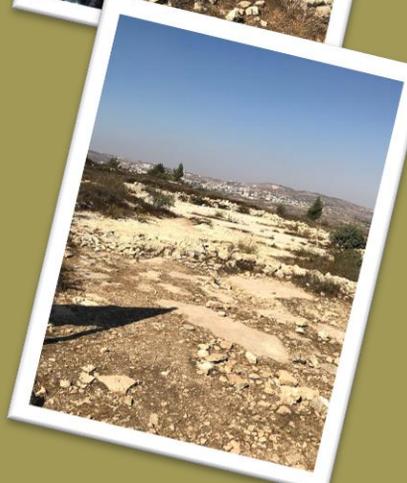
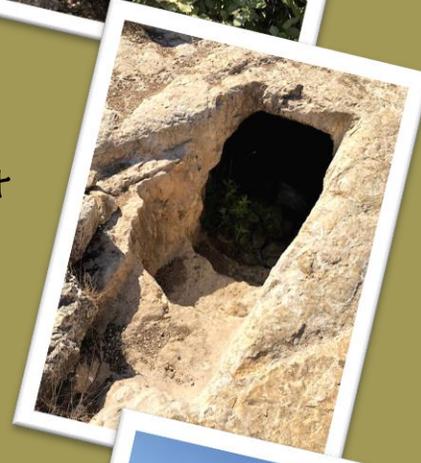


SHALOM MY FRIENDS,

Once more we find ourselves in the mountains of Israel. Today as we wind through the twists and turns, we pass towns and villages, vineyards and sheepcotes, orchards & modern businesses all a fulfillment of God's word!

We hang a right at the roundabout leading towards Ramallah and drive into the settlement of Beit El, or Bethel. As is the norm, we are waved through the security gate and drive past construction, a new apartment complex. Houses with front gardens, grocery stores and a playground fly past the window. It isn't at all what I pictured a "settlement" to be, but is in fact a bustling town. One of the schools here is known for the fact that their students upon graduation know most of the old testament by heart. That school is named after the vision and promises that God gave to Jacob here many years ago. After listening to the grade 2 class recite a huge portion of Genesis I don't think any of us will complain to do our weekly Bible Memory verse for Sunday School! The class empties into the playground and the boys start a rambunctious game of soccer while we pile into the van and head up to the top of the hill. The Tel, or ancient site, is often found at the top of the hill as it was easier to defend. Sadly we know from the history found in our Bible and with the proof of archeology backing it up, Bethel and the cities of Israel were taken and destroyed by the Assyrians. God used that gentile nation to punish Israel for their worship of false idols. Do you remember the king that is infamous for making them to sin? That's right - Jereoboam the son of Nebat. He didn't want his subjects to go into Judah for the feasts as God commanded. Instead he set up golden calves in Dan (in the North) and Bethel (in the South) and made Israel worship them. The faithful fled to Judah in the days of Hezekiah. Such a sad story!



Stepping off of the smooth gravel of the parking lot we start down a dirt pathway lined with large white and blue signs. Each of these has a Bible verse about Bethel on it. We are reminded that this is where God appeared to Jacob in a vision and gave him the promises, amazing promises that will be fulfilled in the Kingdom. The trail ends at a flattened part of the top of the hill, obviously man made. Here is where Jeroboam set up his evil temple with the golden calf in it. Archeologists have been able to see from the few remains that he tried to copy the true Temple design that God had given David and was passed on to Solomon. What an evil and wicked man to try to copy God's design and twist it to serve a hunk of metal.

There are other sights to see here, ducking down we enter an archway which is all that is left of a byzantine era tomb, one of our group noticed an odd black cube - it is a tiny mosaic tile that would have decorated this tomb. On the opposite side there is part of a wall and tower also from the time of Jeroboam. The ruins here at Beit El are a warning to all of us that we must worship and serve God in the way that he has set up.

We reverse our steps and follow that same path back to the parking lot. Before we leave however there is still one very interesting thing to do. Towering over the parking lot is the local water tower. We lose count of the steps as we climb up, each footstep ringing on the metal stairs. From the top of the tower you can see almost the entire land of Israel. They call this the "Lift Your Eyes" tower because it is in Beit El that God told Abraham to lift up his eyes and look Northward, Southward, Eastward and Westward and all the land that he saw God would give to him. The coastal plain lays to the West. To the east we can see into Jordan and the Mountains of Gilead and Moab, Our eyes travel up the Shomron Hills to Mt Hermon in the North. To the South we can easily see Jerusalem, which is only a 15 min drive, and past to the Hebron mountains. We pause and stand in awe and wonder at what Abraham would have seen and how we are privileged to hope to meet Abraham in the Kingdom and talk to him about all these amazing places that we have been to and seen. We know that Abraham did not inherit any land during his life time - instead he waits the resurrection and that being fulfilled in the Kingdom after Jesus comes back. Exiting the town we pass a large rock, not carved with hands, to remind everyone of the rock that Jacob used for a pillow here. The barren summer time hills behind remind us of the coming Kingdom when it will bloom! I hope you have enjoyed our trip today,

Until Next Time:

Crazy Auntie Lindsay