

SHALOM MY FRIENDS,

Waking early this morning in our Jerusalem apartment, we quickly enjoyed a scrumptious breakfast of pomegranate juice, mangos, the creamiest yogurt I have ever eaten and granola. Grabbing our camel packs full of water, some snacks and sun hats we were in the rental car in short order.

Exiting the city, we head north on to highway 60. Within 10 minutes we are passing the city of Bethel. People forget how close places are in the land of Israel. Did you know that Israel is about the size of the state of New Jersey? Teeny, tiny compared to Canada or the USA! We continue weaving through the Mountains of Israel...wait look out your window - that's amazing.... You can see the stepped terracing that dates back to the time period of King Solomon. This terracing has been proven to come from that time in Israel's history by many archeologists - the Israelites would carve out steps on the hills, surround them with rock fencing and then back fill them with rich topsoil. This farming method is still in use today - actually locals can rent community garden plots in the Davidic era and Solomonic era terracing today! Most of these have vineyards now growing abundantly on them.

45 minutes after we left Jerusalem the tires of our car crunch into the gravel parking lot of Tel Shiloh ("She-Low"). Trees covered with ALMOND BLOSSOMS greet us. This archeological site is just outside the large modern town of Shiloh - where they have built the synagogue to look like the Tabernacle of old! There are schools, grocery stores and we notice that new houses are being built - just as God told Ezekiel in Eze 36:8-15 "...I will multiply men upon you (mountains of Israel), all the house of Israel, even all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded..." big billboards announce new high rise condo buildings that are going in this year.

Climbing out of the car, the heat hits us so we grab our camel packs full of water and slap our sun hats on as we walk towards the gate proclaiming "welcome to Shiloh: wishing you a season of significant archaeological finds and discoveries that could help rewrite history" Did you know that Uncle Leen Ritmeyer and Aunt Kathleen Ritmeyer from Wales are helping to dig in Shiloh and draw reconstruction drawings of the Biblical town? A reconstruction drawing is when they take the finds of the archeologists and use them to make an accurate drawing of how that site looked in history. This is really helpful for us to understand what towns and buildings looked like in Bible times. We sign in and walk through a lovely shaded treed area, suddenly finding ourselves walking through the gateway where Eli died, falling off his stool. On both sides of the lane we see the outlines of building after building, homes from the town during the time of Samuel! Almost the whole village has been unearthed from the dust to show the truth of the Bible - following our MAP (below left) we make our way past a WINEPRESS (above) and mikveh (ritual bath) from the time of Jesus, showing that Shiloh was used then as well.





At the top of the hill there is a small museum where we see the huge storage jars from the time of the Judges – they look almost like jigsaw puzzles with their many pieces painstakingly put back together. Each area of the circular room holds artifacts from different time periods. Canaanite era, the Judges, the time of Jesus, and the Byzantine ages are all represented. To touch the jar fragments that were from the time of Hannah and Samuel is very moving – was it from a jar that they would have used when they were here? Upstairs we watch a short movie that goes through the Biblical time period of the city and once again emerge back into the heat to now make our way down to place of the Tabernacle.

How do we know that this is the place that the Tabernacle was you ask? Well, look around – everything is hills, rolling hills going up and down – except this one flat area that is the perfect size and shape for the Tabernacle. When God created this area of the land He must have had this in mind for Shiloh. We stand at where the gate of the Tabernacle would have been and everyone is quietly thinking – immersed in thoughts of what it would have been like for Hannah to come here to pray. For Elkanah and Hannah to bring Samuel, and for Samuel to grow up and serve here until the time of the taking of the ark and the destruction of Shiloh by the Philistines. There is a large wine/olive oil press right beside where the Tabernacle would have been – where they would have pressed the oil that Samuel used to care for the lampstand. The buildings just up the hill from here all had smashed storage jars from the times of the Judges that are 3-4 feet tall when put back together! Here is where the grain would have been stored. They have set up a tent with pottery that they have found here for us to all look at. Rubbing your fingers over the triple raised ridges on one – you wonder what it came from, a bowl that someone ate dinner out of or maybe one of the storage jars? One of the adults finds a bit sticking of pottery out of the pathway and unearths a section of a jar handle 4 inches long. Everywhere we go in the land the dust cries out that the Bible is true!

Isn't it amazing that God's people have returned to this land in preparation for Jesus to return and set up the Kingdom! Before we leave we look down at the same highway we drove on, route 60. Do you know that it is the exact same road that Abraham walked down to come into the land, that all those faithful would walk up and down to visit the Tabernacle and then the Temple in Jerusalem for the feasts? Jesus and his followers walked here. They call it "the Route of the Patriarchs" or the "Route of the Forefathers" One day soon Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be resurrected and able to walk again through the Mountains of Israel on this road that their descendants have named after them. By God's grace you will be able to walk through it as well – what do you want to ask them? Maybe ask Hannah "what was it like to pray at the Tabernacle in Shiloh?" And Samuel "how did it feel to grow up in and around the Tabernacle in Shiloh?" Wouldn't it be neat to talk to them and learn from them?

Before we leave Shiloh, we stand once more on the edge of the hill where the Tabernacle stood and look down across the valley filled with fields, the hills with vineyards and cedar trees. With your eyes trace the road, route 60, north towards the next village of the Israelites called Eli ("Ellie") – named after the priest that long ago served where you stand

SHALOM UNTIL NEXT TIME;

CRAZY AUNTIE LINDSAY