

Reflection #20



There are a couple of places in the Holy Land where you can say, “Jesus stood here.” One is on the ancient steps leading to Church of En Galli Canto. There is a place on the Mount of Olives where Jesus could have stood. Perhaps the likeliest spot is Magdala. Magdala was a fishing village at the time of Jesus; fish from the Sea of Galilee would be bought and sold here. According to Josephus, fish from Magdala was transported to Rome, so this is a big village. Jesus and his disciples would have walked through here, spent time here.

Not long ago, a plan was put together by the Roman Catholic Church to build a pilgrim hostel/retreat center on the site. The city of Magdala had long been abandoned and there was little in the way of current development. Plans were put together and funds were raised to begin. Yet, before you “dig” a foundation in Israel, you must have the site examined for archeological potential.

Two feet down, archeologists discovered the oldest synagogue in the region; they also discovered the ancient town of Magdala. This is a synagogue where Jesus would have taught; this is the hometown of one of his most mentioned followers, Mary Magdalene. The fishermen he called would have been in this place a lot. There is no plaque that reads, “Jesus stood here and said. . . .” But this site is as close as you are going to get.



The dig is still ongoing and it will be one of the few sites we will visit where archeologists are currently working. Here you will not see the strata as you will in Jericho or Meggido, but you will see the way the ancient world is beneath us.

There is a whole world beneath you as you walk the Holy Land. In Magdala, you can get a sense of what lies beneath a vast number of places. If you dig down, you will find ancient life.

As we travel from site to site, from shrine to shrine, you will be flooded with information, history, images, and sounds. Some of this will be current, some historical, and a lot will be ancient. There is so much to take in that the six hours of touring each day will leave you exhausted and ready to just sit and enjoy a conversation that doesn't include words like, "Mameluk" or "Roman engineering."

In the down time, though, I would encourage you to listen to your heart. There will be moments for you to be still, to reflect, to listen to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps most important would be to see how each of us is a kind of archeological site. The Holy Spirit is removing the layers and coverings we have heaped upon our soul. We are ever being "dug" as it were to reveal the image of God in us.

Part of a pilgrimage is to become attentive to this spiritual archeology that is going on in us. We move pretty fast. As Ferris Bueller said, "Life moves pretty fast." In our touring and visiting things will go by very quickly. Yet, this is also a time to move slowly, intentionally. When will you walk for a week in places of profound holiness? When will you spend a week praying and singing and reading the bible every day?

This will be a time to dig down. A pilgrimage will uncover parts of your heart. Be sure to take time each day to see what God is doing, finding, uncovering.