

Julia's blog 2015

A daily blog of a group of ladies from Arkansas that volunteered with Voice in the Wilderness in June 2015

Day 1 - Israel 2015-01

The Just Shall Live by Faith Greetings from Jerusalem! At the end of our long 30+ hour travel day Tony reminded us at church last night that the just shall live by faith – Habakkuk 2:4.

Tony picked us up at the airport and brought us to the guest house for a nap after which we loaded up our Bible bags with bibles to give away and Tony picked us up again for the prayer meeting, fellowship meal and church which began at 6:00pm Jerusalem time on Wednesday.

Our faith was shorn up by his teaching about true faith vs false faith in James 2 – little did we know how much we would need this message from God's Word! After church we walked up, down and around the Ben Yehuda street area talking to people and giving away Bibles to Dutch, Arabic, Hebrew, Amharic and Russian speakers. We entered into a debate about saving faith with a professing Christian leader who twists and turns the Bible and believes his church's traditions over God's Word and then saw Jerusalem at night up high from a local hotel's overlook. All of this was before we entered into a debate with an American man named Robert O. Smith who lives and works in Jerusalem. We had just happened upon this man, not knowing his name or what he did until we were well into engaging him in conversation about the gospel. He professed belief in Jesus but then began to argue us into the ground with untruths as well as his liberal political agenda. After Tony stood his ground for the true gospel and the righteous lifestyle that results from it, he physically attacked Tony (no injury) and tried to turn him into the police to no avail. Joined by another man who entered into the fray and screamed at Tony as we walked away, we took note from this vitriol encounter that it is coming to a neighbourhood near us very soon as those who love darkness rather than the Truth will try to belittle and malign those who are willing, like Tony, to stand firm in Biblical truth. Why should I be surprised that all of us had been given the opportunity so quickly to live out a light and momentary version of Revelation 12:11 "They overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death"

We arrived back at the guest house around midnight, bid Tony goodbye until the morning then stayed up to process all that had happened on our long and faith stretching travel day. I suggest you all Google Robert O. Smith, author of "More Desired than Our Own Salvation" as Tony did in hindsight because he is one deluded and spiritually dangerous dude who has great influence within the World Council of Churches. This morning we are up and chipper after a good night's sleep. In reflecting again upon yesterday Sue read to us from Isaiah 41:11-12, 15-16 "All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish ... see I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, with many teeth, you will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff, you will winnow them, the wind will pick them up, and a gale will blow them away. But you will rejoice in the LORD and glory in the Holy One of Israel". Get ready and prepare yourself to have your faith tested and strengthened because it won't be long before hostilities come to Arkansas to all who dare to take a stand upon God's Word. The just shall live by faith – we pray we are ready to live out what we say we believe again today.

Day 2 - Israel 2015-02 Emotional Moleskin

This morning Tony arrived at 11.00 and he spent about 30 minutes giving us an orientation to evangelism in the Middle East. He ended with these two challenging questions, "Do you really believe people are going to hell without Jesus? Are you going to be selfish and not share the gospel with people today?" Knowing that the correct answer to those questions is "Yes" and "No" we filled our bags with Bibles and headed off in the van for the Old City.

It didn't take me long to be rubbed raw when we encountered two young people who worked for the World Council of Churches. One was a professed unbeliever and the other a professed believer and together they were working for world peace under the name of the church but they refused to talk to us about Jesus. Ouch! That made me feel sad because the Prince of Peace is being discounted and dismissed in an organization that says it represents the church. Next we encountered a religious leader who disliked us because we were evangelicals and his church was much older than ours. Even when Tony showed this Greek speaking man a Greek version of the gospel from Romans he would not move beyond his love of church history to a love for Jesus. Ouch! That made me feel indignant because a church leader was teaching people to put their faith in traditions instead of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then a nominal Arab Christian told us he needed our money not our Bibles on top of Olivia being brushed off by a German girl after she had run down the street to catch her and invite her to church. Ouch! That made me feel rejected. During lunch at a falafel restaurant we sat in the shade and offered Bibles and conversation to those who walked by our tables. Tony pushed us to engage people and initiate conversation on our own. Ouch! That made me feel apprehensive.

Today was the beginning of Ramadan so we had loaded up on Arabic Bibles and children's Bible story books and the Campus Crusade film about Mary Magdalene. Many Muslim men and women took our gifts just as they were offered – in the spirit of Love. Ouch! That made me feel successful as if we had done something well when I should have felt humbled by God's grace that gave the recipients willing hearts. I felt successful again when two Jewish girls, one a Sabra (native born Israeli) and the other from Romania took our Hebrew New Testaments and then I felt it again when Dottie shared the gospel and gave a Bible to a Jewish woman right under the noses of two Jewish men from the Anti Missionary Society. Ouch! Being slow to Biblically evaluate and correct my feelings made me feel like a dunce. Yet when I felt like a failure after the first soldier I offered a Bible to declined I Ouched again. Evangelistic success and failure are controlled by the Sovereignty of God. My feelings should reflect a submissive trust, not a personal success or failure. When we engaged a touristy family from North Carolina in a conversation about God's judgment the dad told us the Book of Revelation was not relevant or understandable today because it was written to the people being killed in the first century under Domitian. Ouch! That made me feel defeated before I've even begun to teach Revelation in BSF. In a sidewalk coffee shop we had several conversations with Jewish people because Tony made us go up to strangers, sit down at their table and engage them in conversation. Stephannie and Dottie were told by two Jewish men to stop talking and asking them questions. Kim and Sarah were told by Jewish ladies with a believing Aunt and Uncle that if everyone listened to them there would be no Jews left. Jan's woman only wanted to talk about antisemitism. Tony's man commented that he couldn't talk to a Christian without thinking about the persecution that Jews have suffered at the hands of people who called themselves Christians. My woman seemed to be mentally ill and was willing to talk to me about shallow things but not about Jesus and refused my offer of a Bible five times. Ouch! All of this made me feel sad. Jesus felt so sad that He

wept over Jerusalem. Ouch again! In thinking about this verse I realized that my sadness was not as deep and tearful as it should be.

As we made our way in the evening toward the Jewish Quarter we encountered a confused young man named John from London. He was actually willing to talk to us for about 45 minutes and was full of many thoughtful questions – the type of questions that many unbelievers have about the civil law in Leviticus, the destiny of people who never hear the gospel, etc. Before we could have good closure with him our conversation was interrupted by two acquaintances of Tony who rudely butted in and essentially ended the momentum that had been building. Jan ran after the young man when he left but he had vanished around the corner. We made our way up to the Golden Menorah overlooking the Western Wall and Jan engaged a smoker in conversation about the dangers of smoking – telling her it would eventually result in her death – and then asked her where she would go when she died. She didn't want to talk about it even though Jan was trying to get her ready to die. Eventually she did listen to Jan's presentation of the gospel and she did take a Bible. Ouch! Our lack of closure with John and our hope for the unbelieving smoker made me feel prayerful at last – exactly the gut wrenching feeling I needed to engage my mind in prayer. I wish I had had my gut wrenched in prayer with every encounter, but I didn't. Now that I have I will continue praying for another encounter with John as well as the salvation of the smoker and everyone else we encountered today.

Street evangelism is an emotional business because you are swimming in the waters of the lost sea of humanity. What I learned today is that just because lost people are tossed and turned by false spiritual teaching – or their own imaginations – I don't have to be tossed and turned by my own emotions. Just as the wise man who builds his house upon the Rock stands firm when the rains come down, the streams rise and the winds blow, I can stand firm emotionally – even when doing street evangelism – by mentally standing prayerful and firm upon Jesus and His character instead of being caught up in my feelings. I can't speak to the emotions of the other 7 women who are with me, but because we are in tune with each other my guess is that they also had some emotionally raw moments today. I'm glad I brought a lot of moleskin with me this year. I think we will all need it for more than our feet. If you need some emotional moleskin too don't look for it in Walmart. You'll only find it in the Bible as you study and obediently take every thought captive to Christ.

Day 3 - 2015-03 To the Jew First

One of the reasons that all of us came on this trip to Israel is because we believe Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" We are interested in Jewish mission because we believe that God is interested in it and has indeed commanded it of the mostly Gentile Church. Romans 11:11 explains that one reason God saves Gentiles is to use them to make Jews jealous enough to want the kind of relationship with God that they see among believing Gentiles. So, one of our purposes today was to focus on Jewish evangelism both in the Old City and in Tel Aviv. It was a challenging but lovely day. We are finally learning the drill. Tony picks us up, we pack ourselves up with Bibles in many languages, we park at their church and then we walk into the Old City.

This morning we had our devotional time with Tony in the Christ Church Guest House garden just inside the Jaffa Gate. For 30+ minutes Tony talked to us about Adam's fall, the depravity of man and the grace of God. Afterwards he motioned to me and told me to go sit with a Jewish couple at the next table and share the gospel with them. They were a very nice older couple who had lived in Jerusalem for a long time but were now from Manchester, England, Tony's hometown! God's Providence never ceases to amaze! As we were chatting Tony joined me to engage them in conversation since they had a hometown in common. The wife, who shared that she is an atheist but had enjoyed listening in on our morning devotional, complimented Tony on the teaching he had given us and they spoke about how the English translation of the passage didn't do the Hebrew justice. We talked about Jesus with them and they were happy to receive a New Testament (Brit Chadasha) in Hebrew. It was a Divine encounter.

Afterwards we followed along with Lisa, a musician, Russian translator and tour guide who is on staff with Voice in the Wilderness. She was so kind to come and teach us a few archaeological things about the city walls and explain some excavations in the Cardo that revealed parts of the wall dating back to the first Temple period. We walked up and down the narrow streets through the Jewish Quarter and parts of the Arab Quarter talking to people and giving away Bibles.

After several hours it was time to make our way back to the ministry house to get ready for a fellowship meal with the team going into Tel Aviv for their regular Friday night evangelism in the red light district. We had friends from China, Korea, France and Tony's family all around the table. Tony's wife, Dona, takes turns with a lovely Korean member of their church in making the family meal; boy is Korean food delicious! We enjoyed the food and fellowship so much; it was hard to break away from it to head to Tel Aviv. The van was loaded down with boxes of Bibles and we were off to meet up with about 30 Korean Americans from Los Angeles who were joining us for the evening. After the van was unloaded, the Bible distribution station set up, and the Korean Americans had received a quick orientation, we filled our bags with Hebrew and English Bibles, got back in the van, and travelled to a close but oh so different part of town. While our new friends and some of Tony's church members were doing street evangelism, in the area where immigrants and foreign workers congregate on Friday nights, we were walking up and down Rothschild street, two by two, engaging Israeli Jews in conversation. Rothschild felt strangely familiar to us – not because there was a McDonald's – but because the people were more established; this bothered us in retrospect, as we were processing the day. It was a street filled with secular, non-religious Jews having dinner at street cafés, strolling their babies, jogging, and meeting each other for date night after work. Tony gave us some great instructions on how to start conversations and find a common bond, and then he sent us out in pairs for about an hour. In the end, we had passed the test but it was not easy. It was good to see that we were in danger of becoming dependent on Tony to do all the talking. Jan and I walked one way, Dottie and Olivia headed to meet and greet in the outside café at McDonalds, Sue and Kim, and Sarah and Stephannie headed in another direction. God had encounters in store for all of us. After each encounter Jan and I stopped to evaluate ourselves: Had we been friendly? Had we found common ground? Had we truly talked about Jesus and the gospel or just offered a Bible? The Jewish people on Rothschild Street were all secular, non-religious Jews or they would have been at home with their families on the Sabbath. I think this made talking and listening to them easier.

One woman was surprised to learn that Jesus was a descendent of Abraham and David. She said she was glad to receive a New Testament, as she had wanted to read it for a long time. Another woman,

who had emigrated from Russia ten years ago, was there with her friend and the friend's two young daughters. As they put on a little girl dancing show to Israeli music, she gladly chatted, listened about Jesus, and received both a New Testament and a book called *Betrayed* which is an autobiography of a Jewish family that came to faith in Jesus. Two other women, who had studied the Bible in school and then never contemplated it since, listened, asked questions, and received our gifts of God's Word and *Betrayed*. There were other young mothers and their children who were told that God had a plan for them, and His plan was revealed in His Word. Another woman, who was just visiting from New Jersey, did not believe that Jews could die and go to hell. She conversed with our team for 40 minutes and revealed some strange ideal about salvation and Jesus. She would not receive a Bible. Another Jewish woman from New York had the worldview that I'm OK, you're OK, everyone is OK – we just need world peace. Some people received Bibles and some refused, but all in all we found that these secular Jews were not any different from secular people in Northwest Arkansas. All were lost, didn't really believe they were lost, and found it difficult to imagine that there is judgment coming for them. As we reflected on our day as a whole, we were sad to admit that generally the Gospel presented in the United States is only ½ a Gospel which is really no Gospel at all. The love of God reigns supreme in most Gospel presentations while the wrath of God is veiled in soft language that almost makes salvation unnecessary.

What can we do about this? All we can do is change our own vocabulary to echo the truth found in the Scriptures, show people from the Scriptures what God has promised in the future, and humbly and prayerfully plead with them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved from God's wrath to come. This should be our goal not only here but at home. Hopefully, the more we grow in courage and compassion for the lost here, the more we will exhibit Gospel courage and compassion at home after we return. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile ... The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them ... so that men are without excuse ... There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away ... there is no fear of God before their eyes ... But now a righteousness from God ... has been made known ... this righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe ... How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ... Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God ... do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is ..." (Romans 1, 3, 10, 12) We know that God's will for us today is to share the Gospel with the Jew first and also the Gentile. I think that would be God's will for you today too. Won't you join us in this quest to share both the love of God and the wrath of God with the Jew first and also the Gentile? We hope so and send you love from all of your friends in Jerusalem.

Day 4 - Israel 2015-04 Henny Penny

This morning in our devotionals we read about the Day of the Lord from Zechariah 14 and talked about the fact that every terrible thing described in this chapter is going to happen on Ben Yehuda Street, Jaffa Road, and all the other streets we have been walking on for the last four days. Do

yourself a favour and read Zechariah 14:1-2, but don't stop there; read the whole chapter. It is shocking. The Day of the Lord is coming – it is coming! Hence, for four days I have felt like Henny Penny (you may know her as Chicken Little or Chicken Licken) as I've walked up and down the streets of Jerusalem. After an acorn fell on Henny Penny's head she hysterically went around telling all of the other animals, "The sky is falling!" "The sky is falling!" "The sky is falling!" Of course the sky was not falling and Henny Penny looked like a fool for thinking that it was. She has gone down in folk lore history as nothing more than an alarmist. Is that what we are, foolish alarmists, as we try to convince strangers that they need a Saviour because God's unavoidable judgment is coming? Are the prophecies of the Old Testament folk stories or are they real stories? The majority of people we have talked to in the last four days would probably say they are not real. If they viewed them as real surely they would be desperate for a Saviour. Hardly anyone seems desperate to be saved from God's wrath which is to come. Most don't even want to talk about it. Nor do they want to talk about their own deaths and what they think might happen to them when they die. Sin and judgment are never popular subjects, not in Israel, not in the United States. Why are we even bothering to bring up such an unpleasant subject? We talk to people about God's judgment because we do believe it is real. Jesus' Second Coming is all wrapped up in it. His First Coming provided the only escape from it. It makes no sense to talk about the need for a Saviour without also talking about the reality of judgment. So we were Henny Pennys today as we walked up and down the streets this morning and again this evening after church. We met tourists from Australia who are stationed in Washington, DC, a man from Russia who was painting a landscape of the Jaffa Gate, two Jewish brothers from Manchester, England making a video to combat anti-Semitism, a Jewish couple from Brazil, a German father and his son, a Jewish man who had recently returned from studying in LA, an older man from Spain, a Jewish couple having lunch, three Russian men, a group of tourists from Mexico, women from the Philippines, a Hindu and her atheist boyfriend from India, a Jewish Canadian woman visiting her in-laws, Jewish girls from Canada on a birth right trip, two Jewish men and their sons – none of whom believe in Jesus or have any sense that they need a Saviour. We also met some Christians from California who were the only believers in their tour group, a youth pastor and his wife from Atlanta, a girl who worked at Gordon Conwell Seminary, and a professing Christian couple from England and Denmark. I'm sure there were more, but these are the ones I can remember. We were encouraged to meet the believers, but none of them except the ones from California seemed concerned about the plight of everyone else on the streets who are in danger of facing God's coming wrath because they have not repented of their sins, bowed to Jesus as Lord and received Him as their Saviour.

When you are talking to unbelieving strangers who have a totally different world view and you hear Biblical truths about salvation and judgment come out of your mouth you sometimes think that you are as crazy as a chicken bonked in the head by an acorn. The gospel sounds absolutely absurd to non-religious Jews and Gentiles who have never heard it before and really don't want to hear it now as they stand there listening and trying to get away from you. Some do express interest, even saying things like "My husband and I were just talking about Jesus today but we don't know anything about Him", "We were just discussing Jesus among ourselves when you walked up. Tell us about Him", "My husband doesn't want your Bible but I do!" or "No one has ever told me any of this before", "Yes, I will read this (New Testament)", or "Will you give me more (New Testaments) for my family?" Surely God must have caused their interest and we pray it will continue and that they really will read God's Word about the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Will you join us in praying daily for the salvation of

all of the Jews and Gentiles who have been willing to take a copy of the New Testament in their language? Will you also pray for us to persevere in boldness and not grow callous to the plight of people who will be caught up in the vortex of God's wrath if they die without a Saviour? It is not a mind friendly thing to see yourself as a Henny Penny saying "Judgment is coming!" "Judgment is coming!" "Judgment is coming!" on Ben Yehuda street. That's why I'm so glad we also read 1 Corinthians 1:18-24" this morning. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate" Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Thank you for praying.

Day 5 - Israel 2015-05 Earthly vs Eternal

First stop yesterday was Caesarea by the Sea, a large artificial harbour built by Herod the Great. This Israeli National Park includes not only the ruins of the harbour but also ruins from a Roman Theatre, one of Herod's Palaces, an Amphitheatre, Bathhouse Complex, a Temple dedicated to the goddess Roma and Augustus Caesar, a Hippodrome and much more, all built by Herod and all magnificent in their time. Today they are just ruins that give proof to the truth that manmade works are earthly, not eternal, and will not survive forever. The same can be said of Megiddo which we toured and learned belonged to an alliance of Canaanite cities that rebelled against Egypt under Pharaoh Thutmose III. Megiddo is mentioned several times in the Old Testament, most notably when King Solomon built several things there (1 Kings 9:15) and King Josiah of Judah was killed there (2 Kings 23:29-30). Of course Megiddo is also mentioned in Revelation 16:16 (along with Zechariah 12:11) and is usually identified as Armageddon, where the valley below it (the Jezreel Valley) will be the staging ground for the Antichrist's forces as they seek to completely destroy the Jewish people. As it stands today Megiddo is nothing more than a super impressive place of idolatrous Canaanite worship, and Israelite ingenuity as it is displayed in Megiddo's huge water system.

Nazareth, the place where the Word of God became flesh at Jesus' conception, will break your heart as at the bottom of one street there is a billboard that reads: "O people of the Scripture (Christian)! Do not exceed the limits in your religion. Say nothing but the truth about Allah (The One True God). The Christ Jesus, Son of Mary was only a Messenger of God and His word conveyed to Mary and a spirit created by Him. So believe in God and His Messengers and do not say: 'Three gods (trinity) Cease! It will be better for you. Indeed, Allah is the One and the Only God. His Holiness is far above having a son.'" (Quran 4:171).

How patient and forbearing God is to not rain down fire and brimstone over this plus all of the other idolatry we saw in Nazareth. In Capernaum we stood amongst the ruins of a synagogue built on top of the remains of a synagogue that stood in Jesus' day. It was here that Jesus healed a man with a shrivelled hand on the Sabbath. In fact it was in and around Capernaum that Jesus did 2/3 of His miracles. Where are all of those people now who witnessed the mighty hand of God? The majority of them are dead in their sins as they did not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Jewish Messiah.

As we drove by the ruins of Korazin all I could hear in my head was Jesus warning, “Woe to you, Korazin! ... For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago ... and you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths” (Luke 10:13-15) At Caesarea Philippi we stood and had our picture made in front of the opening of a cave that was commonly called “the Gates of Hell” in Jesus’ day. Gone are most of the ruins of the impressive pagan temple that once stood there. It was here that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, stood in front of the temple to the shepherd god Pan and asked Peter in Matthew 16:13-18, “Who do you say that I am?” It was here, standing in front of this pagan temple that jutted out of a huge rock wall that Jesus promised to build His church – a church that would storm the “Gates of Hell” and prevail over them. Bet She’an, one of the ten cities of the Decapolis was the most important city in Northern Israel. It was a thriving Roman city inhabited by pagans, Jews and Samaritans and it had magnificent public buildings engraved with inscriptions and adorned with statues. What does it look like now? A city destroyed by an earthquake and partially put back together by hard working archaeologists. As I later stood on an overlook in the Judean Wilderness I contemplated not only what we had seen but also what we had done yesterday and today. Herod, the magnificent builder, erected temples to Roman gods as well as the God of Israel. He was pluralistic and loved a life of leisure. We are no different as we chase after our gods of materialism and do everything we can to avoid a hard life. The Canaanites in Megiddo offered their children on a round stone altar. Do we not do the same when we choose to offer our children on the altars of sports or other extracurricular activities that always seem to squeeze out substantial Bible study, family devotions and sometimes even church on a busy weekend? The Word of God was conceived in Mary’s womb in Nazareth yet He was also birthed in us through the Holy Spirit. Our chasing after idols must try God’s patience as much as the idolatry we witnessed in Nazareth. We have not seen Jesus heal a withered hand in a synagogue on the Sea of Galilee, but we have plenty of proof He has given us in our own lives that He is the Son of God. Are we willing to profess Him before others as Peter did at Caesarea Philippi? Better yet are we willing to boldly go up to strangers and say, “Who do you say that Jesus is?” and then take the time to enter into their world and tell them what Jesus says about Himself in the Bible?

This morning after checking out of our hostel in Tiberius we were so eager to get some coffee and breakfast from a 5 shekel shop down the street that not a single one of us picked up even one Bible out of the back of the van to carry with us as we walked. We were not thinking of others who need to have a copy of the New Testament in their own language. We were not thinking of initiating conversations with lost strangers. We were only thinking of ourselves. We realized it too late when God sent others to the 5 shekel shop and we were caught empty handed and unable to give them God’s Word in their language. Our hearts sank that we had so quickly failed the test. In reflecting on that moment I am glad that we learned from it. The rest of the day you could not separate us from our Bible bags. We gave Bibles to Arab tour bus drivers, National Park workers, and tourists. Once when Dottie and I were wavering in our courage to approach a group of guys having a cookout by a little spring, Tony simply said, “Ok if you’re afraid then just don’t go over to them. We can get in the car”. Hearing him say that out loud was enough to propel us to overcome our self-centred fear. We needed the push and are glad he gave it to us. Who can ever get over standing in front of the cave at Caesarea Philippi or looking at the grottos carved into the huge rock wall? Once you have been there you realize that everything in life boils down to how you answer Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” In fact I believe that it is in failing in any given moment to give the correct answer to

that question that we are overcome with irrational fears that tempt us to walk away from evangelistic opportunities that God hands us on a silver platter. What are we to make of the ruins of Bet She'an? Like Caesarea Philippi, Bet She'an represents every non eternal thing we work so hard to achieve, stupidly believing that it is worth it when all it takes is a personal earthquake to undo everything we've sacrificed our lives to build. The remedy? Google the Judean Wilderness and stare at some photos of it for a while and I think you'll come to the same conclusion we did as we stared at the real thing. In the barren Israeli desert where nothing grows and all you see is the stark, brown landscape of the hilly earth, your mind begins to drift to a different plane – and it is there that you see in your imagination a city whose Architect and Builder is God. We need to be about the business of living for that eternal city because it is the only one that can't be destroyed. Herod the Great didn't do that. Consequently all that is left of his life's work is a pile of rocks. Our hearts are changing.

Day 6 - Israel 2015-06 Voice in the Wilderness

Voice in the Wilderness is such an appropriate name for the church and ministry we are serving with here in Israel. When asked to identify himself John the Baptist quoted Isaiah 40:3, "A voice of one calling in the desert: 'Prepare the way for the Lord'". This is what the entire Simon family and church of Voice in the Wilderness is trying to do. They are working here in Israel to prepare the way for Jesus' return by doing what John the Baptist did. They are sharing the true and Biblical gospel with both Jews and Gentiles and calling them to repentance and faith in Jesus. At the same time that they work to help people in Israel see their spiritual need they also work to meet their physical needs, both through Dona's ministry house that helps needy women and the church which distributes aid parcels.

Last night I was able to learn more about the call that Voice in the Wilderness also has to the needy outside of Israel. Tony preaches and does evangelism and Bible distribution not only in Israel but also in Jordan, Egypt, Turkey and Iraq. For the last nine months God has extended Voice in the Wilderness' reach by calling Tony to Iraq Kurdistan where he has worked on a regular basis among the refugees fleeing ISIS. I encourage you to get on the ministry/church website: www.voice-wilderness.com and read some of the newsletters from this past year.

Monday night we hosted a group of Korean born men and women who have immigrated to Los Angeles. They have been here about a week and were the ones we met at church on Saturday night and in Tel Aviv on Friday night. Their flight to LA was in the middle of the night so they came here to the ministry house to have tea with us and rest until about midnight. As we had tea Tony told them more about his work with the refugees. First of all Tony said that from an eternal perspective what has happened to these people fleeing ISIS is a good thing because they have fled from countries which were closed to the gospel. He said, "Before we could not go to them but now we can because they are refugees." Apparently their spiritual beliefs are a melting pot of mixed up religions. Some belong to an ancient religion that has to do with following John the Baptist – Jesus is not a part of it. Others, like the Yazities, have religious practices that work to pacify Satan. Because Islam has failed them they have a great openness for the gospel. Tony encouraged the Koreans and us to be concerned for these refugees and to do what we can to take advantage of the opportunity to spread the gospel among them at this time. Some of the refugees come to Iraq Kurdistan as professing Christians because they have been born into families who have professed Christianity for centuries.

This doesn't mean that they have really been born again or that they even know what the gospel is. Even many of their church leaders cannot articulate the gospel. Hardly any of the common people can read. One of the things that Tony does through Voice in the Wilderness is to take and give away audio Bibles in their languages. He teaches the leaders and the people about God's grace and encourages the church to teach the people to read because now they are not working and they have the time to learn. In addition to giving out the gospel via audio Bibles, children's Bibles and Bibles in over five different Kurdish languages (for those who can read), he also gives out emergency aid. He spoke of one pastor (in a town I could not spell or pronounce) that has the responsibility to feed 800 families and another in Irbil that is responsible for 1000 families. He either goes to Iraq Kurdistan by himself or takes a team that he has trained and when they get there they buy and put together emergency aid: food parcels, fuel, heaters, chickens, formula, etc. He said there is no room for luxuries. He works through the churches that are there and he gives physical aid not as an end unto itself but as a means to the end of giving the gospel. I know he would appreciate your prayers as the salvation of these needy people and the gospel opportunities he has been given weigh heavy on his mind. Recently when he was there the American Consulate was bombed and a coffee shop near where he was working was bombed. He told us that after Ramadan is over he believes that American, Iraqi and Kurdish forces will work together to try and recapture Mosul. Tony said that even if there is a war going on there he will still go because missionaries should not always pull out when their situation gets tough. As long as the airport is open he will fly. When it closes he said he will drive. He has a missionary friend in Lebanon who stayed (I'm assuming in Lebanon during a war – but it could have been in Iraq Kurdistan) when everyone else left. He and his mother, who was in a wheelchair, handed out Bibles to all who would take them. Tony told us that he is not afraid to go because God is Sovereign. Then he asked us, "Do you just believe this on paper or do you really believe it in practice?". When I asked him about other Christian organizations that are giving aid he commented that very few do evangelism as well as give physical aid. He said that there are some organizations that come to entertain the displaced children, but entertaining is not what they need. They need the gospel. He works to teach the adults about Jesus so that the adults can teach the children. It was amazing to me that he has been able to take well over 600 audio Bibles straight through customs in Turkey. What is the difference in how Tony approaches the situation in Iraq Kurdistan compared to other relief agencies? Tony views it as a calling not a job. He views the salvation of their souls as primary and everything else as a means to that end. If you would like to know more, just get on the Voice in the Wilderness website or the Facebook page "Aid for Kurdistan and the refugees". An hour ago after dinner Olivia helped Tony by posting a couple of hashtags you can use to raise awareness for the refugees that he works with in Iraq Kurdistan. We hope it will be trending soon.

If the Lord leads you to financially give towards this gospel opportunity I believe you'll be able to figure out how to do it from the Voice in the Wilderness website or their FB page. If not, you can ask us while we are here and we'll try to get more specific information to you or you can get into my FB friends, find Antony Simon and message him. You can also contact Zion's Hope in Florida: www.ZionsHope.org and they can give you more information as they are heavily involved in Voice in the Wilderness and can also receive funds earmarked for this ministry. (One quick disclaimer: Raising your awareness of the need for hard core evangelism and Bible distribution in Israel and Iraq Kurdistan and giving you an opportunity to financially contribute was my idea, not Tony's. He has no

idea I am blogging about the ministries of Voice in the Wilderness today. God put it upon my heart to tell you, so I did).

All that being said, we also felt like a lone voice in the wilderness today as we climbed the Herodian to see the ruins of Herod's palace and tomb while trying to give out Bibles to people we met along the way. Then we walked the streets of Jerusalem (which are now becoming familiar to us) to engage people in conversation about Jesus and offer Bibles to any who would take one. There were not many who would talk or take Bibles today. When we asked Tony about this he simply brushed it off by saying, "Talking with dead people is difficult". Then he coached us on how to respond to someone who either tears up the Bible we've given or tells us to go away because we are offensive (both of these scenarios happened today). He said, "Just say, I'm sorry you're offended. I'm just telling you what the Bible says. When the Messiah comes you can take it up with Him. God Bless you."

Day 7 - Israel 2015-07 Go Fish

If you have ever played Go Fish with a 5 year old you can get the picture of what it is like for us every day as we stand in the storage room trying to sort out the many different languages and take a good guess at how many/what language Bible we'll need for the day.

Yesterday as I was fishing around I found a resource I had not seen before so I stuck a couple in my bag. What I learned later in the day came by way of reminder that we may pack our bags but it's only God's grace that leads us to the right Bibles/ resources for the day as only He knows which fish will come and take a bite. When Tony got here in the morning he brought two women from Finland with him who were going to spend the day with Dona visiting a church member in the hospital and checking on everyone at the women's house. Their church in Finland helps fund the women's house here that Dona runs. After telling these two women all about his mission to the refugees in Iraq Kurdistan, Tony took the time to train us again on how to approach people. It has been helpful to us for him to keep such a close watch on how we are doing and to point out some things that we should do differently so that our evangelism skills (or lack of them) increase and are refined. None of us considers ourselves to be skilled evangelists and I don't think that any of us believe we have been given the spiritual gift of an evangelist. Yet, we know we should not hide behind our lack of giftedness and leave the evangelism up to someone else because all believers are called to go and share the Gospel – all believers are called to become fishers of men. Tony encouraged us to trust God for the day as it would be a long day and we would not return until late at night after church. When we left for the day the van had boxes of different Bibles in the back end so that we could replenish our bags after doing evangelism in the Old City as we would head up Mt. Scopus to the Hebrew University and Hadassah Women's Hospital in the afternoon for an hour or so before church at 6:00pm. The day was filled with fishing for men as we approached people one after another asking where they were from, trying to engage them in conversation or simply offering them a New Testament in their language and then encouraging them to read it. Sometimes Tony will get the conversation going and then hand off people to us and sometimes he will point and say "That person is Ethiopian/ Jewish/Arab/Russian/German/Philippino/French/etc". After three summers of fishing with him on the streets of Jerusalem I still can't figure out who's who. We have all talked about how not knowing who's who is one of the hardest things for us because sometimes we wind up putting our foot in our mouth (like the time two years ago when we were in Haifa and I told two uncovered

Arab women how much I loved the Jewish people because they looked Jewish to me). To say that street evangelism is humbling is an understatement. One interesting thing about fishing on the streets is that you can approach two people and one will turn his back on you while the other one eagerly takes a Bible. This happened several times yesterday. The one that sticks out to me the most were two Arab women from Nazareth who were walking together on a narrow street in the Old City. One waved her arms in a disgusted “No!” and the other a hesitant “No”. After the first woman walked on the other asked us if we were Jehovah’s Witnesses (she couldn’t quite say that in English but we got her drift). When we said “Oh No! We are not JW” – she then came towards us eagerly, took a Bible and blew us a kiss!. It was a lovely moment. As we were walking along a Jewish young man who had just turned 18 approached us because he was raising money for the IDF. In August he will begin paratrooper school. After visiting with us for a while he gladly received a Bible. Another time Dottie was able to tell a soldier all about her son, Andrew, and give him a Bible and I came upon a few other soldiers and gave them Bibles. I have been surprised that we have not seen more IDF/IAF this year. Maybe we will today. Sometimes Tony directs us to stop at a sidewalk café and sit down at the tables with strangers. This happened for two of us yesterday. The response of the women was polite but negative “You are blond, I am brunette. We are all different. I don’t want to hear about your religion”. When you fish for men on the streets sometimes you get nothing, sometimes you get a nibble, and sometimes a bite and sometimes you get to reel in a fish. The strongest bite I got yesterday was from a Hindu man from India. We did not have any Hindi Bibles but he took an English one and then I remembered the new resource I had stuck in my bag. I gave the man a DVD of the Jesus film which had the option to watch it in Tigrinya, Mandarin, Sinhala, Nepali, Vietnamese, Hindi, Malayalam, or Turkish. I wish you could have seen his face. He said in English, “Malayalam! That’s my language! Thank you! Thank you!” I have never heard of Malayalam. Isn’t God so very good and kind to feed the Gospel to people in their language? Oh, I pray this man watches the film and gets reeled in by another believer that God will use to harvest his soul in grace. If he is not harvested in grace, he will be harvested in judgment. This is the truth that spurs us on to give covered women a film in Arabic about the salvation of Mary Magdalene. Knowing there are both wheat and tares in the same harvest field also spurs us on to give a CD of Paul Washer’s Shocking Message to those that profess to be Christians but are obviously clueless about Jesus and the gospel when they are engaged in conversation. If you have never listened to this message or watched it on YouTube I suggest you do so.

After a late lunch in the Arab Christian quarter we walked back to the van parked at the Baptist House (where Voice in the Wilderness has their services/Bible studies). There we restocked, piled in and headed to the sidewalk by the coffee shop across from Hadassah Women’s Hospital and down the street from Hebrew University. Tony went into the coffee shop to study before church and we divided up and hit the pavement. For the first twenty minutes I stopped taxis in front of the hospital and gave Bibles through the window to the Arab or Hebrew drivers. When I ran out of Arabic Bibles I crossed the street and walked down the stairs to catch students leaving their dorms. Everyone else was spread out up and down both sidewalks. When we came back together to report and meet Tony everyone had gotten nibbles and bites. God brought Jews and Gentiles from the Ukraine, the United States, Turkey, Jerusalem, the Congo and many other nations.

Stephanie and Kim asked a Jewish woman “What do you think about Jesus?”. Her surprising but delightful response was “I have been wondering about Jesus; I have some questions.” What a joy it was for them to answer her questions, share the gospel and send her off with a Bible in hand. Dottie

gave Bibles in Chinese to two Chinese students, one who was a believer and the other who was not. She encouraged the believer to turn around and give the Bible to someone else and she said she would!

Our bags and our hearts were both lighter when we got in the van to go back to the Baptist House. It is so wonderful to attend a prayer meeting that is not all in English. Tony's flock is small but dedicated and eager to pray and study the Bible on Wednesday nights. We helped Dona with the food preparation and then we gathered around the large conference table to pray, have a fellowship meal and study the Book of James. The two women from Finland were there along with Tony's two elders (Kang from Korea and Leonid from the Ukraine). Ella who is still in the hospital joined in via Tony's iPhone. Tony exhorted us all from James chapter 3 to use our tongues for their created purpose – the praise and glory of God. Will you join us today in using your tongue to engage someone in conversation about Jesus? Will you tell them the Biblical Truth about God the Creator, the Truth about man and sin, the Truth about Jesus the Lord and Saviour and the Truth about what their rightful response to the Gospel should be? Don't be afraid or shut down by their response. Just go fish – for the One who stocked the pond with fish from every tongue and tribe and nation – the One who saves both Jews and Gentiles said, "The time has come ... the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news! ... Come, follow Me ... and I will make you fishers of men" Mark 1:15, 17.

Day 8 - 2015-8 On A Clear Day

As we were leaving Hebrew University last night we crested a hill that must have been the top of Mt Scopus and Tony said "Look up front! You can see the Dead Sea!" We oohed and ahead and then Jan said, "On a clear day you can see Mt Nebo!" For those of you who don't know me, I'm short, so I could not really see over the seats in front of me to see anything out the front window, but my heart could see and it hit me like a ton of bricks. "On a clear day you can see Mt Nebo, but can you see the people who are going to hell walking by right in front of you?" This is a question that every true Christian must ask himself when he comes to Israel to sightsee. I have had the privilege of coming to Israel several times on a tour. I have been from Dan to Beersheba sightseeing, but it was not until three years ago that I began to really see the people who live here. The people are lost and they will die in their sins if they do not come to faith in Jesus before they take their final breath. The traffic was terrible as we were driving home so Tony took the van down a narrow, winding road and through the Valley of Gehenna then up to the ministry house that overlooks it. I passed my phone up to Jan and had her take a picture because I wanted to always remember how sanitized the Valley of Gehenna has become. If you read the Bible you will remember from the Old Testament that the Valley of Gehenna is the place where the Canaanites used to kill and sacrifice their children on an altar to the demon god Molech. Later in New Testament times it became the city dump and incinerator. Because there was always a fire burning in Gehenna it was Jesus' choice of illustration for hell – the place where the fire burns but the worm doesn't die – the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. On a clear day you can see Mt Nebo in Arkansas too, but can you see the people all around you that are going to hell or has hell become so sanitized by our weak Gospel presentations in America that it looks nothing like it is supposed to look? If that thought has hit you like a ton of bricks I'm glad because one of the struggles in coming here to do street evangelism is the struggle to bring this training home to Arkansas and motivate people to share the whole gospel – both the wrath/judgment of God and the grace/love of God with lost people. We shared with a lot of

lost people yesterday. While we were not able to engage everyone in conversation who took a Bible or our other materials, we are trusting in the sufficiency of God's Word to bring the reality of their destiny home to their hearts.

After we went to the Baptist house to meet and be joined by an IMB missionary, David, we headed down the sidewalk on our way to the Old City. We had not walked even 50 yards before we met a woman from Sri Lanka. Sue had been carrying a Bible in her language around for two days, just waiting for this divine appointment. Next it was a man from the Philippines, after that a woman who needed a band aid, then a woman who was standing on the corner smoking. All received Bibles in their languages, all before we even got to Jaffa Road. Once we got to Ben Yehuda Street we split up and began to look for people who might be willing to talk to us or take a Bible. We met an IDF soldier who had emigrated from Ethiopia and was now a member of the special forces who are the first responders in an emergency, a Jewish religious couple, an orthodox Jewish man, and then an orthodox Jewish woman who flagged us down with "You ladies! You ladies from America!". She was not happy. She had overheard us talking and giving Bibles and she wanted us to know what we were doing was against the law. (FYI it is not against the law to talk about Jesus or give Bibles as long as you don't talk to anyone under 18 years of age). We tried to talk to her too but she told us, "If you really believed in Jesus, the Jewish rabbi, you would become orthodox Jews". This is a hard city in which to do kingdom work. Kim had also spoken to a Jewish woman from New York and Detroit who immigrated to Israel 30 years ago. When Kim told her a little bit about Jesus' life and His role as both Judge and Saviour on the Last Day she also said, "Be careful who you share this with because it is against the Law", but then she said she would take a Bible if Stephannie would just slip it in her purse. I think she took a Bible in part because she loves Mike Huckabee and has gone to hear him speak when he has come to Jerusalem. She said she loves the Governor because he loves the Jewish people. This is how it often goes. We engage in conversation and try to give Bibles because we love the Jewish people too. Some are angry and walk away, some are angry and then take a Bible anyway, some are caught off guard but show interest (or at least politeness) and some are already prepared and wondering about Jesus. We are living out the parable of the sower in the place where it was told and it is thrilling! It is even thrilling when you get cornered by an orthodox Jewish man who uses Hebrew words you can't understand but you know they're not good. This happened to me yesterday. The man was nice and cordial but clearly trying to debate me into the ground by asking if I celebrated my Jesus with a pagan Christmas tree. By the time I could finally understand what he was saying I had gotten a little grip and was able to talk to him and tell him that in our family we just worship Jesus, not the pagan roots of Christmas trees. In retrospect I wish I had told him that the tree is a good symbol for Christmas because Jesus died on a tree – maybe today I'll see him or someone else who asks me that same question. He also wanted to debate me about Easter and I was able to say that Jesus died on Passover and was raised on First Fruits, but then he told me that First Fruits was not a spring celebration (it is – he was trying to confuse me). I stood my ground and then was rescued just in time by Jan and Tony and we moved along. Most of the soldiers that we met along the way did not believe in life after death. We wondered if they were told this in their training. Outside the New Gate we were encouraged when a Hindu man sitting under a tree took the Jesus Film in Hindi. As we walked through the gate Tony told us to persevere as the something that we are doing about evangelizing the lost is better than the nothing that most people do when they come here. I must confess that some days we only do even our little "something" because he is pushing us to do the right thing. Inside the New Gate and down a narrow street we helped an Armenian woman

look for a lost earring while Tony told her to read her Bible so that the 1 ½ million Armenian Christians killed by the Muslim Turks in the genocide would not have died in vain. At Tony's favourite falafel stand we talked and gave Bibles to those who passed by while we ate our lunch. We invited a young Jewish man from NYC who had long hair and was wearing a Pink Floyd T-shirt and a Star of David necklace to join us. He was not religious and clearly empty inside himself. I wonder what in the world he was thinking as we stopped people walking by our tables. Tony talked to him and gave him a New Testament that contains prophecies about Jesus from the Old Testament in the front of it. Tony also talked a long time to a very religious Jewish young man who expressed that he could make his own atonement and then a Turkish man who looked at the "good test" on Tony's phone in Turkish.

There were so many other people we talked to in the Old City. People from all over the world. We navigated the Arab market on the way to the Damascus gate giving out the DVDs of Mary Magdalene's conversion and then we went to the Garden Tomb. Tony engaged a young unbelieving man who works at the American consulate in conversation and later sent Jan running up the hill to give him a Bible after we found one in English. After our respite Tony took us back to Hebrew University to meet and greet the students and others who walked up and down this strategic street corner. We nearly emptied our bags of newly restocked Bibles. Three encounters stood out to me. First there was a non-religious Jewish woman who was willing to talk about many things but not about Jesus because she thinks all religions are ridiculous. Oddly enough she asked to be my Facebook friend. We stood there on the side walk with Rachel's hotspot and made that happen and then she took a Mary DVD in Arabic (she was a linguist and spoke several languages including Arabic). Second there was a blind man accompanied by either his wife or girlfriend who was willing to talk to Tony about Jesus. I was so very thankful that the Holy Spirit brought to my mind that Olivia had an audio Bible in her bag (we had talked about it earlier in the day – these things are not by chance!) but she was across the street. We shouted to her over the traffic, she came running, the man received the audio Bible, Tony exchanged phone numbers with him and we all praised Jesus for the way that He orchestrates every detail of the day. Lastly there was a young Arab man who stole our hearts. Jamal was raised as a Muslim but recently he studied the Quran and decided that it was wrong. He then went to a church in the Old City but found it to be as dead as Islam so he decided to become an atheist. We exhorted him to read his gift of a New Testament and Tony was just about to share the gospel with him when a security guard came up and asked us to leave because an angry student had reported us. The moment was lost and Jamal moved on but not without a Bible and Tony's contact information. We are praying for him. We waited a few minutes on the street and then piled in the van and headed home – which was when we caught the view of the Dead Sea and then drove through the Valley of Gehenna.

Once at home we ate an authentic Uzbekistan meal (cooked by our friend Lisa, watched a slideshow of Tony's trip to Iraq Kurdistan, greeted a lovely friend of the Simons' from England who slept on the couch and then dropped into bed exhausted between 11:00 and 12:00.

Our days are long and hard but our hearts are full because God is giving us a little bit of clarity to see lost people. I've never seen Mt Nebo in Arkansas; there have been days I haven't seen the lost people right in front of my nose either. I am praying that when God gives us clear days back home we will now have the eyes to see them. I know this will only happen if hell is brought back in our

minds from its sanitized place to its Biblical place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. I hope you will contemplate the clarity of your own vision or lack of it just as we have done here.

Day 9 - Israel 2015-09 The Jewish Messiah

In the last few days we have done A LOT of talking about the true Gospel and the Jewish Messiah. We have gone through and refined an articulate presentation of: 1. the Truth about God (He is the Creator and rightful Ruler/Lawmaker who gave Adam one rule in the Garden of Eden and gives the world many rules in the Bible plus a moral conscience to show them they are lawbreakers), 2. the Truth about Man (the first man, Adam, broke God's law – he sinned – so all who were in the loins of Adam are sinners who deserve God's consequence for sin – eternal death or separation from God in every way but His wrath. The proof of this truth is that all men physically die – even little babies die sometimes), 3. The Truth about the God-Man Jesus Christ (God sent Himself – God the Son- to come to earth and become a man – the seed of the woman. His name is Jesus. Unlike Adam and us He never sinned and so He could become a Substitute Man to turn God's wrath away from all who will believe in Him. This is what was promised to Satan, Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. This is what is pictured by Abraham's offering of Isaac – then the substitute ram - human blood to pay God's forgiveness price of human sin – the Levitical sacrificial system and the sacrifice of the Lambs with the blood on the doorposts when the Israelites were "passed over" by the Angel of Death. Jesus is called the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world because faith in His sinless life and sacrificial death on man's behalf is man's only way of escape from God's wrath which is to come. 4. the Truth about man's right response to God the Son, Jesus. Which is to bow to Jesus, the God-Man, as Lord, repent of your sin and believe in His substitutionary life and death on your behalf. There is no salvation from God's wrath to come except through the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. God revealed Himself as the Creator and Redeemer of the world through the Jews who wrote the Bible, gave the world the Jewish Messiah and evangelized the Gentiles through the first century Jews who taught the world these four truths. There is no Christian Messiah. There is only the Jewish Messiah and someday both Jews and Gentiles will worship Him together around His throne in Jerusalem.

Yesterday more than ever I felt a keen separation of Jews and Gentiles – almost as if the wall that Paul talked about being demolished at the cross has been reconstructed. Originally there was a wall of separation because the Jews were the only believers in the One True God. Gentiles could not become believers in the God of Israel without becoming Jews. At the cross the way was opened for Gentiles and Jews to come straight to God themselves through Jesus – no more need for the sacrificial system because real atonement for man's sin had been made through human blood. Now the believing world is mostly Gentiles and Jews believe that they have to lose their Jewishness to become a Christian – something they clearly do not want to do. Of course the truth is they do not have to cease being Jewish. This isn't even possible. In the truest sense of the word Gentile believers have become Jews in that we are the ones who have been grafted in to the original olive tree – we have been grafted in to the faith of Abraham – the faith in the Jewish Messiah. We spent all day yesterday both in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv telling Jewish people about this. We told many Gentiles too, but I want to tell you about a few of the amazing divine appointments we had with Jewish people who we are praying will come to faith in their Messiah, the Jewish man, Jesus. As soon as we had stepped outside the gate of the Baptist House walking to the Old City a Jewish man walking the other way on the sidewalk greeted us. We asked him if he had a copy of the Brit Chadasha (New Testament) and he did not so we handed him one in Hebrew and told him it was a Jewish Book

about the Jewish Messiah. He asked who wrote it – we told him “Peter, James, John, Paul ...” He said – that’s a long name! Can I also have one in English? (for the woman who was with him:). Later as we were working Ben Yehuda Street Jan was approached by an older Jewish man who wanted to know what she had tried to give another woman (we are being watched all the time). Jan had tried to give “the good test – a Hebrew pamphlet that goes through the Ten Commandments showing that no one is good, all have sinned and are in need of salvation from the Jewish Messiah). She engaged him in conversation, called for me to come and then we spent the next thirty minutes talking to him. He was such a dear man. His name is Abraham. He was so well versed in the Tanakh (the Old Testament), asked us many questions and was genuinely looking for the Messiah to come soon. He wanted a copy of the New Testament and asked us something like “Can you promise me that God will come to me and talk to me tonight in the night and tell me Jesus is the Messiah?” We told him that we could not promise him, but if he would read the New Testament (we always used the Jewish word for it) and ask God Himself then God would speak to him through His Word – both the Old and New Covenants. We made sure he had Tony’s number (already written on the Good Test) and asked him to call Tony to talk some more. We offered to go find Tony and bring him in the moment and he said, “No, I want to read first and then I will call.” If we came to Israel for no other conversation than this one Jan and I would leave happy and honoured to have been used to plant a seed. But there is more. The day had just begun. A British woman, Dianne, who has worked with Tony for many years and is now staying at the ministry house had come with us along the way and gave us more Scriptures that we could share with Jewish people to explain the truth that Jesus is God the Son (Proverbs 30:4 in particular). The Divinity of Jesus is a huge stumbling block to Jews because the Rabbis have redefined passages like Genesis chapter 1 “in the Beginning God” (Hebrew word “Elohim” – the root word of “Him” is “Hem” which means “They” – create in “Our image” shows it again) and in Deuteronomy 6:4 – Hear O Israel the Lord our God is One. The word One is actually “echad” which means one-ness, like a unity that could show a plurality. The Rabbi Rambam actually changed the word to “yachid” which is a singular – meaning only one. Ignoring some Hebrew words, like Elohim, changing the meaning of other Hebrew words and sometimes even changing the actual words, like echad to yachid, the Rabbis have told the Jewish people that Christians worship three gods while Jews are monotheistic. Of course we believe what the first Jewish believers wrote – that Jesus is God the Son, the promised Jewish Messiah, the seed of the woman who came to live and die as man’s only atoning sacrifice. God the Holy Spirit is also seen all through the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 1. Kim and Stephannie had a significant conversation about Jesus and Christianity with a Philosophy student strolling along Ben Yehuda Street. She had immigrated to Israel from Russia as a baby and took a Russian NT as well as an English one so that she could give one to her mother. We are beginning to tell Jewish people that they should listen to what HaShem (The Name), says in His Word about Himself instead of just believing what their Rabbis tell them. This is good advice for everyone – both Jew and Gentile! By the time we got into the Old City we had already given away all but one or two of our Hebrew Bibles.

Not long after we got home it was time for the family meal with those going to Tel Aviv for the regular Friday night evangelism. On Rothschild Street, a primarily Jewish street, we encountered mostly Jewish people who were not giving a thought to their eternal destiny but also several who were. I’m so very glad that our Bible study before dinner was from Romans 15:8-13, 19-21. Please read it. If God had not given Paul the ministry of teaching not only Jews but also Gentiles about the Jewish Messiah then we would still be spiritually dead in our sins. One older Jewish woman on

Rothschild absolutely lit up when she was engaged in conversation and given a New Testament. A religious man we talked to was stumbled when we showed him a Brit Chadasha because what it literally means in Hebrew is “New Covenant”. He had very broken English but worked so hard to talk to us, explaining that he believed God’s covenant with Israel was an everlasting covenant and that the Jews who wrote the New Covenant did so because they believed that God was done with them and so they made up a New Covenant with God choosing Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. He only wanted to read God’s Word which to him was the Old and Only Covenant Book. He was looking for God’s Kingdom which would come with the Messiah and he urged us to become Jews and keep the commandments so that we would have blessings in the life to come. Truly he had the whole big picture of the Bible – but – he believed his Rabbis and would not consider that Jesus is actually the Jewish Messiah. In the end he did take a New Testament from us and said he would read it. Oh we pray this is so! Lastly there was a Jewish man who was born in Tel Aviv in 1936. His parents had lived in Frankfurt. When Hitler rose to power they saw the handwriting on the wall and immigrated to Israel. Their friends who would not come died in the Holocaust. This precious man had been studying his heart out in Hebrew school since he was three years old. He had been religious all of his life but now as he was about to turn 79 he had many doubts about all that he had been taught. The men in his family have tended to die at age 80 so clearly he was worried about his own eternal destiny. He knows a lot about Jesus already – His miracles – His death and even His burial. Our team members told him about the resurrection. One great thing about this encounter is that God had brought us a new team member for the night, a believing Jewish woman named Linda whom we had met when we were evangelizing two weeks before at the falafel stand. We had given her Tony’s contact information and begged her to come with us to Tel Aviv and she worked her schedule so that she could do it. We could write an absolute book with her testimony and life experience but basically she has been in Jerusalem for the last 18 years doing hard core evangelism with orthodox Jews. So, she was able to bring a depth to the conversation with this Jewish man that we were not able as she spoke with him in Hebrew when he could not find the English words for what he wanted to say. In the end he said that he is in “the middle” between Judaism and Christianity – exactly the same place that Linda says she was in right before her conversation. When he talked about Ezekiel 37 our girls told him that he was the perfect picture of the “dry bones” Ezekiel was talking about. He said that the only happy people he knows are people who follow Yeshua (Jesus). His wife was sitting on the bench beside him listening and finally she also began to ask questions. They wanted to talk more with someone staying in Tel Aviv so Tony’s son Josh is going to take an older believing Jewish man with him to visit our new friend, Nahum.

Yesterday ended on such a great note. We are so very thankful to God for every divine appointment we had with people yesterday, both Jews and Gentiles.

Day 10 - 14 Israel 2015-10 Living for the Moment

Today is Wednesday, our departure day.

Our pace has still been hard and long but different as we visited archaeological sites in the Old City and David’s City and Jan and I reconnected with long time shop keeper friends.

Dianne was joined by Michelle from Florida yesterday and we got to meet her last night. Although we did do a little bit of benefit to Israel's economy as we shopped for gifts to bring home we also had significant conversations with our shop keeper friends.

I will give you the cliff notes. First there was Moshe' and his brother Dove, who are both Jewish Rabbis and very versed in the New Testament as well as the Old. We talked with him about the Supreme Court's decision and how we will be returning to a changed America. We also asked him for clarification about an article we had read that quoted the Talmud (ancient Jewish commentary on the Hebrew Scriptures). The article said that the Talmud said that the only time in the history of man that there has been same sex marriage was in the days of Noah, just before the flood. If this is true then it takes Jesus' words in Matthew 24:37-39 about people marrying and giving in marriage to a whole new level. Moshe' agreed with the article we had read. He said not because the Talmud commentary specifically refers to same sex marriage but because it specifically refers to man's violation of God's boundaries in every way. God destroyed the world in a flood because He saw that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. Read Genesis 6:1-8 and you will see how this applies to the sexual limits God set upon man and man's rebellion of saying, "No! We will have no sexual limits!" We also learned, that the word "homosexual" was not in the English language until the late 18th century and therefore was not in the King James Bible - beforehand there was only a phrase "a man laying with another man"; but the understanding of what homosexuality is was taken from the Greek word "arsenokoitai" that is found both in Leviticus (in the Greek Septuagint) as well as the New Testament. All of this to say, the corruption of the world must have included sexual corruption, including but not exclusively with the Nephilim. Oh my! My heart grieves for every person who is just living in the moment with no thought to God's promised coming judgment. People who just live in the moment (especially the people we've spoken to in Jerusalem this week) don't want to talk about sin, death or judgment. Yet, we must or we cannot help them see their need for a Saviour. Moshe' and his brother are actively looking for the Messiah who will usher in God's Kingdom, but they have totally missed seeing Jesus as the fulfilment of God's promise to send the One who would come first to save us from our sins. Please pray for their eyes to be opened to the truth of their own Scriptures.

As we spent a little girl time in the Sandrouni Pottery shop we chatted with our long-time friend, Mr. Sandrouni, who was born and raised around the corner from the Christ Church Guest House. His kindergarten was actually a building that houses guest rooms now. Mr. Sandrouni is Armenian – the first people group who became Christians when the Gospel was taken from Israel into what is now modern day Turkey. At the end of WWI a million and a half of Armenian Christians were murdered in a genocide by the Ottoman Turks. His father was three years old when his own parents were killed and he fled to Jerusalem with his grandmother, Mr Sandrouni's great-grandmother. She raised his father and even lived to enjoy Mr. Sandrouni as a toddler before she died. When we asked him to tell us about his church and his relationship with Jesus he told us that he has now met the Lord!!! We were so excited to know this! He said that his traditional church is not big on studying the Bible even though he has asked his leaders to please begin a Bible study. At the moment he and his wife have been studying on their own, but he was very interested in coming to Voice in the Wilderness' midweek Bible Study. He said he was ready to get beyond the milk and on to the meat. My heart just soared to see him converted and desiring spiritual growth. We even witnessed his change with our own eyes as he introduced us to an impoverished Muslim man he has hired to empty his trashcans every day for \$200/month. The man has 7 children and Mr. Sandrouni was worried that he was not

able to feed his family so he invented a job to give the man a little extra income. Mr. Sandrouni is moving beyond living for the moment as he is opening his eyes to the poor and desiring to grow in Christ through the study of His Word.

Jan and I also had dinner with our Jewish shop keeper friend, Ronit, whom we have known for 15+ years. We have given her a Bible in Hebrew, gone through a panorama of the Bible with her and we have shared the Gospel as well as tried to prepare her for hard days ahead, if in fact, we are approaching Jesus' return. She is so dear to our hearts that we are grieved to the bone to watch her continue in darkness. She is one of the kindest and most generous persons we have ever known, but she is not a bit religious. She is like many secular Jewish people who try to live full exuberant lives while carrying the weight of impending war and destruction on their shoulders. We will be in touch with her throughout the year via email to encourage her to pick up her Bible and read it.

On Monday morning our Jewish believing tour guide friend, Jane, came to the Guest House to visit with us. Her story of surviving a brain bleed last year after we left her is so complex and miraculous that I can't even write it. Surely God saved her for the praise of His glorious grace!

Making new friends and visiting with old friends is always a highlight for me here in Jerusalem. This year God used two new friends to display the intricacies of His providence to us. You may remember in an earlier blog post that I told you about a young man from London named John, whom we met in the Old City and talked to for a long time before we were interrupted and then the moment passed. Every day we have been praying that we would run into him and we have even looked for him at the Citadel Guest House where he is staying until the end of July. You may also remember in an earlier post that I told you about a girl named Lisa from Wisconsin whom we met and exchanged contact info with at the Garden Tomb. On Saturday night Lisa came to church via our invitation a few days earlier! As we visited with her after the service we found out that she was also staying at the Citadel Guest House. We prayed together about John and asked her to try and find him. Then much later in the evening we bumped into her again just outside the Jaffa Gate and Tony invited her to come to Ben Yehuda Street on Monday night to do some evangelism. Lo and behold! when she came on Monday night she brought John with her! We were not there but Tony recounted to us that he had a very significant conversation with John and they had an appointment for coffee for later in the week. It was a joy to experience this direct answer to prayer for that young man! In the midst of Tony's talking to John at the sidewalk café' some other men overheard his explanation of Romans 1 and they asked Tony if he would come back next Monday night to do a Bible study with them. Happy Happy Joy Joy!

When you live for the riches of eternal life instead of living for the moment to please yourself in this life you have encounters like this that satisfy much more than any earthly pleasure. We hope that you will continue to pray for the Simon family and their ministry through Voice in the Wilderness – including their church plant, their women's house, their street evangelism ministry, their ministry in Iraq Kurdistan and the Bible study that Josh (their oldest son) is now teaching in Tel Aviv among 25 or more Jewish millennials.

We were excited to learn that another Jewish couple from Hawaii will be joining them in August full time to help them with their work. This husband and wife have 7 children, some who are getting married and some who are younger that will move here with them. We give God thanks for this family and look forward to meeting, working and worshipping with them in the future. There is also a

high possibility of a young man interning with them for a year and helping them with a website, social media and graphics. They need the help so much and anyone who walks along the way with them – for a short term or a lifetime – will be blessed by living for God’s Kingdom with their same eternal mind-set rather than living for the moment. Will this be you? Will this be us? We pray so even as we prepare to re-enter the United States – a much different place than we left 2 ½ weeks ago. We’re different now too though, and look forward to being with all of you soon. Sending love in this last post – Julia for all.

PS: Kim just shared this quote with me: "If I'm wrong about God then I've wasted my life. If you're wrong about God then you've wasted your eternity - Lecrae". Living for the moment leads to wasting your eternity. Oh, that we would all take our moments at home and use them as Gospel opportunities like we have done here! Please pray for us as we re-enter and readjust. We are ready to come home even though we leave a part of our hearts here in Jerusalem. Our longing to see the King in Jerusalem someday will help us to prepare the way for His return after we return to you.

