in praying to that end.