

VIEW WEST: THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE BEATITUDES ON THE MOUNT OF BEATITUDES OVERLOOKING TABGHA AND THE SEA OF GALILEE (UPPER LEFT). ALSO VISIBLE ARE MT. ARBEL, THE HORNS OF HATTIN, MT. NITAI, AND THE PLAIN OF GENNESARET (TOP).



PAINTING BY CARL BLOCH (1834–1890): CHRIST AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

PREFACE

This book is not a typical guidebook about the Holy Land. I wrote it for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints so I can quote modern prophets and Restoration scriptures (e.g., Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price). Nevertheless, it is intended for anyone interested in the Holy Land.

Blessed Pilgrimage accompanies my website, BibleLandImages.com, where you can download the book's photos for personal and educational purposes. Access is free. The objective is to introduce you to the Holy Land with text, pictures, and Landsat 9 natural-color satellite imagery.

A book can't replace an in-person tour of the Holy Land. Nevertheless, with a map and images of the land fixed in your mind, it's possible to experience much of the land and learn from its lessons. If that were not so, most people, who can't visit the Holy Land, would never have an opportunity to experience the land made holy by Jesus Christ. For suggestions on how to experience the Holy Land in person or on a virtual tour, see chapter 3, "Experience to Learn."

As a guidebook, *Blessed Pilgrimage* is notable for another reason, certainly the most important reason: its purpose is to celebrate the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the Messiah of the Old and New Testaments. We live in a world losing faith in the Son of God, His life, and His mission. Thus these pages dwell on subjects like faith, hope, charity, the two great commandments, and many of Christ's other teachings. The purpose is to strengthen your faith and mine in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who came to show us the way to everlasting happiness, teach us the truth about creation's divine purpose, and sacrifice His life, enabling the attainment of every good gift, including eternal life. Thus salvation or everlasting peace is in Christ and Him only. There is no way but His way.¹

To my Christian and non-Christian friends who may discover and read this book, please enjoy its ethical teachings, satellite maps, drawings, photographs, and small bites of geography, history, and archaeology. On

matters of faith, we may not believe in the same way or in the same things. Nevertheless, there is much to celebrate and learn from each other without dwelling on our differences.



THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR BUILDING
IN HAIFA, ISRAEL.

SPECIAL FEATURES

I lived in Israel for eighteen months between 2021 and 2024. Six months a year is the maximum time allowed on a tourist visa. I learned this during a visit to the Ministry of the Interior, where I pled my case for a one-year extension. I got a friendly “It’s not allowed!” (באמת זה אסור!) and received a three-month extension instead.

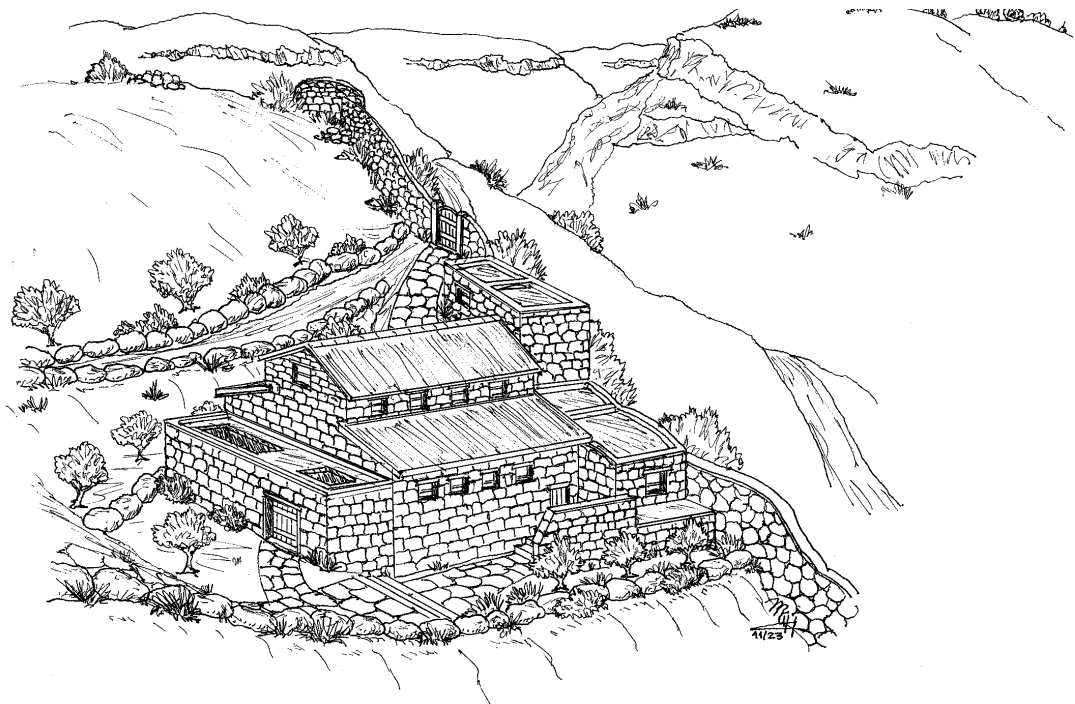
For *Blessed Pilgrimage*, I compiled a list of sites visited by most people touring the Holy Land. I went to the sites, taking pictures at different times of the day and in different kinds of weather. As I got into the project more, I decided to expand my efforts beyond what most tourists see to include dozens of biblical and extra-biblical sites of interest. The book focuses on these as a way of showing you the land.

This book is unique in the number of its panoramic (see photo *below* and on page xxii) and aerial photographs (see the bottom photo on page xxi). These will help you visualize sites and places in the context of their surroundings. As you tour Israel, you will encounter many places of interest that you won’t have time to visit that your guide may discuss on the bus as you pass by. Also, many of the photos in this book are not the traditional views but are meant to expose you to the entire land of Israel, beyond what you normally see on a tour or in a typical photo book.

Another special feature of the book is the number of drawings it contains, showing you what a synagogue or other structure may have looked like in antiquity. They will help you bridge that gap between the reality of a photo or place as it appears today and your imagination of what it looked like anciently. Modern Israel conflicts with the ancient one, a reality you have to deal with in the Holy Land.

BELOW (VIEW NORTH): THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN FROM MT. TURAN IN LOWER GALILEE, LOOKING TOWARD THE MUCH HIGHER MOUNTAINS OF UPPER GALILEE (TOP).





VIEW NORTHEAST: THE FIRST-CENTURY SYNAGOGUE OF GAMLA. TO SEE THIS DRAWING IN CONTEXT WITH PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SITE, SEE "GAMLA" ON PAGE 275. ALSO SEE APPENDIX A ON PAGE 295.

BELOW (VIEW WEST): THE NORTHERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE, WITH A VIEW OF BOTH CAPERNAUMS: THE WHITE SYNAGOGUE (CENTER) AND THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES (LOWER CENTER). SEE A PANORAMIC DETAIL OF THE CHURCH AT THE TOP OF PAGE XXII AND IN THE BOTTOM MAP ON PAGE XXIII.





VIEW EAST: A PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES (EASTERN CAPERNAUM), LOOKING ACROSS THE SEA OF GALILEE TOWARD BIBLICAL GERGESA (KURSI), WHERE JESUS CAST OUT DEVILS AND ALLOWED THEM TO ENTER A HERD OF SWINE (SEE MATT. 8:28–34 AND THE BOTTOM MAP ON PAGE XXIII).

The drawings were done by my good friend Michael Hansen. He and his wife Ann are citizens of Israel, where they have lived for more than forty years. Mike has a way of incorporating his knowledge of the land into each drawing (see the sample on page xxi).²

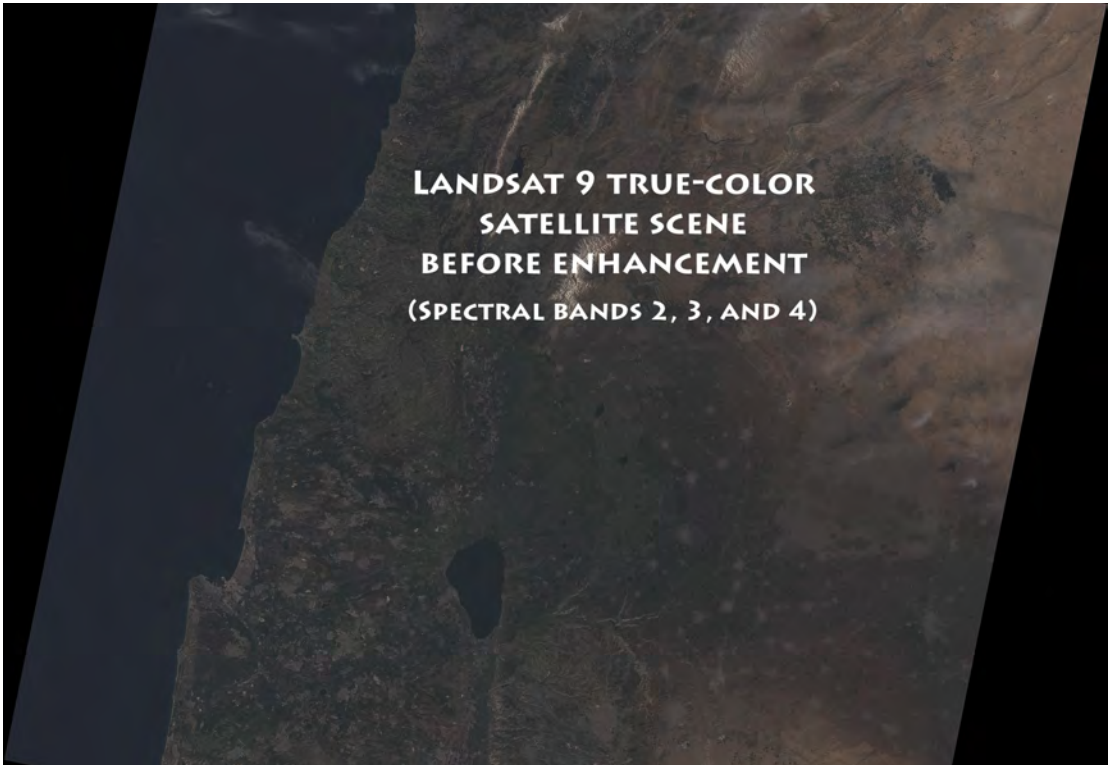
SATELLITE IMAGES

Years ago, I downloaded a collection of Landsat 8 satellite images that stretch from Italy in the north around the lands of the eastern Mediterranean Sea and then south, down to Egypt. Together, these areas make up a region called the Levant. Images from Landsat 9 (with many improvements) began coming out in October 2021, so I've updated my database. In recreating the maps used in this book and on the website, I took advantage of ten years of technical improvements in the imaging tools, including Natural Scene Designer Pro and three of Adobe's products (Lightroom Classic, Photoshop, and Illustrator).

Individual Landsat 9 scenes cover about 115 by 115 miles (185 by 185 kilometers) of the earth's surface with eleven spectral bands containing different information. I combine the 30-meter RGB "true color" bands (2, 3, and 4) with the 15-meter panchromatic band (8) to produce the maps. When the bands are merged in Adobe Photoshop, they look like the image at the top of page xxiii. Vertical photographs taken from high altitudes differ greatly from what we perceive as natural color on the ground. Green colors, for example, are much darker and water is generally black. The combined image ends up very dark for reasons having to do with how light is reflected from the earth's surface. The information we need is all there, but the images have to be enhanced to see it. Compare the two satellite scenes on page xxiii. I used Natural Scene Designer Pro to create the three-dimensional effect in the bottom scene.

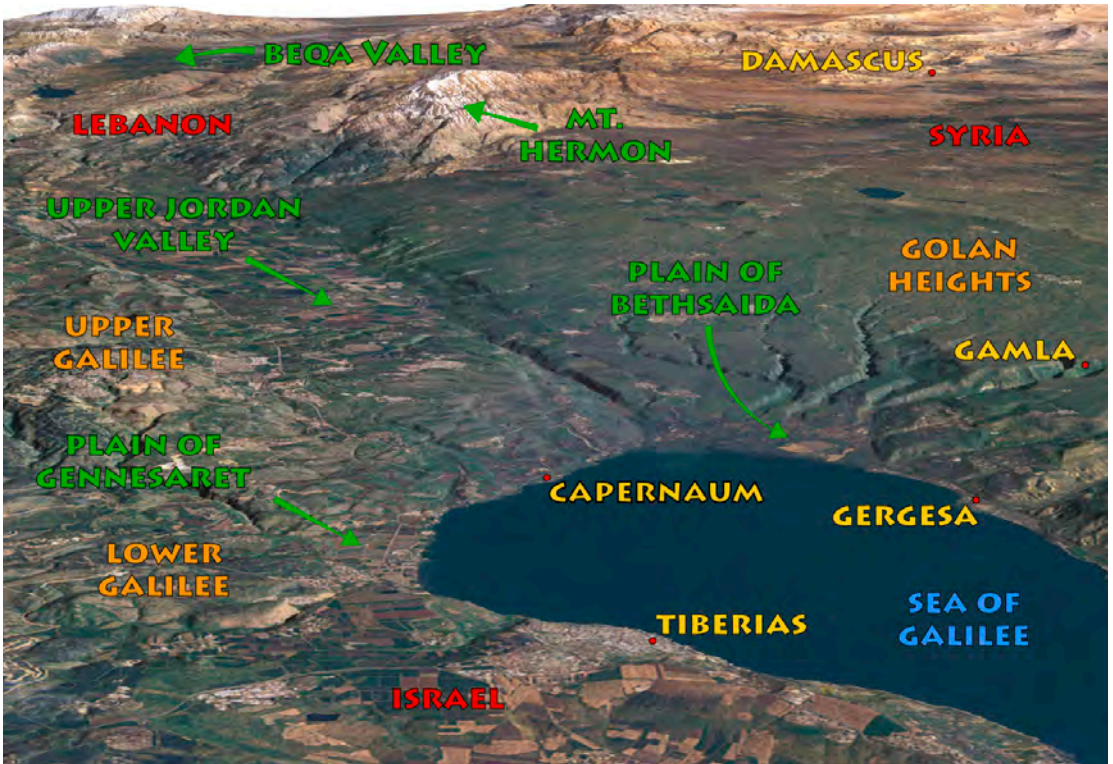
What's fun about satellite maps on the website is it doesn't matter how you display them, whether on a smartphone, tablet, or computer. The overlay is programmatically generated based on GPS coordinates, so the names always appear in the same place. Capernaum, with its dot, is accurately placed regardless of the display size. You can remove the overlay with a button click to get an unobstructed view of the land. All maps come with ground and aerial photos. The combination of maps and pictures will give you a pretty good feel for what the land looks like, which you can use in your daily study of the Bible.

The photo of Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee (see bottom photo on page xxi) goes nicely with the satellite map on the bottom of page xxiii. It was raining the day I took the photo with my drone, which was part of the experience (see chapter 3, "Experience to Learn"). I walked from Capernaum, following the shoreline east to the other side of the lake, where I ascended the canyon to Gamla overlooking the Sea of Galilee from the Golan Heights.



VIEW NORTH: LANDSAT 9 SATELLITE IMAGE BEFORE BEING ENHANCED. THIS IS THE RESULT AFTER COMBINING THE 30-METER RGB BANDS WITH THE 15-METER PANCHROMATIC BAND, PROVIDING THE IMAGE WITH 15-METER DETAIL.

BELOW (VIEW NORTHEAST): LANDSAT 9 SATELLITE IMAGE AFTER ENHANCEMENT. THE 3-D EFFECT IS CREATED BY COMBINING THE SATELLITE IMAGE WITH ITS TERRAIN MODEL USING SPECIAL SOFTWARE.





VIEW NORTH: THE JUDEAN DESERT WEST OF QUMRAN AND THE DEAD SEA. IF YOU FOLLOW THE ROAD, IT EVENTUALLY DROPS DOWN TO KIBBUTZ KALYA ON THE DEAD SEA.

ON THE TRAIL

My usual pattern was to start each day early and take a bus or train to somewhere in the country, where I would begin to hike. Walking made it possible to get photos that were impossible to capture while driving around in a car. Experiencing the land on foot, often leaving trails as I walked through fields and orchards, over and under fences, helped me better understand the country, its history, and its people. I hiked over 2,000 miles (3,200 kilometers) in eighteen months, which gave me plenty of time to think about where I was going and what I was doing.

One day I was walking back from Capernaum to the junction on Highway 65 to catch a bus back to Tiberias and from there to Haifa. I admit to being especially tired after a long day and many miles, with another couple of miles to go before reaching the junction. Out of the blue, a car pulled over, stopping right before me. In it was an older couple from Ramat Gan, near Tel Aviv. They asked where I was going and if I needed a ride. In other words, they wanted to know if I was okay.

I explained that I was on my way to Tiberias. They must not have believed I was okay because they insisted I get in, which I (thankfully) did. They were on vacation, driving around the country and staying in different places at night. These were the COVID months, when few Israelis left the country. The couple was not, however, on their way to Tiberias. The man must have been concerned about me because he abruptly said, “We’ll take you to Tiberias.” It wasn’t an offer. It was “This is what we’re going to do.” Well, I was happy and grateful. We enjoyed a delightful conversation en route. Between my broken Hebrew and the woman’s non-native, basic English, we got along fine. It was a good experience that happened to me more than once on hikes around the country. People frequently stop to see if I need help. The conversation usually starts with questions like “Are you okay?” or “Can we give you a ride?” or “Do you need water?”

I had a different experience walking alone in the desert on the plateau overlooking ancient Qumran—hot day, bright sun, about noon, as I recall. You get the picture (see *above* photo). Earlier in the day, the



VIEW EAST: WADI ARUGOT, SOUTH OF QUMRAN NEAR THE DEAD SEA. NOTICE THE PEOPLE HIKING THE TRAIL IN THE PHOTO (TOP LEFT). THEY PROVIDE PERSPECTIVE ON THE MAJESTY OF THE CANYON.

only person I saw was a Bedouin boy on a donkey. Then out of nowhere came three Hyundai-type vehicles loaded to the max. A group of men were out exploring the desert and seemed to be having a good time. Oh, how I wish I had a photo of what I remember seeing that day.

Picture this scene if you can: I'm in the middle of nowhere, several miles from anywhere. I'm out there to experience the Judean desert up close. The men in the vehicles wave as they drive by. They don't stop to check on me, ask what I'm doing or whether I need anything—maybe a little water, which I do. Nope. They just wave and smile. At that moment, for whatever reason, I remember the experience I described above with the couple from Ramat Gan and literally laugh out loud. Picture three vehicles and six men traveling through the Judean desert with all the comforts of home. Now picture me, with my twenty-five-pound camera backpack and half a bottle of water, walking alone through the lower reaches of the desert above Qumran. Somewhere in these two experiences, there's a lesson as you and I strive in our own way to walk the Way of Christ the Lord.³

A TROUBLED LAND

Middle Eastern conflicts have existed since the beginning of recorded history. And yet, sound religious values, if followed, can solve the region's problems. Everyone, regardless of religious affiliation, must *act* on what they believe and teach others to do. The world is doomed without religion. Its moral foundations are the only things holding society together. Without it, civilization as we know it will die. Religion orients your life toward a higher purpose, something bigger than yourself. It requires community, people who worship the same God and aim for the same things. When religion is forced to take a back seat, the void is filled with radical, secular groups that don't have society's interests at heart. Visiting the Holy Land, especially with people who share your beliefs, may encourage you to do and be better than you are today.⁴

As one who believes in Jesus Christ, I accept Him and the gospel He taught as indispensable to human



VIEW WEST: THE DOME OF THE ROCK ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT IN JERUSALEM. ALSO VISIBLE IN THE BACKGROUND IS THE MAJESTIC DORMITION ABBEY (TOP LEFT).

happiness. He is the answer to every major issue in life.⁵ You don't have to be Christian, Jewish, or Muslim to understand that treating your neighbor the way you want them to treat you is a tenet of good faith that, if embraced by all, would solve most of the world's problems, including ignorance, strife, and the sad plight of many who go without the necessities of life (adequate food, clothing, and shelter).

All three major religions in the Middle East teach loving your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

The Lord told Moses, "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. 19:18).

The following passage from the Koran seems important given Middle Eastern conflicts: "Serve God, and join not any partners with Him; and do good—to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, *neighbors* who are near, *neighbors* who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet)" (Al-Nisaa 4:36, emphasis added).

Yes, the answer for world peace is to love God and your neighbor. As Jesus said, this *is* "the Law and the Prophets."⁶

WHERE I LIVE IN ISRAEL

I've been staying with a friend in Nesher, a town next to Haifa on the northeastern slope of Mount Carmel. From time to time, I rent an Airbnb in places where I want to spend more than a day or two, which helps me avoid a long bus or train ride from Haifa at the start of the day. Jericho was one such place. I stayed with a family that served traditional meals from their kitchen. Every night I ordered a different meal, my introduction to Palestinian cuisine. *Fabulous* doesn't capture how good the food or the company was. The money was well spent, and the experience was better than eating out in a local restaurant.



VIEW NORTH: THE CITY OF NESHER OVERLOOKING HAIFA BAY AND THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA. I LIVED IN AN OLDER APARTMENT BUILDING (LOWER CENTER).

The owner, Mohammed, was a wonderful host. One of his children carried a platter of food to my door every night. The oldest boy, probably around age ten, wanted to bring me the meal so he could practice English. He was pretty shy, however, so we didn't converse much. My experience staying in Jericho at the Airbnb and spending time with the family is now a sweet memory. I plan to return and stay there again.

I had many such experiences on my adventures in Israel. I also used Airbnbs in Jerusalem, Beit Jala next to Bethlehem, and Mishmar HaYarden in the Upper Jordan Valley north of the Sea of Galilee. I stayed in Beit Jala three times for extended periods. The apartment is beautiful. The family is wonderful, and Suad is an excellent cook. I know because she and Charlie invited me for Christmas dinner in 2022 (see Appendix A, Beit Jala in *Blessed Pilgrimage*, vol. 2). Every adventure has a memory attached to it. If you visit Israel, remember to record your experiences. You'll be glad you did.



KAFTA IN A TRAY: PALESTINIAN GROUND MEAT PATTIES IN TOMATO SAUCE.

DON'T TAKE PICTURES!

When I say not to take pictures, what I mean is, consider not taking many photos of sites and places you visit on your tour of the Holy Land. Listen to the guide. Absorb your surroundings. Enjoy the views, the message, and the environment. When you take pictures, focus on people, including the ones in your group. These photos will mean the most to you when you return home. They are your memories of the time you spent in the Holy Land. I've been to the places you're likely to visit, so there's a good chance I have captured a picture for you. Put these with the ones you take, adding personal notes of your daily experiences. I also



VIEW WEST: THE VALLEY BETWEEN JOTAPATA AND KHIRBET QANA (CANA OF GALILEE). THIS IS THE WAY JESUS WOULD HAVE WALKED BETWEEN THE CITIES. SEE “CANA OF GALILEE” ON PAGE 105.

include pictures of places you’re not likely to visit so you can see the Holy Land you don’t experience on tour. The top photo on page xxix of the Beit Netofa Valley is a good example. The valley has no public road through it, so it’s impossible for tour buses to travel this way. The Beit Netofa is one of Israel’s beautiful valleys that most people will never see except in a photo like this one.

The valley in the photo *above* connects Roman Jotapata and Cana of Galilee, which are not sites you are likely to visit on tour. The road between the two towns was one Jesus would have taken as He “went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matt. 9:35). For context, the valley in the photo runs between the mountains pictured in the top photo on page xxix (upper right). Cana of Galilee is near the end of the valley on its north side. The ancient site was on the sunlit hill above the trees and below the mountains that form a v-shape behind it.

DO TAKE NOTES

We take pictures of family and friends to help us remember life’s journey. The memory, however, is not so much in the images but in the experiences that accompany them. Photos help, but after a while, knowledge of the information they contain begins to fade (including names!). Capturing your experiences in writing to combine with the pictures is very important if you want to remember your time on tour.

Here’s a suggestion: Make daily notes about what you see and feel in the land. Impressions to become a better friend, neighbor, parent, child, or sibling are especially good. The notes don’t have to be lengthy or polished. Put down enough information to help you remember what is important later. Combining pictures and notes with personal impressions will capture your trip in a way you’ll not likely forget over time. Trust me. I’ve learned the hard way. You forget what you think you’ll never forget, so write it down. It’s a principle with a promise. It’s a way of showing God, the Father of us all, what’s important to you. He responds with additional insights and direction.⁷



VIEW WEST: THE BEIT NETOFA VALLEY WITH KHIRBET QANA (CANA OF GALILEE) AT ITS WESTERN END (UPPER RIGHT). THE VALLEY WAS ONE OF THE MAJOR ROUTES THROUGH LOWER GALILEE IN JESUS'S DAY.

BELOW (VIEW WEST): THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN IN UPPER GALILEE NEAR THE CRUSADER MONTFORT CASTLE. IT LOOKS OUT OVER NAHAL KEZIV, WHICH DRAINS NEAR NAHARIYA ON THE MEDITERRANEAN COAST (TOP).



A FINAL THOUGHT

It's not possible to see everything on a ten-day tour of the Holy Land, which is all the more reason to come to Israel as often as your time, budget, and on-the-ground circumstances allow. If you never get to Israel (or even if you do), visit BibleLandImages.com to study the maps and photos until you can visualize the land in your mind. Then, as you read the Bible, you will start to see the physical context of each story.

The land's allure comes from its history and its position between the world's oldest civilizations: Egypt, the empires of Mesopotamia, the Greek nation-states surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, and Rome. It also comes from its beautiful landscapes and varied topography, which surprise people who think of Israel as a desert. Much of it is, but it also has gorgeous green valleys and streams that fill the Sea of Galilee.

I hope that *Blessed Pilgrimage* will benefit your life in some small way at home or in the Holy Land on tour. *Please* share the book and free website with friends who are interested in learning more about the Holy Land. I take pictures with you in mind, hoping you will enjoy them as much as I have enjoyed producing them. I did it for you.

BELOW: THE FLOWERS IN THIS PHOTO WERE TAKEN IN WADI AMUD BETWEEN SAFED AND THE SEA OF GALILEE. THIS IS ISRAEL'S NATIONAL FLOWER, THE ANEMONE CORONARIA. JESUS CALLED THEM "LILIES OF THE FIELD" (SEE MATT. 6:28–33).



ENDNOTES

1 Quentin L. Cook, “Be Peaceable Followers of Christ,” *Liabona* (Nov. 2023), Gospel Library. “As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I testify that ‘peaceable followers of Christ’ [see Moroni 7:3] will find personal peace in this life and a glorious heavenly reunion. I bear a sure witness of the Savior’s divinity and the reality of His Atonement. He is our Savior and Redeemer.”

2 Since I wrote these words, Michael Hansen took ill and passed away. See Appendix A, “Michael A. Hansen—In Memoriam,” on page 295.

3 Jesus taught the Golden Rule: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12). In related verses, He taught His followers in both the old world and the new, “Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:17–20, 3 Ne. 14:17–20). And also, “For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; *or whosoever will save his life, shall be willing to lay it down for my sake; and if he is not willing to lay it down for my sake, he shall lose it.* But whosoever shall *be willing to* lose his life for my sake, and the gospel, the same shall save it” (JST, Mark 8:37–38).

4 Ulisses Soares, “In Awe of Christ and His Gospel,” *Liabona* (May 2022), Gospel Library. “I have a dear friend who is a brilliant, retired university professor, a prolific author, and, above all, a committed disciple of Jesus Christ. He has visited the Holy Land dozens of times to participate in conferences, conduct academic research, and lead tours. According to him, every time he visits the land where Jesus walked, he marvels because he undoubtedly learns something new, astonishing, and fascinating about the Savior, His mortal ministry, and His beloved homeland. The awe my friend shows when he talks about all that he learns in the Holy Land is contagious, and this amazement has been fundamental in his great achievements and academic pursuits in his life.”

5 Russell M. Nelson, “The Answer Is Always Jesus Christ,” *Liabona* (May 2023), Gospel Library. “Dear brothers and sisters, . . . I plead with you to come unto [Jesus Christ] so that He can heal you! He will heal you from sin as you repent. He will heal you from sadness and fear. He will heal you from the wounds of this world. Whatever questions or problems you have, the answer is always found in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Learn more about His Atonement, His love, His mercy, His doctrine, and His restored gospel of healing and progression. Turn to Him! Follow Him!” Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liabona* (May 2023), Gospel Library. “Contention drives away the Spirit—every time. Contention reinforces the false notion that confrontation is the way to resolve differences; but it never is. Contention is a choice. Peacemaking is a choice. You have your agency to choose contention or reconciliation. I urge you to *choose* to be a peacemaker, now and always (see Moroni 7:3–4)” (emphasis in original).

6 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “First Presidency Issues Statement on Middle East Violence,” news release, Oct. 12, 2023, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/first-presidency-statement-middle-east-violence>. The First Presidency issued the statement after Hamas terrorists attacked and killed 1,200 innocent Israeli citizens, men, women, and children, on Oct. 7, 2023: “We are devastated by the recent eruption of violence and loss of life in the Middle East. Violence of this nature is abhorrent to us and is not in harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is a gospel of peace. At such times, our hearts ache for all victims of this atrocity. As servants of God, we affirm that He calls upon all of us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and we pray for a peaceful resolution of all conflicts.”

7 Richard G. Scott, “How to Obtain Revelation and Inspiration for Your Personal Life,” *Liabona* (May 2012), Gospel Library. “When it is for the Lord’s purposes, He can bring anything to our remembrance. That should not weaken our determination to record impressions of the Spirit. Inspiration carefully recorded shows God that His communications are sacred to us. Recording will also enhance our ability to recall revelation. Such recording of direction of the Spirit should be protected from loss or intrusion by others.”