

Life Lived Differently

*Reflections from the
Holy Land*

Rachel Britton

Introduction

The Holy Land is a special and sacred place for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It is a place where God met with his chosen people, and sent his Son, Jesus, to appoint disciples and save ordinary people in an extraordinary way.

God still meets with people, through his Holy Spirit, who visit the Holy Land today.

You may not have the opportunity to visit the Holy Land, but I hope through the devotions in this book you will feel like you have walked there with me, and God will speak to your heart.

Although I spent some time in Israel several years ago, I had the unique opportunity to experience a study trip to the Holy Land with Lysa TerKeurst and Proverbs 31 Ministries.

I knew it would be special, but I was unprepared for how God would stir my heart and how I would sense he calls us to live life differently. Not only does God move us, but he equips us by providing Jesus as an example, guide, and mentor. It is good to be touched and prepared, but we must also act, and live like Jesus.

These ten devotions are inspired by the places we visited in Israel and the ways Jesus has taught us to be different. I pray these spur you on to a Life Lived Differently.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

You will find each devotion has an opportunity for you to Read, Reflect and Respond. I encourage you to read the Bible passages we have chosen for you. To make it easy, each passage includes a link to [Bible Gateway](#). Here you will not only be able to read the Bible passage in the version we have selected, but you can read other translations or paraphrases to help your understanding.



Golden Menorah near the Western Wall



Synagogue relics in Capernaum

Approach God Differently

To get to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, you have to enter through a military checkpoint. I put my bag on the belt of the x-ray machine and stepped through the security gate, just like at the airport. A soldier looked me up and down, but let me pass.

I entered a broad paved courtyard, with freedom to wander around, and walk down to the wall.

As I got closer, a fence separated access into two directions. Men went to the left of the fence. I joined women making their way to the right. Plastic chairs littered the vicinity immediately in front of the wall.

A number of women sat, heads bowed and eyes closed, praying. Others scribbled intently on scraps of paper.

For a moment sweet-sounding melodies from the other side of the fence distracted me. I stepped onto one of the low benches beneath the fence and peered over—a good vantage point to observe a group of men and boys singing, holding hands, and dancing in a circle. “A Bar Mitzvah celebration most likely,” our guide informed us.

No barrier could stop the contagious spread of their jovial mood. I smiled as I climbed down and turned my attention to the sixty-two feet high, one hundred and eighty seven feet long section of the Temple Mount.

I didn’t expect this setting to move me. Already, though, I could sense the importance of these blocks of stone to many people of different faiths.

Then, as I stood with only millimeters between my nose and the pitted limestone, a lump rose in my throat. I watched the woman next to me place her hands on the rough slabs and touch her warm lips to cold stone. I knew she felt the same as me.

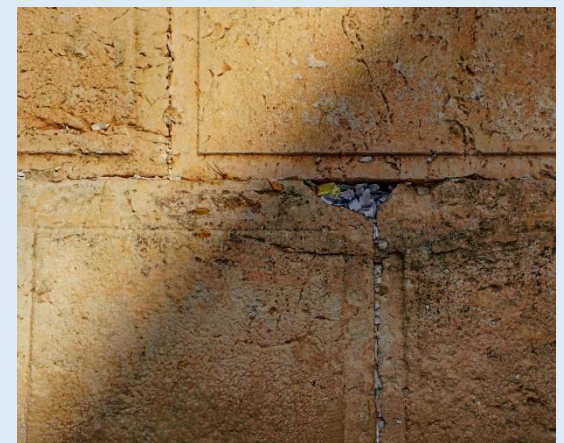
Every crevice as far as I could stretch to reach was crammed with scrunched up pieces of paper. I scanned for a suitable location to place my own folded square containing my carefully worded prayer. I found a nook and pushed it in until it held secure.



The Western Wall, a sacred site for Jewish prayer and pilgrimages.



View above the Western Wall with the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine built in the late 7th century.



Pieces of paper containing prayers placed in the cracks of the Western Wall.

Approach God Differently

Then facing the wall, I closed my eyes and prayed to my heavenly Father in a place where millions of people for thousands of years have come to worship God.

And, I realized, a location where Jesus came up to the temple to pray, to teach, and to heal.

The Western Wall is a reminder of the ancient practices of past people coming to Yahweh. And of a temple, long destroyed, where only the high priest with a lamb sacrifice could step into the inner sanctum to make an offering to God.

**Jesus, during his life and ministry, modeled
a different way of approaching God.**

He spoke with God on the mountainside. He stood on the Mount of Olives and knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane to be with his Father.

The significance of Jesus' actions become apparent through his death when Jesus made God's throne room accessible to us. Jesus, scripture tells us, entered the Holy of Holies—his spotless life took the place of a blemish-free lamb—rendering those sacrifices obsolete. Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice, means no other sacrifice was needed for us to be close to God.

The thick, heavy curtain of the Temple, barring an ordinary person's access into the Holy of Holies, tore from top to bottom when Jesus died. The way to God was opened up.

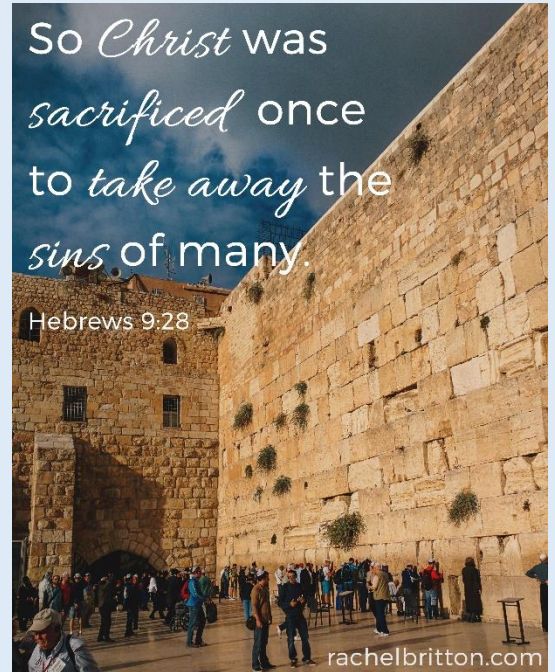
Through Jesus' death, access is no longer limited and security checkpoints are outdated, we have *total* freedom to come *fully* into the presence of a holy and pure God in any place, at any time, and with no restrictions.

HOLY LAND HISTORY

The Western Wall is a section of the Second Temple rebuilt and renovated by Herod the Great, ruler over Palestine (37-4BC).

*So Christ was
sacrificed once
to take away the
sins of many.*

Hebrews 9:28



READ

[Hebrews 9:1-15, 24-28](#)

[Hebrews 10:19-23](#)

[2 Corinthians 3:12-18](#)

REFLECT

How does direct access to God's most holy place through Christ change the way we should pray?

Is there anything creating a wall between you and God today? An unconfessed sin? Fear? Doubt? An area of your life you have not fully given to him?

RESPOND

Bring anything standing between you and God before the throne of grace and allow Jesus to remove what blocks you from experiencing his closeness.

If you were at the Western Wall today, what carefully worded prayer would you stuff into its crevices? Write it down on a piece of paper and tuck it in a safe place in your home.

Be Free Differently

I stepped carefully and slowly on the steep descent from the Mount of Olives towards Jerusalem. I'm glad I wore a sturdy pair of shoes with good grip. It would be easy to slip on the smooth stone roadway.

We followed a narrow lane. A stone wall rose high on either side and obliterated the view of the Old City across the Kidron Valley. Occasional breaks in the wall allowed a glimpse of the Jewish tombs lining the hillside, and the gleaming golden domes of the Russian Orthodox Church. Jesus often walked from Bethany via the Mount of Olives and towards Jerusalem. The route we took is called the Palm Sunday walk.

Eventually the land flattened out into the Kidron Valley, which runs along the eastern side of Jerusalem between the Mount of Olives and the Old City.

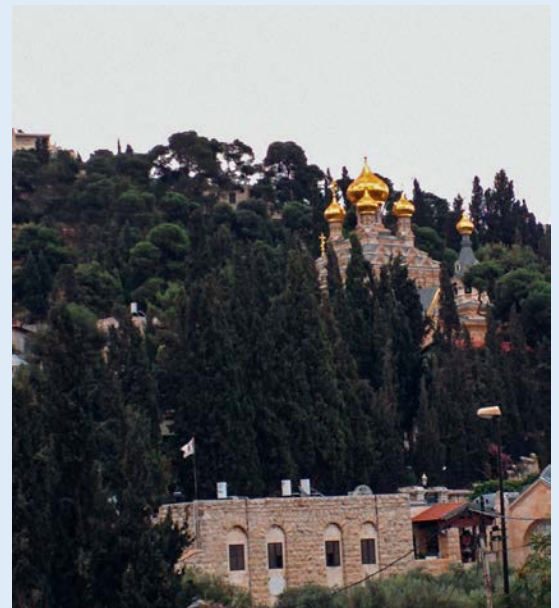
We crossed at the traffic lights of a busy intersection and began the sharp ascent toward the Sheep Gate. This entrance would take us inside the walls of the Muslim Quarter of the Old City.

The gate looked more like an archway in the limestone wall—a narrow entrance, the width of a car.

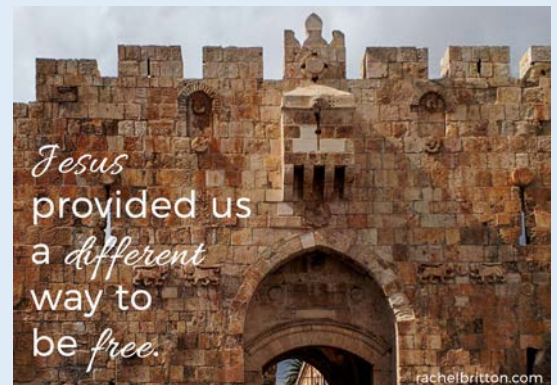
However, the name Sheep Gate signifies the importance of sheep in the country's culture not only today, but also in Jesus' time.

Sheep farming is an important occupation for Bedouin communities in the Judean hills around Jerusalem. We spied sheep dotting the crest of a hill outside the city. A Bedouin shepherd sat perched on a rock, patient, unhurried, and watching over his flock.

It was a glimpse of a life from thousands of years earlier when David was a shepherd boy. The role of shepherding has not changed much over the years.



Church of Mary Magdalene, a Russian Orthodox Church on the Mount of Olives



Lions' Gate also known as Sheep Gate or St. Stephen's Gate.



Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives.

Be Free Differently

The snapshot of the shepherd and his sheep was also a reminder of the biblical importance of sheep and shepherds, and the analogy of Jesus as our shepherd and us as his sheep.

The Sheep Gate earned its name from bleating animals herded through its curved arch. Washed in the Pool of Bethesda, they would have been sheared and inspected for imperfections. The Temple needed a constant supply of blemish-free animals for offerings and sacrifices. In biblical times, the priests had sheep pens on the land close to Jerusalem. Most likely, Bethlehem's shepherds at the time of Jesus' birth provided the priests with sheep through this gate from their location just to the south, on the outskirts of present-day Jerusalem.

Even though the Bible likens us to sheep, we rarely think about how sheep were raised for slaughter. Without Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laying down his life for the sheep, we would be called to pay for our wrongdoing before God.

Yet, we are no longer required to offer animal sacrifices, or to pay for our sin. In any case, as much as we like to appear perfect, or try to be good, when our lives are examined, they are flawed. Our sacrifice is not adequate. Jesus took our place because he is the perfect offering and satisfies the requirements.

Jesus provided us a different way to be free.

With Jesus we have freedom from our wrongdoing so we can approach God without charge or cost to us.

HOLY LAND HISTORY

Sheep's Gate is also known as the Lion's Gate because of the engravings of lions above the gate. It is called St. Stephen's Gate because the site of Stephen's stoning is believed to be nearby.

*"I am the good shepherd.
The good shepherd
lays down his life
for the sheep."
John 10:11 NIV*

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Photography: Shelley Delano Summerville

READ

[John 1:29-34](#)

[2 Corinthians 5:21](#)

[Isaiah 54:4-7](#)

REFLECT

How is Jesus' sacrifice a better way than the Old Testament animal sacrifice?

What kind of freedom is offered to you because of the sacrifice that Jesus made?

RESPOND

As the shepherds brought the sheep through the Sheep Gate for sacrifice, what wrong actions or attitudes do you need to sacrifice before Jesus?

What is one way this week that you can show your gratitude for that sacrifice?



Lions' Gate sign in Hebrew, Arabic and English.

Pray Differently

To get to the top of Mount Arbel took a five-minute gentle climb along a stony pathway from the parking lot. It was enough to elevate my heart rate, and for me to spend a few moments catching my breath when I stopped.

The sun beat on my back in the warm, still October afternoon. I wish I had worn lighter clothing. However, soon the cool, calm blue waters of the Sea of Galilee stretched out far below me.

The mountain fell steeply at this point until it came to the shoreline. Elsewhere around the shores of the lake, and on the right side of Mount Arbel, the hills undulated with gentle pastures. This grassland was dotted with large, white rocks. They looked like suitable seats to rest on and listen to an inspired teacher. This was where Jesus fed thousands of men, women, and children both physically and spiritually. Not much has spoiled the Galilean countryside in 2,000 years. The nearest town both then and today is a good distance's walk away.

"Be careful not to step too close to the edge," I was warned. On the left side of Mount Arbel, a sheer rock face opposite mirrors the cliff edge I stood on.

A wide gully ran between the two cliffs down towards the water. Sometimes, when the wind is in an easterly direction, it rushes down this gully and similar ones around the lake and whips up violent squalls on the water. Jesus' fishermen followers had experience with these storms.

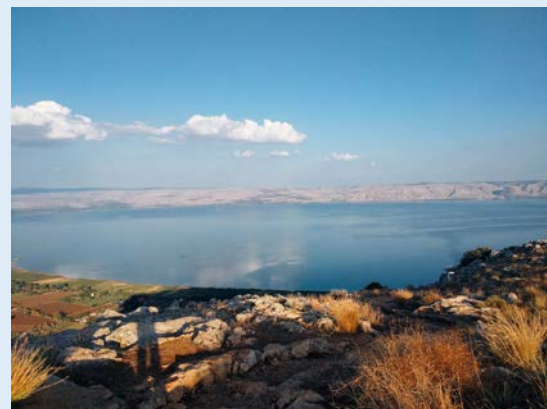
The disciples' small fishing boats were no match for large waves. One such boat was recently discovered buried and preserved in the mud of the lake. We saw the remains in a museum and I marveled at the size. No bigger than a small two-person sailing dinghy, I had imagined the fishing vessels of Peter and Simon to be much bigger. I conjured up images of fishing trawlers filled with nets and a burly crew on board. This boat, however, resembled a flimsy wooden shell.



The cliffs of Mount Arbel in The Lower Galilee near Tiberias.



Meadow next to Mount Arbel.



View of Sea of Galilee from Mount Arbel

Pray Differently

From my experience of sailing on lakes, I know the wind, affected by the contours of the land, can confuse a sailor with its constant shifting of direction. This small vessel could have flipped like a coin in rough weather.

It was here, overlooking Galilee, Jesus saw his disciples struggling in the high winds on the sea below. This very spot on Mount Arbel could have been the place Jesus went to pray on that stormy night. Scripture tells us Jesus often withdrew up to the mountain to spend time with his Father.

Jesus dealt with the needs of the people, but other demands he knew could wait. Jesus had needs himself—to be in a lonely but beautiful place in solitude with God.

Jesus showed we should often leave things, no matter how urgent they seem, and retreat to find time in a place to pray.

The necessity to pray was apparent to his closest followers. Often the disciples had the opportunity to watch Jesus withdraw at a short distance to pray. One such time prompted a disciple to ask him, “Lord, teach us how to pray.”

Surely, these men—God-fearing and law-observing Jews—knew how to pray. Yet, something about the way Jesus prayed made them feel they needed to know more.

Jesus revealed a different way to pray.

“Forgive us our debts,” Jesus said to ask when they prayed.

No longer did people need to visit the temple to offer sacrifices for sins committed. Instead, they could pray to their heavenly Father and ask him directly for forgiveness. In an era of sacrificial ritual, this radical teaching opened the door to us for a new type of relationship with our God.

HOLY LAND HISTORY

The first century boat was found in Magdala, called Magadan in the Bible. It is thought to be the home or birthplace of Mary Magdalene, whose name means Mary of Magdala.

*“Come with me by yourselves
to a quiet place
and get some rest.”*

Mark 6:31 NIV

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READ

[Matthew 15:29-39](#)

[Luke 11:1-4](#)

REFLECT

In what way is Jesus leading you into a new type of relationship with him?

What other demands in your life need to be set aside so you can spend more time pursuing that relationship?

RESPOND

Ask Jesus to create an urgency and deep desire to come to him in prayer.

Set aside specific times to pray this week, perhaps even going away to a quiet place as Jesus did at Mount Arbel.



First Century fishing boat found in Magdala and displayed in a museum.

Shine Differently

Pebbles crunched under my feet and reeds rustled in the light breeze--the only sounds on a peaceful morning at the Sea of Galilee.

Rays of early morning sunlight sparkled as they hit the waves on the lake. Before long the sun would be high overhead and beating down furiously. I would then be forced to look for cover instead of standing out on the rocks. For now though, I shaded my eyes with my hand and gazed at a small boat making its way into the middle of the lake.

I imagined Jesus doing the same thing. He watched his friends out on the water doing what they knew best, trying to earn an early morning catch of fish.

After the gloomy and disturbing events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion in Jerusalem, Jesus' disciples no doubt felt relieved to return to the tranquility of Galilee.

The resurrected Jesus turned his attention to building a fire and cooking a fish breakfast before he beckoned his followers from the lake. During the meal, Jesus gave Peter instructions to feed his sheep.

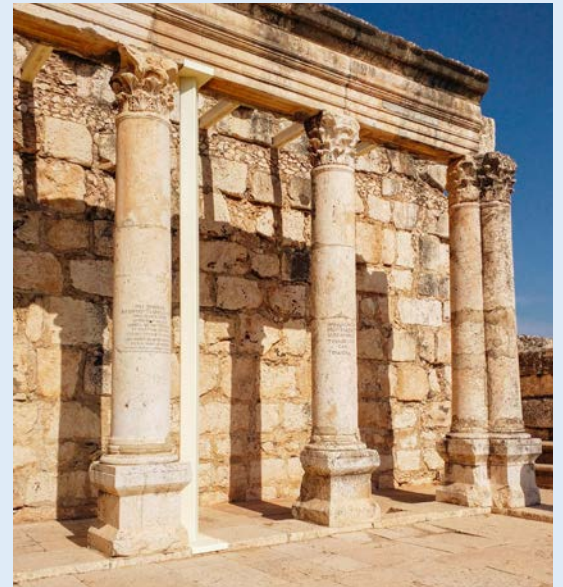
Not far away, on the shore of Galilee, lies the town of Capernaum. We went there later. By then the sun burned my bare skin. I stood under the branches of a Ficus tree, a species of fig tree cultivated from ancient times for its fruit. The shade brought some relief and from there I took in my surroundings.

Excavations showed black basalt stone remains of small, simple houses.

Jesus made his home in Capernaum during his ministry. The name means "home of the comforter." It's an appropriate name for a place where Jesus, who consoled many people, lived.

Peter, Andrew, James and John lived and fished from Capernaum. The town would have bustled with men and boys mending nets on the shoreline and bringing in the daily catch.

Matthew, the tax collector, also lived here. As well as an ordinary fishing village, Capernaum was an important Roman town, sitting on the border between two Roman territories. Here people paid taxes on their journey to Jerusalem. In Capernaum, Roman Gentiles and Jewish fishermen lived together.



Jewish synagogue at Capernaum built during the AD 300s.



Overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Israel's largest freshwater lake.



Archeological remains of houses at Capernaum.

Shine Differently

The one-roomed houses stood huddled together around a common courtyard. Daily life took place here. Women prepared and cooked food in the outside area, their husbands gutted the fish and placed it in the coals. The flat roofs provided a cool place to sleep at night. In these surroundings, Jesus ate and slept with his followers. This is where Jesus taught, healed people, including a centurion's servant and Peter's mother-in-law, and performed miracles.

Jesus reached out to people in an ordinary way. He lived his life among the common poor people, even though he was the Son of God. In his humanity, he was no different from them. He needed to eat and sleep and be surrounded by friends.

Standing directly behind the homes are the remains of a synagogue built on the ruins of an earlier synagogue from New Testament times.

Most likely Jesus taught here. Perhaps he read [Isaiah 9:1-2](#). "Galilee of the nations", it says, "has seen a great light." The disciples would have been among his listeners. Did they know Jesus was talking about himself, coming from Galilee, as a light for *all people*?

Jesus' ministry lasted only three years. He taught in a small area on the northwest shore of Galilee. Yet, Jesus also reached out to the world in an extraordinary way.

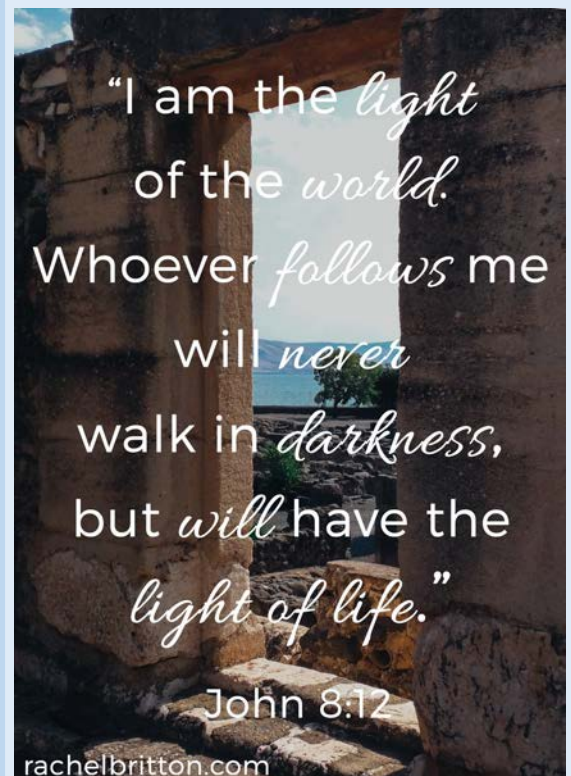
Jesus demonstrated a different way to shine in a dark world.

He brought light and life not only to his own people and to Gentiles in his home town, but to the Roman world away from the shores of Galilee, and to people beyond his lifetime.

Maybe, those who killed Jesus thought death would be the end of his light. But, Jesus' message has reached across the world and down the centuries to you and me today.

HOLY LAND HISTORY

The remains of the Jewish synagogue in Capernaum is from 300AD. It is built of white limestone imported into the area to stand out against the black local stone. The ruins of a New Testament era synagogue has been found under its foundations.



READ

[Matthew 4:12-17](#)

[Isaiah 9:1-2](#)

[John 21:1-17](#)

REFLECT

Why is it sometimes more difficult to shine in familiar surroundings?

How does Jesus' message of repentance in Matthew 4 relate to our mission to shine brightly in a world of darkness?

RESPOND

Imagine yourself in the synagogue as Jesus was teaching. What new ways would he be calling you to?

What area of deep darkness will you allow him to shine his light on today?

Be Healed Differently

Inside the Sheep Gate of the Old City in Jerusalem, are the remains of the Pool of Bethesda, overgrown with grass and weeds. White limestone blocks show outlines of an ancient structure. In the center are deep impressions resembling what could have been oblong baths. An occasional column stands broken and alone.

These relics at street level are far more recent than the pools talked about in the Gospel of John. Over the centuries, layer upon layer of construction has taken place on top of the original pools. The shattered columns are not part of the ancient colonnades. These are buried somewhere beneath the ground.

I peered over the edge of the wall and looked down. Jerusalem had experienced heavy rain the week before our visit. Muddy rainwater made puddles at the bottom of the ruins. This water barely resembled the pools that existed thousands of years earlier.

It is thought the Pool of Bethesda during Jesus' time was either filled by underground springs below Jerusalem or with rainwater fed by an aqueduct carrying runoff water from the Kidron Valley.

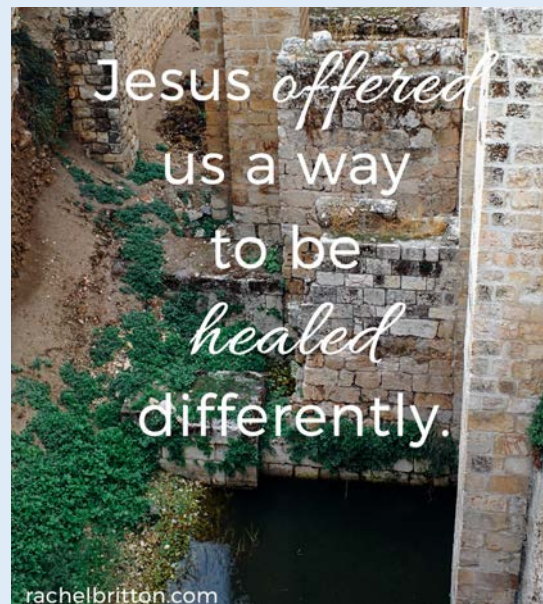
We know from the Gospel of John people believed the waters to have healing properties. Blind, lame and paralyzed men and women laid by the pool waiting for the opportunity to get into its waters and be cured.

Jesus, however, offered a different way to be healed. He revealed this at the pool, and many other times. Jesus showed mercy to a crippled man and healed him both physically and spiritually. He enabled the man to walk. He forgave the man's sins so he could stand clean and righteous before God.

The word Bethesda reflects the mercy Jesus offered. *Bet* means the place, and *hesda* means his grace or his mercy—the place of his mercy.



View over Pool of Bethesda in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem.



Looking down into the Pool of Bethesda.



Garden outside the Church of St. Anne at the Pool of Bethesda.

Be Healed Differently

The word *mercy* is a rich word. It refers to God's kindness, generosity, and compassion to people who do not deserve, nor have done anything to merit, being shown such favor.

Jesus' ultimate demonstration of mercy was not healing one crippled man, but saving humanity through his death on the cross.

Nearby the Pool of Bethesda are carefully tended gardens with trees, shrubs and herbs. Hyssop is one of the plants growing in abundance. It is a hardy herb that grows anywhere -- it will regrow even if trampled on.

The hyssop at the Pool of Bethesda reminds us of God's mercy shown to us through his Son, Jesus. In the Bible, hyssop is a symbol of humility, and a plant associated with cleansing and purification.

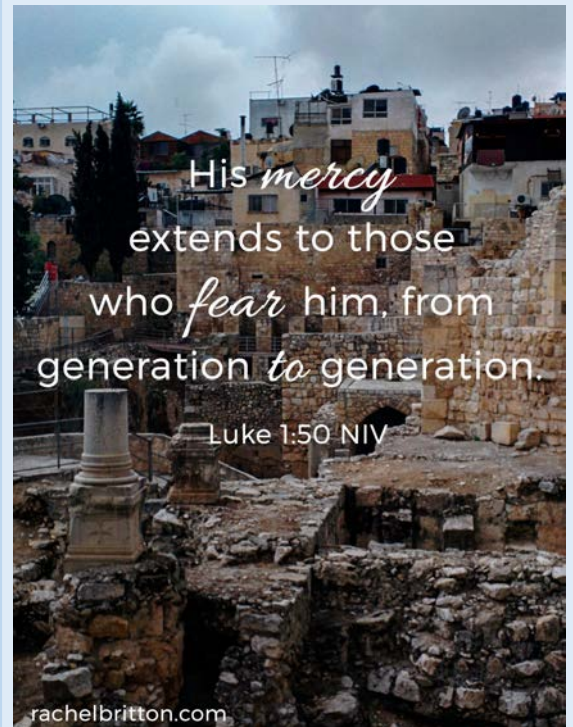
Jesus humbly went to the cross for us even though he did not deserve to die. Yet, through his death we have been cleansed. He who was perfect became unclean so we can be pure.

Abused and trampled on by our wrongdoing in his death, Jesus was not destroyed. He came back to life, like the hyssop.

The healing at the Pool of Bethesda, the example of the hyssop, and finally, the history of the Sheep Gate nearby—where sheep passed through on their way to be sacrificed—all point to the mercy we have been shown through Jesus' death and the healing it offers.

HOLY LAND HISTORY

Excavations have revealed two pools existed at the time of Jesus. The first pool was constructed after Solomon built the temple, known as the First Temple, some time before 900 BC. The second pool was built in the 200s BC.



READ

[John 5:2-15](#)
[Isaiah 55:6-9](#)
[Ephesians 2:4-5](#)
[Psalm 51:7](#)

REFLECT

Is there an ailment you are waiting by the pool for Jesus to heal?

How does the mercy of Jesus' sacrifice offer healing and cleansing in your life?

RESPOND

Put yourself in the place of God's mercy and ask him to heal the trampled areas of your life.

How will the mercy that has been freely offered to you affect the way you treat others?

Forgive Differently

The orange glow of street lights popped up across the Old City in the failing evening light.

In the stillness of twilight, we walked down towards the Kidron Valley. Earlier in the day, I walked from the Mount of Olives towards the Kidron Valley with the city in front of me. Now, the Old City was behind me and the Mount of Olives was in front of me, across the valley, where we had started our day. Just out of sight—buildings stood in the way—was the Garden of Gethsemane. I anticipated it to be a walkable distance from where I stood.

For now, I looked down at an ancient stone stairway. The slabs of limestone made a distinct path down the hill. These stones date back from Old Testament times. The feet of many different people have walked this ancient staircase. It is very likely that Jesus' sandaled feet walked up these steps. I wanted to put my Nike soled feet on the path where he walked, but an iron fence made the area inaccessible.

Jesus made some of his final steps in this neighborhood of Jerusalem.

As I stood on rocky land in dusty brown dirt, I contemplated that fateful evening after Jesus' arrest.

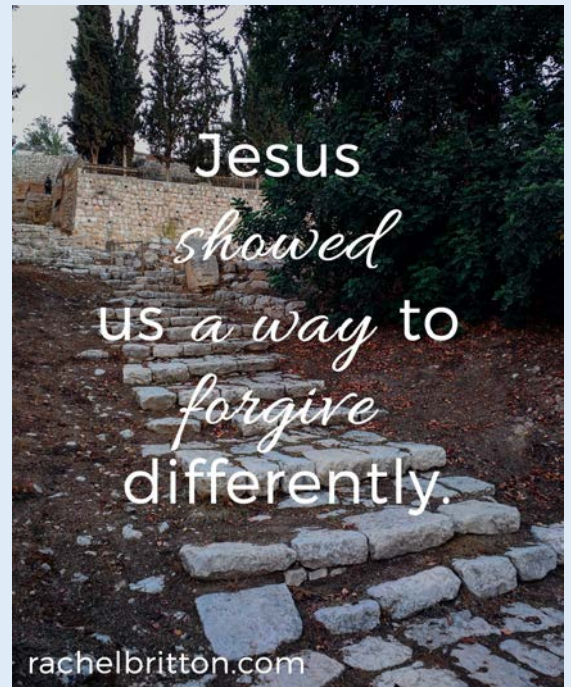
The soldiers brought Jesus, after they had seized him in the Garden of Gethsemane, to the house belonging to Annas, the former high priest. Just beyond the limestone steps, white rectangular boulders defined the outline of a building believed to be the site of Annas' house.

The soldiers dragged a bound Jesus up the stairway and into the home. John went into the house with Jesus and witnessed the interrogation that went on.

On the other side of the path, large misshapen blocks, worn down by the weather, showed remains of Caiaphas' palace, son-in-law to Annas and high priest during Jesus' trial. Annas sent Jesus here.



Looking over the ruins of the house of Annas.



Ancient stone staircase leading down to the Kidron Valley from Old Testament times.



Ruins of Caiaphas' palace

Forgive Differently

Somewhere in the vicinity outside, Peter warmed himself by a fire. By now the sun had disappeared and a coldness crept over all who were with him. The other disciples, it seemed, had scattered. At least John and Peter remained with Jesus. Yet, fear consumed Peter. Perhaps he thought he would be arrested, too.

So, on this hillside Peter vehemently denied he knew his Lord.

The rooster's crow reminded Peter of what Jesus had told him only a few hours earlier: "Today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

How heart-breaking for Jesus that his friend would have nothing to do with him when Jesus needed him most. Yet, it is Peter's heart that broke. Peter wept bitterly. How often do we abandon Jesus for fear of being rejected or mocked by our friends? Jesus, however, only continued to be faithful to Peter, as he is to us.

Those who arrested Jesus looked for ways to ridicule, to accuse, to punish, and to destroy him.

Yet, Jesus showed us a way to forgive differently.

Jesus accepted everyone; he spurned no one. Jesus absolved people of their wrongdoing; he did not accuse. Jesus proclaimed a time of the Lord's favor; not of judgment.

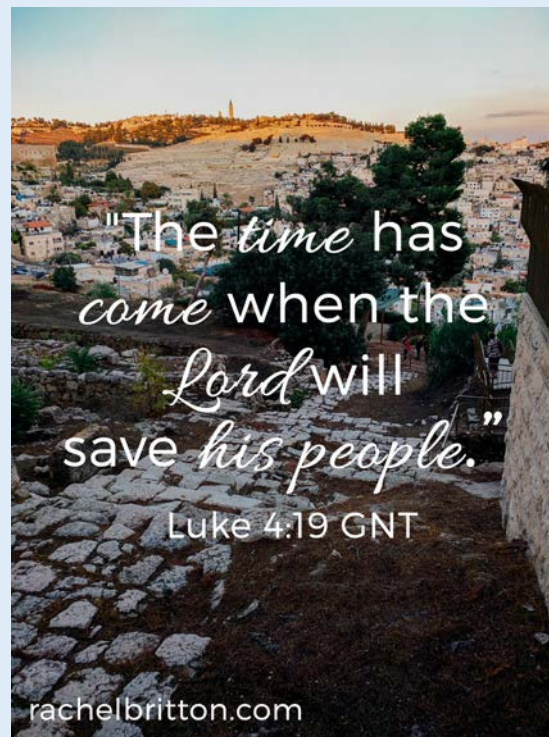
Jesus told his followers to pray to God for forgiveness for only God forgives sins; he would not condemn.

Jesus freed people from spiritual and physical oppression and life-crippling diseases; he repressed no one.

Jesus came to give life instead of to ruin life. The limestone steps signify part of his journey to a sacrificial death so life could be given to us.

HOLY LAND HISTORY

A church has occupied the site where it is believed Peter denied Jesus since 475 AD. The current Saint Peter's Church has existed since 1931.



READ

[John 18:12-26](#)
[Mark 14:27-31](#)

REFLECT

Has there been a time when you have denied Jesus from fear of being rejected or mocked?

Think on how Jesus has responded to you when you have denied him. How has he continued to be faithful to you?

RESPOND

What is one way you can boldly proclaim Christ as Lord at the risk of being mocked or rejected?

How can you show favor to and forgive someone who has rejected you?

A Different Future

Set on the side of the Mount of Olives towards the Kidron Valley is the Garden of Gethsemane. Planted with olive trees and surrounded by stone walls, it faces the Old City of Jerusalem.

This small area gives a glimpse of how the Mount of Olives looked two thousand years ago when most of the hillside was covered with trees bearing black olives harvested for their oil.

After the hustle and bustle of a big city, it felt good to step through the gateway into the peaceful sanctuary of the Garden. Jesus often escaped to the Garden, too. It was one of his favorite places to spend time with his friends, and with his Father in prayer.

Some of the trees, their trunks thick and gnarled, stoop like old people under the hot morning sun. These trees are thought to be from the time of Jesus.

The Roman commander Titus ordered the olive trees in this area to be cut down during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. However, he had not destroyed the trees. If the roots of the olive tree are intact, the tree will sprout and grow again. The ancient trees in the Garden of Gethsemane bear witness to this.

It amazed me to see such old wood still bearing fresh fruit. I learned the fruit grows on new shoots of the olive tree. Many branches on these aged trees hung heavy with olives.

The olives on the trees were beginning to change color from green to black. The recent rain helped the fruit to ripen. Then they are ready to be picked and pressed for their precious oil. Gethsemane means “a place for pressing oil.”

Perhaps Jesus prayed beneath these actual time-weathered trees, just before his arrest.

In this place, not only did Jesus sense the agony of a painful death, but he anticipated the crushing of his spirit by the weight of the world's sin. How appropriate that he should be in a place of pressing.



Ancient olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane



New shoots on an olive tree.



A ripening olive

A Different Future

A short distance from his friends, Jesus knelt and submitted himself to his Father's will.

Those who took Jesus to his death hoped to destroy him and the disturbance he had created in their religiously regimented world. Even his followers did not expect to see Jesus again. Little did they know, Jesus' death was not the end of it.

Instead, new life rose from Jesus' death, just like it did with the olive trees.

The Old Testament prophesied this would happen. Isaiah said a shoot would rise from the stump of Jesse. Jesus foretold this event, explaining to his disciples he would have to die but he would rise again.

When we accept Jesus' death as the payment for our sins, in his resurrection, we are given new life. We are like young shoots on the olive tree. Death is never the end. We are promised everlasting life with Jesus.

Jesus promises us a different future.

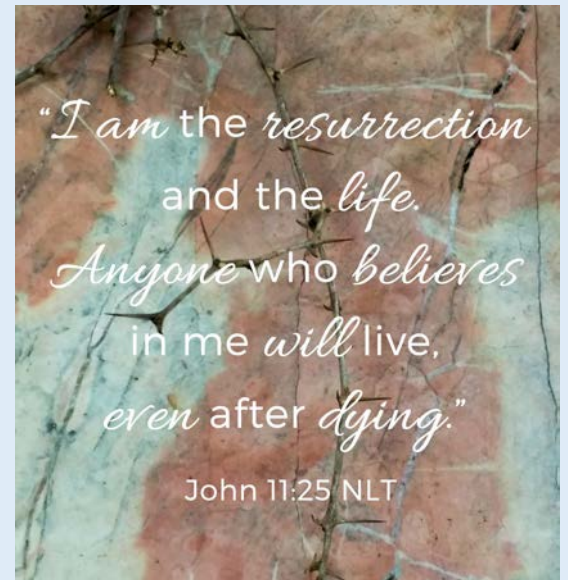
We have a future filled with hope and everlasting life with him.

We may experience our own "pressing" in life, like the olive fruit. Yet, we know Jesus is familiar with suffering so we can turn to him when our circumstances are difficult.

We don't have to stay bound to our wrongdoing and shortcomings. If we stay connected to Jesus--make him the center of our lives--we will sprout forth with new life and bear fruit.

HOLY LAND HISTORY

Next to the Garden of Gethsemane is the Church of All Nations, known by this name because of contributions from many countries to build the church. It is also known as the Church of the Agony. Inside is a flat rock believed to be where Jesus prayed. The rock is surrounded by a wrought iron crown of thorns.



READ

[Isaiah 11:1-5](#) [Matthew 26:36-46](#)
[Romans 5:8](#) [John 10:10](#)
[John 11:25](#)

REFLECT

Have you come to a point where you have placed Jesus in the center of your life? What fruit do you bear as a result?

Do you know for certain that you will spend eternity in heaven with Jesus?

RESPOND

If you have not given your heart to Jesus, pray this simple prayer to receive God's forgiveness and accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I trust and follow you as my Lord and Savior. Guide my life and help me to do your will. In your name, Amen.

If you prayed that prayer for the first time, I encourage you to tell someone! Contact a Christian friend or your local church and share with them about your decision. Or share with me by [clicking here](#).

Worship Differently

Nestled in a corner of Jerusalem and accessed by narrow streets of the Old City is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This large rambling church is built on a site believed to be where Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead.

Visitors need to be prepared for the swarms of pilgrims from many Christian denominations—Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox—as well as other groups such as Coptic Christians and Evangelical Christians. And they have to be ready for the centuries of ornamentation and embellishment within this structure.

It took a few moments for my eyes to adjust to the dimly lit interior of the church after the bright light outside. The walls and ceiling were covered with mosaics, paintings, and statues. Large incense jars hung down from the altars.

This is a place where worshippers run their hands over the smooth surface of a large stone slab, called the Stone of Unction, where Jesus' body was anointed with spices before he was placed in the tomb.

Steep stone steps rose sharply in one corner and led to two chapels. People crowded the room. Many lined up to kneel and kiss the silver disk nailed to the spot of Jesus' crucifixion.

Under the main dome of the church and enclosed in an ornate chapel stood the tomb where Jesus' body laid. Many more people waited to enter the tomb; to get on their knees and show their reverence.

Nothing seemed to resemble what could have been a two thousand year old site of Roman crucifixion.

In another location outside the city walls, we visited the Garden Tomb. Discovered in the last few hundred years, this tomb stands in the more natural setting of a garden, carefully tended and surrounded by high walls. It's a short distance from a craggy rock face with crevices that resembled eye sockets, although I found them difficult to detect. This is believed to be Golgotha—the place of the skull. Noisy, idling engines and the stench of diesel from a bus station below made it uncomfortable to immerse oneself in the significance of this place.



Pilgrims wait to kneel under the Altar of the Crucifixion to touch the site where Jesus died on the cross.



Incense burners hanging in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre



Inside of the Garden Tomb

Worship Differently

Instead, both these locations brought to mind the words of the angel: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

Visiting tombs, though, is something we human beings do. Life might be over, but we want memories to live on. An unkept grave gives the impression the person is no longer remembered.

Visiting the burial site of a loved one brings comfort and a sense of connection.

Going to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, or the Garden Tomb invokes the same sense of love and remembrance for our Lord. It was the same for the women who came to care for Jesus’ body.

However, Jesus requires us to worship differently.

We are not to look for a living Lord in dead religious traditions. The physical place where we worship is not important. Jesus told us to worship in Spirit. With God’s Spirit dwelling within us, we can worship God freely in every place, all the time.

Jesus said we are to worship in truth. It is the attitude of our heart towards God that matters. Jesus called himself the Truth. We must make Jesus the center of our lives. Our thoughts, our words, and our activities must reflect his truth. We are to live a life as Jesus would have lived; following his example and his command to love God and love other people, too.

HOLY LAND HISTORY

Helene, mother of the Roman emperor Constantine, built the first church on the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 335 AD. Helene came to the Holy Land to identify all the sites associated with Jesus’ life and ministry.

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*“God is spirit,
and his
worshipers
must worship
in the
Spirit and in truth.”*

John 4:24

READ

[Isaiah 53:4-5](#)

[Luke 23:32 - 24:12](#)

[John 4:23-24](#)

REFLECT

Why might it be easier to look for dead religious traditions to take the place of the sincere worship of the Lord?

How should we honor his death in love and remembrance while still walking in his new way of life?

RESPOND

Identify any areas of your spiritual walk that have been bound by religious traditions or expectations.

What new way of thinking can you apply to those areas?

Share Differently

Facing the azure waters of the Mediterranean Sea are the remains of a large and important Roman port, Caesarea.

The most intact feature of this town is the amphitheater, still in usable condition. As we walked in, workmen in hardhats and tool belts dismantled an enormous metal lighting rig from a concert the day before. The trussing stood on a more recently built but authentic-looking stage. A semicircle of stone seats rose up impressively against the blue sky, but their beauty paled when compared to the original structure of archways and covered porticos.

Herod the Great did not shy away from building imposing structures: the Temple, a fortification and palace high on the mountain at Masada, and here, the port and city of Caesarea.

The coastline does not have the natural features suitable for a harbor. Instead, Herod constructed huge breakwaters like arms stretching into the sea. These safely held ships bearing goods coming from Egypt, Rome, and elsewhere in the Empire.

No doubt the port enabled Herod to bring columns of Egyptian marble for his palace that lie toppled and strewn on the ground. An example of a collapsed Empire.

Visible on the edge of the Mediterranean, lapped by seawater, is the outline of a decorative fresh water pool built for a ruler who enjoyed an opulent lifestyle.

An aqueduct nearby is a reminder of the outstanding quality of Roman engineering. It carried water to a busy city, and no doubt to Herod's sea-edge freshwater pool, from Mount Carmel thirteen miles away.

Equally impressive are the ruins of a horseshoe-shaped stadium, now partially covered by encroaching sand. I stood inside and imagined the excitement of the crowds. This is where they sat to watch Olympic games, horse and chariot races.

Caesarea served as an important port for the Roman administration during the time of Jesus. The Roman life of Caesarea seemed a world away from the fisherman's life in Capernaum even though it was only a distance of thirty miles.



Remains of the ancient port of Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea.



Aqueduct that brought water to Caesarea from Mount Carmel.



Remains of Herod's freshwater pool on the edge of the sea.

Share Differently

There is no record of Jesus having visited here. Jesus may never have come to Caesarea but his ministry certainly reached this far. The New Testament records Caesarea played an important part in the spread of the Gospel.

In Caesarea, Cornelius, who Peter witnessed to, became the first Gentile follower of Jesus. Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years, and no doubt preached the Gospel to those who guarded him.

The port of Caesarea, built for the passageway of goods around the Empire, allowed the movement of the Gospel. Man created a commercial port and metropolitan city for his own purposes, but God used it as a gateway for his message to spread to the rest of the world.

God intended his good news to be for people of all nations, and for the whole world.

Jesus instructed his followers to go out into the world to make disciples. How would they do this? Their world was the shores of Galilee, or as far as they could go on foot.

Even though their reach may have seemed limited, God still used them to fulfill his plans. From a small corner of Galilee, all they needed to do was be obedient - to share differently with people unlike themselves and in cities unfamiliar to them - allowing the Gospel to reach the world.

Just as **Jesus told his disciples to share differently**, we too are expected to communicate God's message in unexpected places and to people unlike ourselves. Even though our reach may seem limited, it does not limit God's plan.

HOLY LAND HISTORY

In excavating Caesarea, archaeologists discovered a stone inscribed with the name Pontius Pilate. This is the only existing physical proof of a Roman official of this name. The original stone is now housed in a museum, but a copy stands at Caesarea.



READ

[Matthew 28:16-20](#)

[Acts 10:1-43](#)

REFLECT

Have you truly embraced Jesus' command to share his message?

How does Jesus' command to include all people influence the ways you share his message?

RESPOND

How can you broaden or expand your personal impact in sharing with others?



Replica of Pontius Pilate's stone

Hope Differently

“Five dollar, five dollar,” called the hawker, holding out his arms laden with necklaces. Another man held fistfuls of bookmarks containing small postcard pictures of the Holy Land. They reminded me of bookmark I had tucked in a Bible at home, given to me by my mom after her visit to the Holy Land.

As I stepped down onto the viewing platform at the Mount of Olives, I left the commotion behind me and walked into my own picture-perfect postcard of Jerusalem.

The city spread out in front of me. A breath-taking view of stone colored buildings blending in with the hillside. Across the valley, the stone walls of the Old City with the East Gate in the center made up the foreground. The golden Dome of the Rock stood behind, contrasting with the landscape but strikingly beautiful at the same time.

From the Mount of Olives, the land falls steeply into the Kidron Valley and then rises again until it comes to the wall of the Old City and the temple mount on which stands the Dome of the Rock.

Down to the right of where I stood, I saw tombs in regimented lines on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city. These are the graves of Jewish people waiting to be the first to meet their Messiah, when he appears on this mountain.

It is no surprise Jesus spent so much time on the Mount of Olives overlooking a city that captured his heart and made him weep for its future.

The contours of the landscape have not changed since biblical times, but the city is broader, wider, and more diverse than in Jesus time.

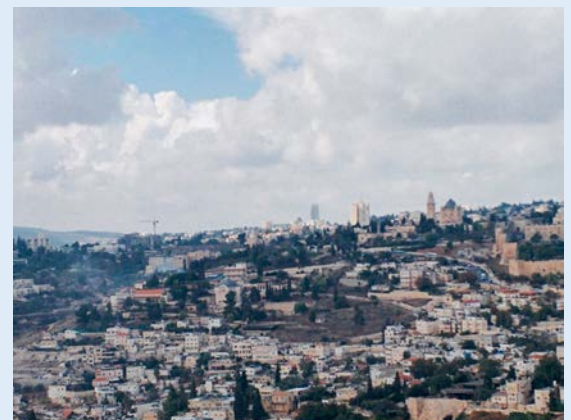
The Mount of Olives is mentioned in the prophets in the Bible. Zechariah says the Mount of Olives will split in two from east to west and a large valley will open up. It's difficult to understand if this is literal or figurative. It's hard to imagine such an event, looking across the peaceful valley. Yet, the Mount of Olives sits where tectonic plates meet. This is fascinating stuff for a geographer like myself.



The Eastern Gate, also known as the Golden Gate, in the walls of the Old City. It has been sealed since the 16th century.



View over Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.



View of the southern side of modern day Jerusalem outside the Old City.

Hope Differently

Earthquakes are a present-day and historical phenomenon. An earthquake happened during the rule of Uzziah, mentioned in the Old Testament. And, scripture tells us the ground shook when Jesus was crucified. It was an earthquake that caused the stone to be moved from in front of the tomb where Jesus' body lay.

Zechariah's prophecy is full of hope--of God removing mountains and opening up a new way. How often we have obstacles in our own life that we want to be removed. God promises us a future free of difficulties.

Ezekiel expands on Zechariah's words and tells us living water will flow from the city of Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, twenty miles to the east. Fish and other living creatures will fill its waters.

The Dead Sea is the lowest place on earth with a mineral content ten times higher than ocean water. It might be good for an afternoon of fun, floating with friends, but nothing lives in its waters. The Dead Sea is a real example of that which is dead being brought to life.

We have the same hope with Jesus. Without Jesus we are dead, but with him we have life.

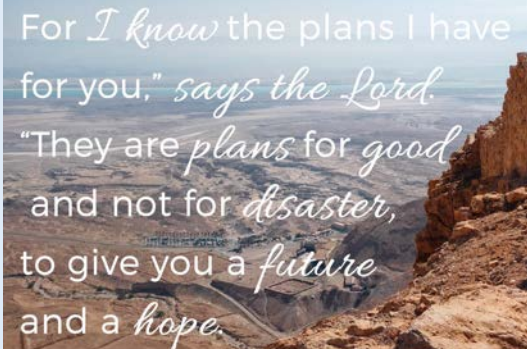
Jesus once stood on the Mount of Olives, and one day he will stand there again. While we wait for this event to occur, we do not want to get despondent in our present day circumstances.

Jesus revealed a different way to hope.

Jesus has gone to prepare a better place for us. A place where there will be no pain or suffering. Jesus has not left us alone in the world. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, as our comforter. Jesus left us with a gift--his peace. We do not have to wait until a future event to experience peace, we can have it now.

HOLY LAND HISTORY

The Mount of Olives is one of three peaks in a mountain ridge. To the north is Mount Scopus and to the south is the Mount of Corruption.



For *I know* the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 29:11 NLT

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READ

[Psalm 23](#)

[John 14:1-3](#)

[Jeremiah 29:11](#)

REFLECT

What parts of your life have shifted or broken open?

How might God be using that area as part of his perfect plan for you?

RESPOND

Ask the Holy Spirit to walk with you in your broken places and breathe hope into them.

Write a prayer of thanksgiving for the events that are shaping your future.

Acknowledgements

This ebook is not the result of my efforts alone.

Firstly, I want to acknowledge and extend a big thank you to [Christa Hutchins](#). Christa has turned the raw material for this devotional book into the fabulous piece you have in front of you. Christa has provided the Read, Reflect and Respond sections to help you think more deeply about what you have read. Thank you, also, Christa for your encouragement, support and friendship.

Secondly, a big thank you to my lovely daughter, [Phoebe](#), who transformed my photographs into the images, and graphics for your enjoyment. Next time I visit the Holy Land, Phoebe is coming with me to be my official photographer! Christa will have to join us, too.

Thirdly, thank you to my husband for supporting me in all I do, and cooking meals, so I can write.

Finally, a huge thank you to Proverbs 31 Ministries and Lysa TerKeurst for providing the opportunity for me to have a Holy Land Experience that was beyond my expectations.

RESOURCES

I'm happy to share the beautiful photographs and graphics contained in this ebook, along with many others taken on my trip. You can find them in this folder:

[Holy Land Pictures and Graphics](#)

Please see the Terms of Use document in the folder.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rachel Britton is an author, blogger and speaker. Raised on the east coast of England, Rachel now lives in Massachusetts with her husband and three college-age children. Rachel is passionate about helping women become healthier in their relationship with God, with others, and with themselves. You can find out more about Rachel at www.rachelbritton.com



Remains of Herod's freshwater pool
on the edge of the sea.