



Throughout our journey, I kept reciting this as best I could, often aloud, sometimes under my breath, sometimes in my mind only. You need words like this in Israel, where the rugged and ancient open vistas make you want to break forth in song; and where the sectarian ravages of human folly and legalism have created plenty of monuments to the dark corners of the human heart as well: barriers and barbwire, icons and graven images, denominational rituals and religious hierarchies set in high places.



Israeli guards

For me, as we passed through places where the twisted covetousness of the human heart had all but distorted the true message of Christ's overflowing and abundant love for the Father and the Father's beloved sheep, I desperately needed those verses on the tablet of my heart. That, and Psalm 23.



To visit Israel is in some ways to experience first-hand the gut-wrenching tragedy of man's rejection of Christ's love. And when you return, everyone you speak to about it asks the same question: "What was it like?" That's an interesting question because usually when you return from a trip abroad people will ask you "How was it?" or "What did you see?" But when you go to Israel they ask you: "What was it like?" They're asking you not just to tell them what you saw, but how you felt about what you saw: They're asking you to share the experience, and also to share how the experience changed you. So here's my answer to that question.

**I experienced two things that I believe have changed my outlook and faith forever.** I am blessed to share them with you now.

**The first**, and I say this without intending any offense to any specific denomination, **is what might be called the Inverse Law of Religiosity. It is simply this: The closer you move to the heart of any religious system, institution, or hierarchy, the farther you move from having a truly intimate, genuine relationship with God.**

No sooner do I write these words than I feel I must apologize for my own spiritual pride. Anyone who would say I have no right nor qualification to utter those words would surely be correct – and I claim none. That said, in the aftermath of our trip to Israel, I believe they are true nonetheless.

Jesus in Matthew 15 and Mark 7:9 warned against the fallen human tendency to take our attention off salvation -- the undeserved mercy of which is frankly beyond our intellectual capability to fathom -- by focusing instead on human ritual. "Full well ye reject the Commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition," Christ said.



Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

No where more than Israel is made manifest the damage caused by obstructing, with sectarian ritual, the living water of Christ's Holy Spirit. Here, in the land where Christ strode free and set free, restoring sight to the blind and healing the leper, divinity has been carved up and parceled out, controlled by the fiefdoms of various denominations. In the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, for example, three different denominations control different parts of the cathedral that shelters the birthplace of Christ. The sound of human laughter is forbidden inside the church – no kidding.



Church of the Holy Sepulchre

In fact, as Pastors Jim and Mary Craig have told us, there is even an entrance to a religious area in Jerusalem that is purportedly controlled by two Arab families: One "owns" the door, and another family controls the key. You need the permission of both to enter.



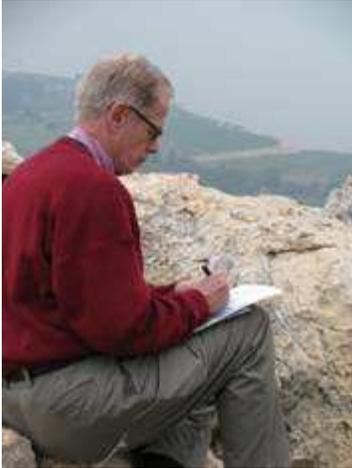
The place in Israel where the religious control is strongest, and therefore the corresponding religiosity darkest, is on the Temple Mount. Here, plainclothes spies follow the tour groups around, listening in to correct the tour guide if anything is said to the tourists that does not comport with the doctrinal religious beliefs. There is a palpable sense of intimidation, as if a dark spirit is trying to bend the very thoughts of your mind to conform with it, rather than with Christ.

"The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you Peace. Shalom."

I might add that the representatives of the mainline U.S. denominations who were part of our tour evidenced similar, if more subtle, symptoms of the same affliction. And it was interesting that the more doctrinaire and hierarchical the denomination, the more spiritual issues that seemed to arise. While I won't elaborate here, I would just confess that no church is perfect. I believe the letters to the seven churches in Revelation are meant in part to convey the fact that, while God loves His churches, all churches have fallen short of the glory of God. In humility and truth, it must be said

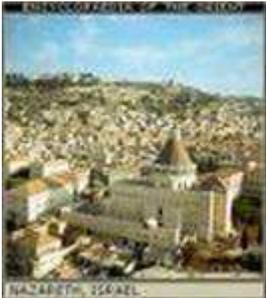
that this is true of whatever church you and I attend as well. Just as Abraham was told to build altars of unhewn stone not altered by human hands, human-constructed hierarchy are all flawed (and how could they not be, built as they are by fallen people). The spiritual transgressions of humanity tend to become amplified as the power of an institution increases. Two obvious examples: The Crusades and the seemingly endless, abominable, heartless persecution of European Jews in the Middle Ages – both of these apostasies, from which Christianity is still struggling to overcome today, came at the hands of hierarchical religious systems.

(Footnote: This “Inverse Law of Religiosity” is a good rationale for the precious value of small, human-scale churches where believers can connect directly in spirit-led worship to the Living God, Yeshua the Anointed One, without the interference of the traditions of men, or of doctrines of men, or of men.)



Pastor Jim at Mt. Arbel

I said there were two lessons I learned. **The second is related to the first.** As Pastor Jim delved into during a recent message, **you can't really understand the context of what we, as Christians, are without understanding the word "Netzor," which is the root word from which comes the word Nazareth and Nazarene, as in, "He shall be called a Nazarene."**



Remember when Nathaniel remarked, John 1:46: “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” That tells you a lot what the image of Nazareth was – it was the sticks, a quaint backwater village of very observant Jews from the House of David who were devoted to Jehovah God. Now here's an interesting question: Since the House of David was in Bethlehem (which is why Joseph and Mary traveled there to be counted by Herod's tax collectors, and where Jesus was born where a church now stands that has since been divided up like a United Nations' demilitarized zone), why were people from the tribe of Judah living in Nazareth?

According to our guide, the persecutions against the House of David (“Rachel shall weep for her children”) began several decades before the birth of Christ. This persecution stemmed from the Scriptures, well familiar to Herod and his advisers, that Messiah would one day emerge from the House of David, the tribe of Judah. Like any tyrannical leader, Herod persecuted any potential rival with paranoid fervor. This meant attacking the Jews in Bethlehem.



When Herod persecuted them, some of them, as persecuted people have done throughout history, migrated. They went to a fertile land in the north of the country, near a vast inland sea named Galilee. Just as olive trees battered by storm or drought will one day bring forth new buds, these relocated people of David became known as “Netzor,” or “offshoots.”



Olive Tree

So they were not the main branch. From the beginning, they were a tiny remnant fertile with awesome new potential. They were a small, despised, persecuted group of people, so humbled by the world’s evils that they had no where else to turn but to a genuine relationship with the one true God: Elohim, El Shaddai, Adonai. And in that, they were saved.

They did not have glorious synagogues or marbled cathedrals to worship in. They did not adorn themselves with fine garments fringed with phylacteries.



They did not preside at the city gate, judging who would be allowed to enter, and what the rules of the town would be. They were refugees, more like the hyrax described in Proverbs 30:26:

“The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks”

(old Scottish/Gaelic “Krayg,” or Craig, as in Craighouse®). And from them God sent forth the Savior of all creation.



The hydrax, or coney

Interestingly, we encountered several hyraxes on our journey. They are a very old species, so old, the scientists say, that they have several rudimentary mammalian features: One of which is they have difficulty, individually, regulating their body temperature. So they must huddle together in order to conserve body warmth.

(I write this, by the way, on Easter morning. It occurs to me that I am about to go off to a nondenominational church to worship the Lord and huddle with my fellow worshippers -- who also have made their dwelling in the krayg of Christ's salvation -- for I have learned that my soul grows chilled without the body-warmth of fellowship with my kinsmen believers.)

To this day, both in Hebrew and in Arabic, the name for “Christian” derives from the root word “netzor.”

**So the second great lesson of our journey is simply this: As a follower of Christ, you also are a Netzor-ian. You were not meant for the “glories” of this world, for its power and religiosity. You don't fit in, and you must reconcile yourself to being scorned and rejected. It's part of your family's heritage: Yours is an eternal inheritance ... and you shall inherit as your reward a life far, far beyond *anything* this world has to offer.**

No, you do not have to go looking for the one who holds the key to get where you need to go. As an emblem of His boundless grace, you have already met the only One who holds the key. You know Him. And He knows you. Intimately.

Yes, we are but conies, plain Gentile offshoots grafted into the One True Vine.

“He shall be called a Nazarene.”

And by His mercy, grace, and love, so shall you!

Hosanna in the highest ... and all glory be to God.

*The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;  
The Lord make his face shine upon thee,  
and be gracious unto thee;  
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee,  
and give thee peace. Shalom.*

...David

(David Patten is Senior Editor of *Newsmax* magazine and on the Board of Directors of Mary Craig Ministries, Inc. He is also Director of MCM's Barnabas Project. I hope you enjoy this testimony of some of his insights gleaned from the

MCM Mission to the Galilee, Israel, and Jerusalem 2010. For more on this mission and the prophetic words delivered to Israel, go to [www.marycraig.org](http://www.marycraig.org), to the prophetic section and then to a special section on Israel. For more on *Craighouse*® a Christian fellowship, its name, purpose, and mission, go to [www.craighouse.org](http://www.craighouse.org). Dr. Mary Craig)

**Pastors:**  
Rev. Jim Craig  
Dr. Mary Craig

