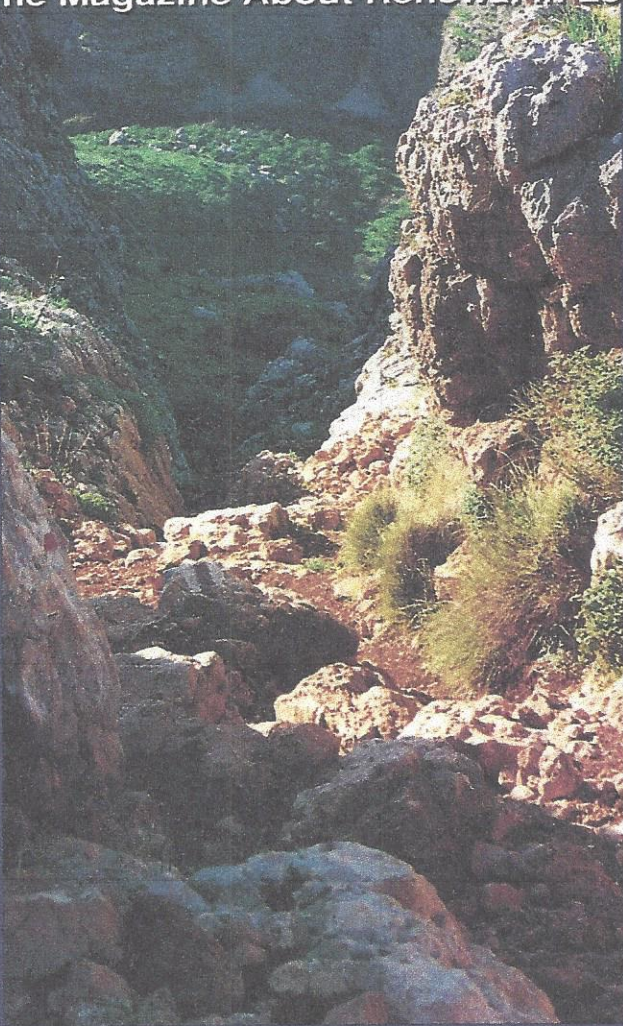


Ministry for the '90s: Restoring Fallen Leaders

Ministries

TODAY

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A PASTOR TAKES HIS MEN TO ISRAEL



THE HOLY LAND
THROUGH THE EYES OF
JAMIE BUCKINGHAM



A Pastor's Gift

By Jamie Buckingham
Photos by Bruce Buckingham

The idea of taking my staff pastors to Israel first ignited when I began praying last year about my Christmas gift to them. As their senior pastor, I wanted to give them something significant, something that would express my love and appreciation for them.

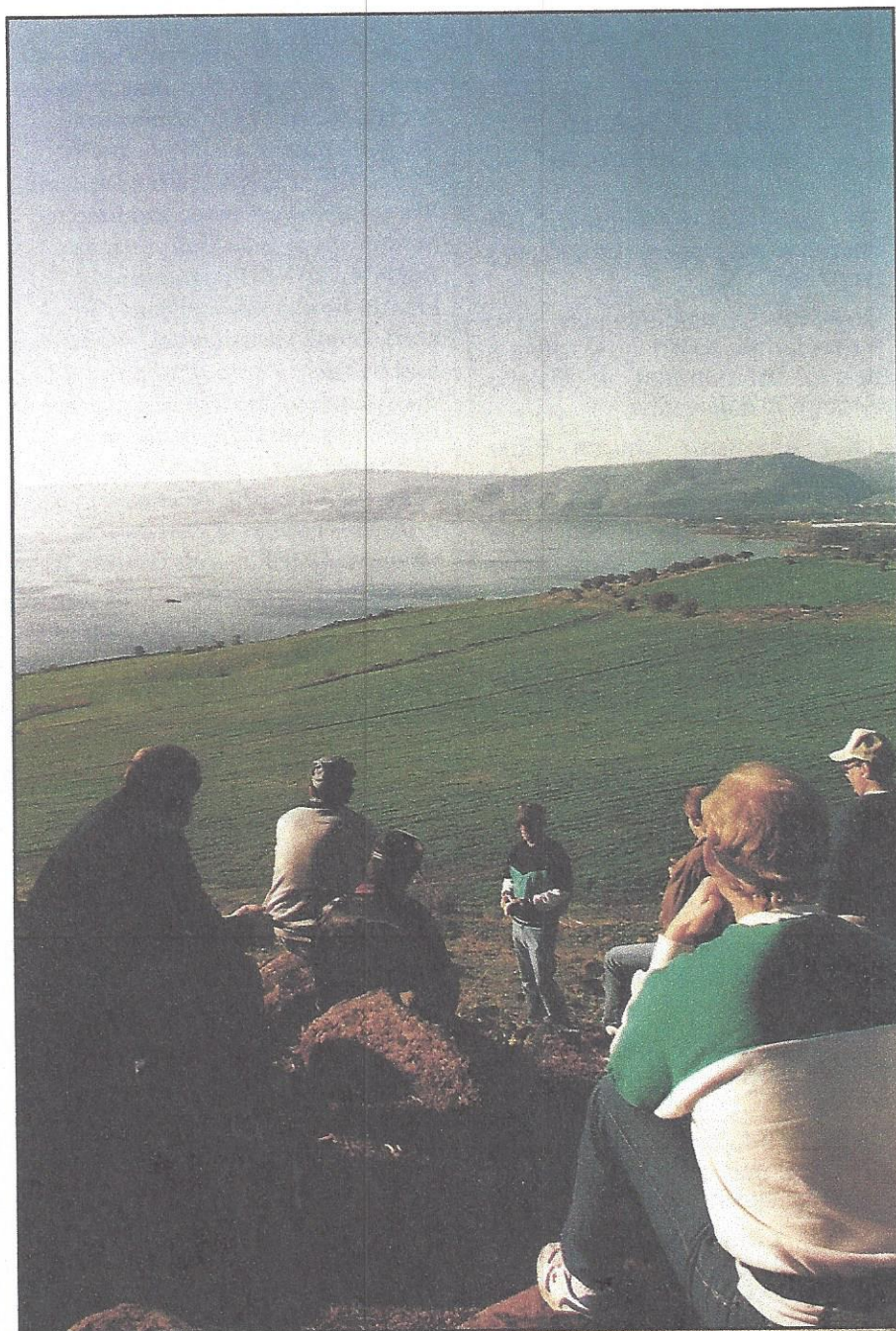
What unique thing did I have to give? The answer came immediately: I could show them the Holy Land through my eyes.

Over the years I had made 20 trips to Israel—mostly to hike or to do research. I had come to know the land well and to love it. The thought of taking some men to my favorite spots was exciting.

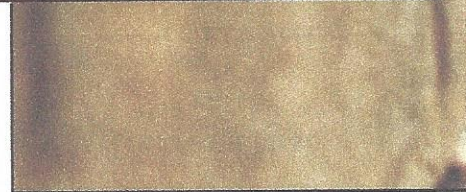
I learned that Jim Jackson with CBU Tours in Montreat, North Carolina, was leading a large tour the last week of January 1990. Since it was off-season and the tour was short (nine days), the price was only \$1,300. Each "tour host" who enlisted travelers on the CBU tour received one free trip for every three persons he signed up. I figured if I paid my own way, I could refund \$300 to each of my men—lowering their cost to \$1,000 each plus airfare from Florida to New York City.

Although three of our pastors could not go, our church agreed to pay the expenses for the other five. Then, since we would be traveling in a 20-passenger minibus, I expanded the group—inviting my two sons, two sons-in-law, two elders and their adult sons, plus eight other key young leaders. The group totaled 20 men, most of whom had never been to Israel.

The plan was to fly to Israel from New York with the CBU group, stay



Above: Here, on the Mount of Beatitudes overlooking the blue Galilee, Jesus gathered His disciples and taught them. **Right:** Praying for the "peace of Jerusalem" at the Western Wall.



Taking your men to Israel can change your life

in their hotels and eat breakfast and dinner with them—all of which was covered in the cost of the tour. However, while the larger group toured during the day in big buses, I would take our men in the minibus to those places I wanted to go.

There was a lot of excitement among the men. We met twice to discuss clothing and climate. (January in Israel can be cold and rainy.) I urged the men to bring only jeans, sweaters, sneakers—and to stuff everything into one carry-on bag.

We left Melbourne, Florida, on a Sunday afternoon, transferred to an Israeli airline in New York and flew



Evening on the Mount of Olives at Gethsemane is a time of quiet sharing and meditation for the men.

non-stop to Tel Aviv—arriving Monday at 4 p.m.

Our minibus driver, a personable young Christian Arab from Nazareth, was waiting for us at Ben Gurion Airport. I had worked with Nassim Hadad on earlier videotaping excursions and had specifically requested him for the trip.

(Others planning a similar tour should use a licensed guide. Guides generally want you to see as many sites as possible. However, my plan

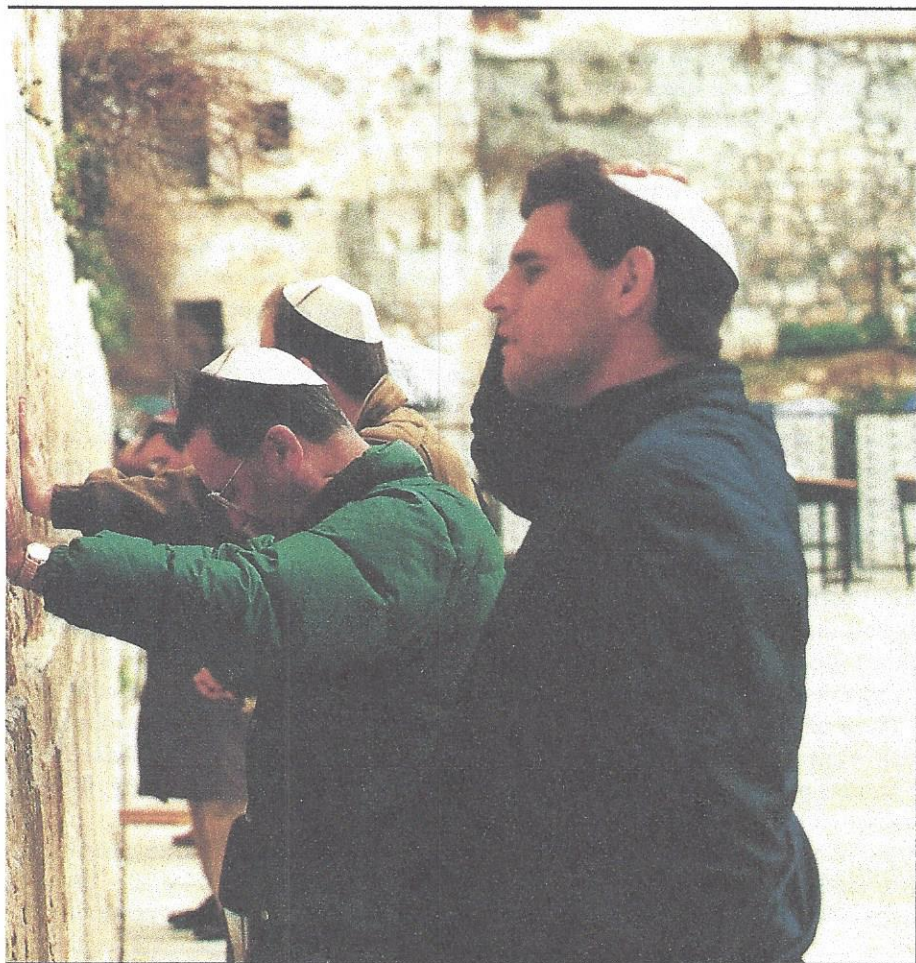
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was to visit only a few places that were particularly meaningful to me, do some hiking and allow time to be alone with God.)

From the airport we went straight to our hotel in Tel Aviv. After-dinner excitement began when 12 of us squeezed into an eight-passenger elevator. Suddenly we were stuck between floors. During the next hour we got to know each other unusually well. One of the fellows had a video camera and recorded the entire ordeal before our rescue: panic, laughter, shouting and wisecracks. It was a great introduction to our small group experience.

Early the next morning we got up and drove north along the Mediterranean shore to Caesarea. After a quick tour of the ancient Roman ruins and the harbor, we drove to the summit of Mount Carmel. I read to the men the story of Elijah's confrontation with the priests of Baal—perhaps at that same spot. Then we went on to Haifa, eating lunch (*falafel* and *schwarma* stuffed into pita bread) while standing at one of the busy street stands.

That afternoon we did our first





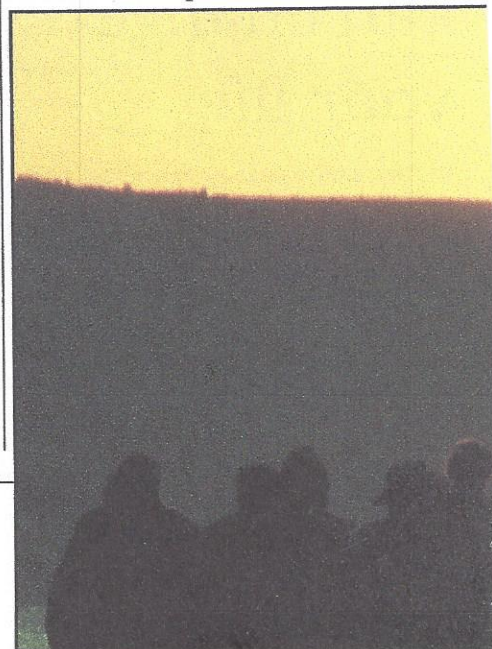
The narrow streets of Jerusalem's Old City reveal an odd mixture of East and West, old and new.

bit of mountain climbing. Heading inland across northern Israel, we stopped at Mount Meron, the country's highest peak. We walked to the top where we could see all the way across the nation—from the Mediterranean to Syria.

We planned to spend the night near the Sea of Galilee, but Nassim insisted we first visit his sister and her family who live in a tiny Arab village near the lake. It was after dark when we stopped at her husband's shop in the village—a town so small it wasn't even on our maps. The husband sent a child ahead to let his wife know we were coming.

"That crazy brother of yours is bringing 20 Americans for supper," he said.

The moment we got out of the bus we were surrounded by a dozen laughing Arab children. Giggling, they took us up a flight of outside stairs to a tiny second-floor apartment. As we squeezed into the little



Organizing a Trip to Israel

By Eliezer Hod

If you've never been to Israel but want to take a tour, start by contacting a regional Israel Government Tourist Office, then a travel agent or tour operator. The Israel Tourist Office does not sell trips to Israel, but it will furnish free information, brochures and maps. Travel agents or tour operators take care of all the details of the actual tour.

The most important part of organizing your tour is the unconditional decision that you are going to go and that you are going to take a group of your friends with you. Once you've taken that "step of faith," you are most of the way there.

Define the terms. You are the *tour host*. Other important participants may include:

- **Tour operator.** A professional tour planner—usually a Christian with tour experience—who will take care of all arrangements, from airline tickets to hotels to securing guides in Israel. He may or may not accompany you on your tour.
- **Travel agent:** A professional tour planner who will custom plan a

tour for you—but at a higher price than the tour operator.

- **Guide:** Licensed by the Israeli government, he will meet your plane and stay with you throughout the tour.

- **Driver:** Separate from the guide, he will drive your bus or coach.

Give yourself five months lead time if you want to be a tour host. That will allow you time to solicit travelers to go with you. Tour operators usually have their own representatives in Israel who will meet your group upon arrival and take care of all arrangements in the country. While the pastor (host) serves as the spiritual leader of his group, every group is accompanied throughout the tour by an English-speaking, government-licensed guide, who will take care of any problems that may arise.

Time of year? Unless you specifically want to visit during Christmas or Easter, it is better to choose a time when the prices are lower. The period of November-March (except Christmas) features the lowest prices—but you'll be subject to

possible rain and cold temperatures. June-August weather is hot. April and October are the best months, with moderate heat and no rain.

Length of stay? Most groups stay eight to eleven days. Remember, once you've paid your airfare, an additional week costs much less—if you feel you can miss an extra Sunday at your church.

Expenses? Many tour operators offer one free tour per a set number of travelers going with you at full price. (*Editor's Note: CBU's February tour, for instance, offers one free trip with three full-fare travelers—or an equivalent cash bonus. Contact: CBU Tours, P.O. Box 1000, Montreat, NC 28757.*) The price of the tour for each individual traveler represents the actual cost of airfare, hotels, meals and a small "operator's cost." Prices from the tour operator may or may not include the cost of airfare from your home city to the city of departure.

Compare price and value. One program may be priced lower—because it offers less. It may not in-

living room, more children showed up, bringing chairs from various houses. Nassim's sister served us cookies and thick, sweet Turkish coffee. We shared gifts—candy for the children and T-shirts for the

adults. It was a memorable visit.

That night we checked into the beautiful guest hostel at a Jewish *kibbutz*, Nof Ginossar, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. After a huge Israeli buffet in the dining



Sunrise over the Golan Heights on the Sea of Galilee.

clude meals, or may offer cheaper hotels, or may be shorter in length. Others may be more expensive because they offer special services or follow a unique route. Some offer "add-ons." For an additional fee you may go to Egypt, tour the Greek islands on a ship or stop over in Europe on the way back.

Beware of generalities. Terms such as "first class hotels" may not mean much. Tourist hotels in Israel are graded by "stars" from the highest class (5 stars) to the most modest (1 star). Demand to know the actual grade of hotels offered, meals furnished and any extra expenses.

The Israel Government Tourist Office will supply you with a list of tour operators and travel agents. However, the best recommendation is the one given by persons who have traveled in the past on a tour with a certain tour operator.

Keep in mind. Your trip to Israel is an extension of your ministry. Involve your congregation first before you try to enlist others from around the nation. Assume everyone in

your church wants to go. Encourage them to do so. Many tour operators will be glad to print a special brochure for you with your photograph, invitational message and itinerary details. Publicize your trip repeatedly. The best way to enlist travelers is by personal contact.

Safety in Israel. Despite exaggerated reports, Israel has one of the world's lowest crime rates. It is safer to walk in the streets of its cities than most American cities. If you have any questions, talk to someone who has visited recently and discover that tourists are safe from harm in Israel.

N'siah Tovah! (Bon Voyage!) ■

Eliezer Hod is director of the south-east U.S. region of the Israel Government Tourist Office, 1100 Spring St. NW, Suite 440, Atlanta, GA 30309. Phone: 1-800-752-3729. Other offices are located in New York, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, Washington, D.C., and many cities around the world.

room, we slept, listening to the waters of Galilee lapping at the shore outside our windows.

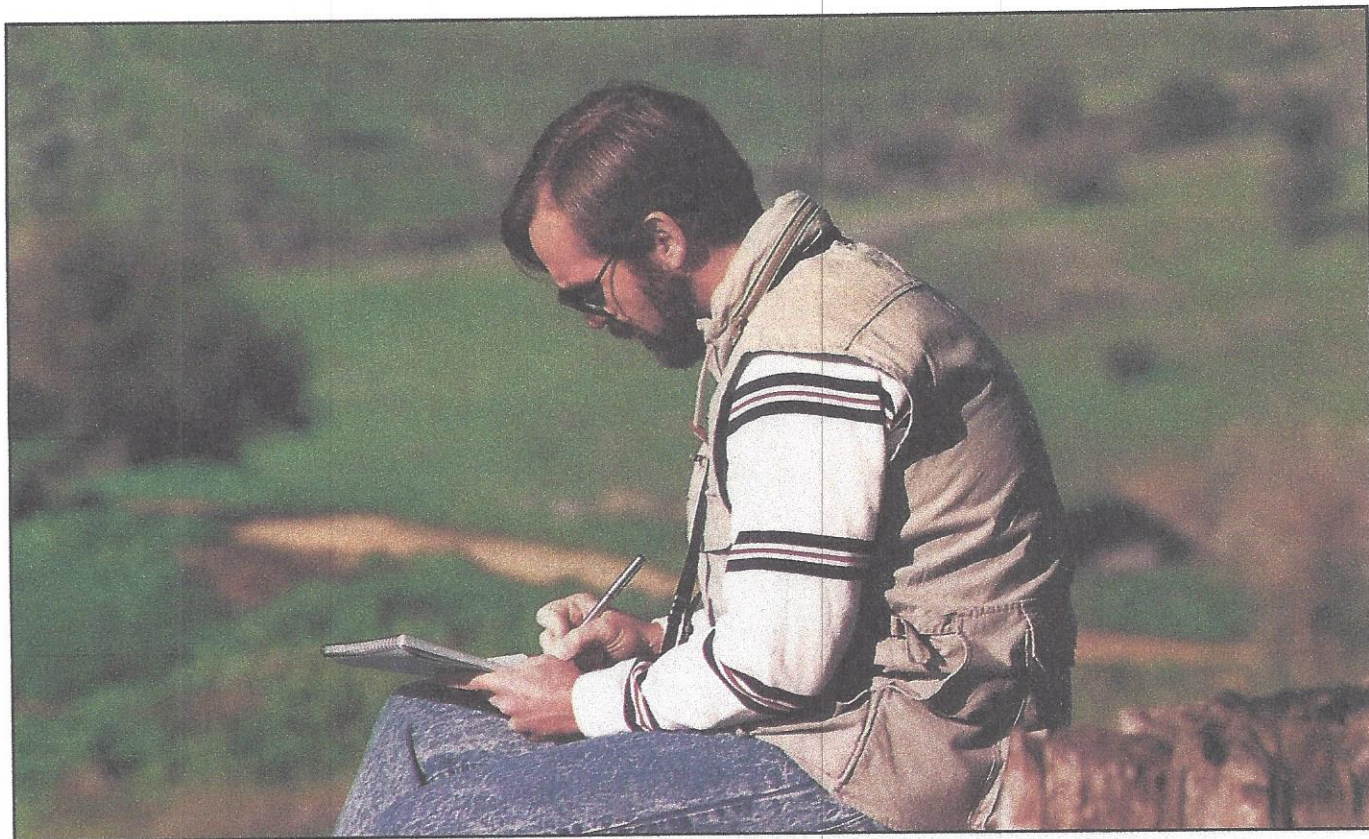
We arose 30 minutes before sunrise and went down to the beach. I asked the men to stand in silence as the sun crested the Golan Heights. Those were special moments as the eastern sky turned rose, pink, then red-orange, heralding the new day. A small fishing boat moved slowly through the mist, dragging nets from the night's catch. Each man had his own thoughts as scenes from the life of Jesus developed in front of our eyes.

After a buffet breakfast, we boarded the bus for the short ride around the lake to a beautiful, sloping plain on the side of the Mount of Beatitudes. Again I asked the men to sit in silence, looking at the incredibly blue Sea of Galilee. The sky was clear, the wind warm. I read aloud Matthew 5 and told them why, ultimately, I had brought them to Israel—to meet Jesus: the man, the Jew. It was, all agreed later, the most precious time of the entire trip.

The rest of the day was spent hiking. We drove to Gamla, high in the Golan Heights, and hiked down to the ruins of the ancient Jewish fortress where tourists never go. We moved on around the lake, down the steep Yarmuk Valley to the Jordan River. Mid-afternoon we headed to the top of Mount Arbel, towering 2,000 feet over the western shore above Tiberias.

It had rained the night before. Following a dirt road toward the top, our little bus got stuck in the mud. We unloaded. It took almost an hour of shoving and pushing to get it unstuck. Again I saw a delightful side of my men. The engineers among us came up with formulas, the young men put their strong shoulders against the fenders, and my oldest son—our official photographer—stood to one side laughing and taking pictures.

Rather than risk another mud-hole, we decided to walk the last mile to the summit. After enjoying a marvelous view of the Sea of Galilee, I gave a bit of mountain-climbing



On a remote mountaintop Steve Pauly contemplates God's call on his life.

instruction. We then scaled the northern cliff, going down hand-over-hand on steel pegs driven into the rocks. Halfway down we paused to explore the cave dwellings of the Zealots, Jewish freedom-fighters who resisted Roman rule. One of Jesus' disciples, Simon the Zealot, carried out guerrilla warfare from these caves before becoming a follower. It was dark when our bus met us at the bottom and returned us to the kibbutz.

Thursday we drove south through the Jordan Valley toward Jerusalem. We made several stops. The most exhilarating was a climb to the "Monastery of the Forty Days," perched 1,000 feet above Jericho on the side of a sheer rock cliff. After visiting the monastery we climbed on to the top of the mountain, another 2,000 feet above the lowest city in the world.

That night, at the Ramada Hotel in Jerusalem, we shared some of the feelings we had experienced to that point. Something was happening to each of us—not just spiritually, but relationally. We had become a family.

The next day, in a cold, misty rain, we drove down to the Dead Sea. After riding the cable car to the top of Masada, we walked down the steep "Serpent's Trail." Then we

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drove to the entrance of Wadi Arugot. It had stopped raining, and we walked seven miles up the narrow canyon, following a stream that ended in a hidden waterfall. Ibex and mountain goats were everywhere. It was here David decided he should "not touch God's anointed" when he had the chance to kill King Saul.

Our final days were spent in Jerusalem. We toured the Old City, shopped with the Jewish people and visited Bethlehem. The highlight, other than the quiet time we spent at the Garden Tomb, was the Sabbath morning church service at the Narkis Street Baptist Church. I spoke, and Jimmy Smith, one of our musicians, sang. Attendance was about 300—a mixture of Americans, Arabs and messianic Jews. There was prophecy and much singing in the Spirit.

We flew back to the United States Monday at midnight, arriving in Florida Tuesday afternoon. Our wives and children met us at the airport with banners and balloons.

None of us were the same. We had not only met Jesus in a fresh way, but we had become covenant brothers.

The trip was the best gift I've ever given to anyone—and no one received more than I. ■

Jamie Buckingham is senior minister of the Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Florida, and editor-in-chief of Ministries Today.