

An Introduction to Your Virtual Pilgrimage

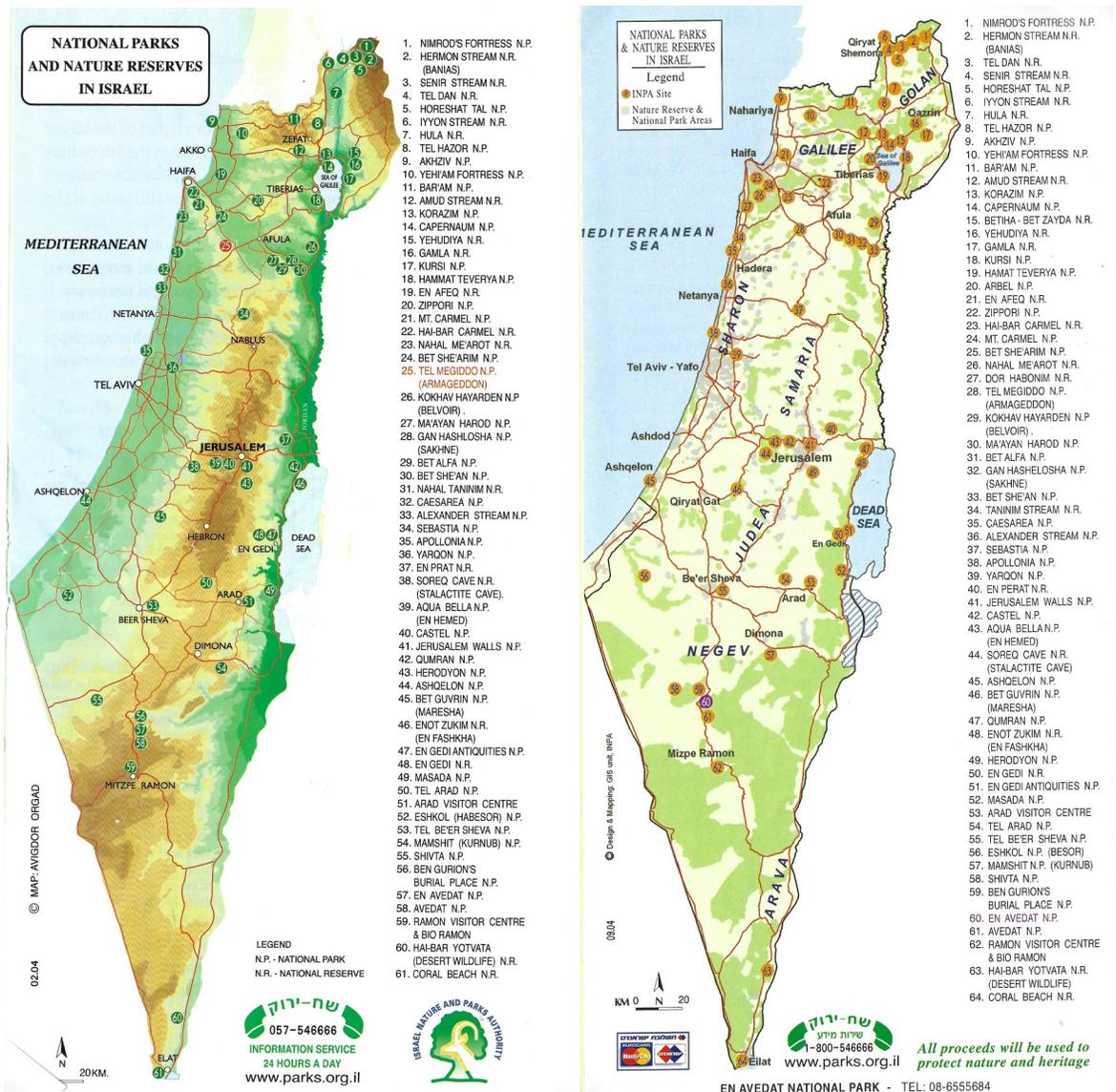
COVID-19 has devastated many of us in many ways this past year. As a small congregation that enjoys our time together, we miss seeing each other on Sunday mornings for worship, gathering for meals, celebrating events, and doing fun things together. While we still can't physically be together, we can do something fun together!

I invite you to join me on a virtual pilgrimage to the Holy Land this Lent. We will see many sites that correspond to Scripture, especially of towns and places where Jesus ministered. I have combined a Lenten devotion with short videos. Where possible, I've included photographs from the trip Clay and I took to the Holy Land in 2009. It was a trip where the Bible's stories came to life and allowed me to see Scripture differently. I know a virtual trip will not be the same as visiting in person. However, I hope that amid a cold winter and the gloom of a pandemic, we can take a little break from the ordinary and let our imaginations join a pilgrimage to the land of milk and honey.

To help you visualize the locations we are visiting, I've included two maps below. Each day, you will visit a different place by video, contemplate the accompanying Scripture, and say a short prayer. Most videos run for two to 10 minutes. The reading is just a few verses, and the prayer is usually one sentence. All together, this trip will take 10 to 15 minutes of your day. Perhaps someday we can experience this together in reality.

Regardless of the distance apart this Lent, we will always be together in Spirit.

—Pastor Kris



Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Holy Land: A Journey

Luke 1:1-4: ¹Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Reflection: A trip to the Holy Land changes one's perspective on reading God's Word. Seeing the landscape, how people live, the cultural differences and the climate all played a role in recording these events. One can imagine more clearly the life of the people of whom these accounts were written and to those these accounts were written. What impressed me the most was what Moses might have realized as he approached the burning bush—the awe and wonder of God's presence in this Holy Land.

"O God, we give thanks to you for this Holy Land and the holy land of which you walk with us every day. Amen."

Video: Virtual Israel Tour Day 1: Our Journey Begins

Link: <https://youtu.be/7aDRVLjGLCw>

Thursday, February 18, 2021

Israel: The Land for Many

Psalm 130

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

²LORD, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

³If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
LORD, who could stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

⁵I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

⁶my soul waits for the LORD
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the LORD!

For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Reflection: Psalm 130 talks about waiting and watching for the Word of hope, the hope of redemption. Usually, we think of Advent as a time of waiting and watching, but it also is true in the time of Lent. It is a different kind of waiting and watching as we travel with Jesus on the way to the cross. We see the signs, we know the story, yet we wait in anticipation for God's redeeming grace.

"O God, in our watching and waiting, help us see our humanity as it truly is, in need of the Savior. Amen."

Video: The Best of Israel

Link: <https://youtu.be/qeVvuph2WAQ>

Friday, February 19, 2021

Tel Hazor: A Key City

1 Kings 9:10-21: ¹⁰At the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD and the king's house, ¹¹King Hiram of Tyre having supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress timber and gold, as much as he desired, King Solomon gave to Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. ¹²But when Hiram came from Tyre to see the cities that Solomon had given him, they did not please him. ¹³Therefore he said, "What kind of cities are these that you have given me, my brother?" So they are called the land of Cabul to this day. ¹⁴But Hiram had sent to the king one hundred twenty talents of gold.

¹⁵This is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon conscripted to build the house of the LORD and his own house, the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer ¹⁶(Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up and captured Gezer and burned it down, had killed the Canaanites who lived in the city, and had given it as dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife; ¹⁷so Solomon rebuilt Gezer), Lower Beth-horon, ¹⁸Baalath, Tamar in the wilderness, within the land, ¹⁹as well as all of Solomon's storage cities, the cities for his chariots, the cities for his cavalry, and whatever Solomon desired to build, in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion. ²⁰All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel — ²¹their descendants who were still left in the land, whom the Israelites were unable to destroy completely — these Solomon conscripted for slave labor, and so they are to this day.



Tel Hazor

Reflection: Tel Hazor is one of the largest archaeological sites in Israel. North of the Sea of Galilee, it was a key Canaanite city, conquered by Joshua's army and claimed as the land of the Hebrew God of Israel. Later, it was a key city for King Solomon. This city was the site of one of Solomon's palaces built on the backs of slaves. This well-built fortress, however, was no match for the invading armies of Assyria during the time of King Jehu. Despite the defenses, Hazor was captured in 732 BC. Its population was taken into exile, and the city was burned to the ground.

Walking around this site feels a bit surreal. You are literally standing on thousands of years of history. One can almost feel the cries of the people that we killed or enslaved to gain power. The last conquest is recorded in the Bible and attributed to the punishment of the people for turning their backs on God and worshipping other gods. God's prophets had warned of this. As the Assyrians burned the city, killed many and captured others including the King, God was silent.

"O God, your saving grace makes it possible for open communication between us. Thank you for your continued presence in our lives. Amen"

Video: What Important Biblical Event Happened at Hazor?

Link: <https://youtu.be/Sfa4WePudyo>

Saturday, February 20, 2021

Hebron: Father Abraham

Genesis 25:7-11: ⁷This is the length of Abraham's life, one hundred seventy-five years. ⁸Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. ⁹His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, ¹⁰the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with his wife Sarah. ¹¹After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

Reflection: People often have scoffed that there wasn't a real man named Abraham. But, alas, they would be

wrong. He was the father of two great nations, Israel and Islam. Here lies the struggle. As we travel through Israel, we will see this struggle come alive. In many areas, Muslims and Jews live side by side peacefully, and in other places, great walls are erected. Life for the Palestinians, the majority of Muslims, is fraught with poverty and barriers, both physical and cultural. One has to wonder what God was thinking and how a fallen humanity can get beyond itself to live in peace.

“O God of all the earth, help us see what you envision for us, and make us instruments of your love and peace. Amen.”

Video: Hebron, Palestine: Tomb of Abraham

Link: <https://youtu.be/-HcMoiyTahc>