

Richard and Rosalind in the
The Garden Tomb, Jerusalem
30 July 2010

Since our return from England at the beginning of July, I am amazed at the succession of events in this hot, supposedly quiet month in Jerusalem. Our visitors continue to come, not in the numbers of groups, but locals and private groups, families and students wanting to see the "sights". We always pray that the impact of that possible, if not probable, location of the crucifixion with the features of a giant Skull on that bleak limestone escarpment and nearby empty Tomb, will become a very significant and poignant moment in their lives. Meanwhile, the political circumstances of our position here are being felt as we gaze on massive construction above us in the Muslim cemetery grounds. This has involved discussion with the Waqf, who are the guardians of all things Islamic here in the City, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, and the Jerusalem City Municipality: we have no idea of the outcome, and our greatest concern is for safety in the Garden and for the integrity of Skull Hill which are, or could be, significantly affected.

Meanwhile, we have been visiting some of the areas of the West Bank and hearing something of daily life for the Palestinian residents there. One day, we were invited to have lunch with a pastor in Ramallah, now capital of "Palestine", and took a local bus from across the road from us northwards and through the checkpoints. We were amazed to find such a bustling city, full of traders, many smart shops and elegant new construction everywhere. The church and orphanage complex, newly renovated by our host, once a poor boy from Jordan, now the Director, and brought up in the same orphanage, when his widowed mother could no longer care for him, is a wonderful story of God's grace and provision, now benefiting generations of boys in similar, difficult circumstances. We were also taken to visit the tomb of the late President, Yasser Arafat, whom our family had met one Christmas, at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Splendid is too inadequate a description, suffice it to say the area is surrounded by beautiful Hebron marble and water, with two guards on permanent duty in full dress uniform.

A few days later, we collected the Flame team from the airport, with whom I have travelled to Sudan, and I joined them, by bus, in Bethlehem each day the following week to teach about spiritual healing in a church and at a women's refuge centre nearby. The experiences, for me, with my visas and passport at the checkpoint gave me much admiration for those who in order to work have to endure this every day without such acceptable credentials as mine. Many residents cannot travel outside the Palestinian territories, so the atmosphere in the town is of a simmering pressure cooker. Praying with the ladies we met was quite a revelation of how hard life can be for them, who are Palestinian Christians, a dwindling minority in that place where the angels appeared one winter night to announce to local shepherds, "Do not be afraid, for I bring you tidings of great joy for all people."

Contrasting visitors this past fortnight have been the Deputy Director General for Tourism, seen with our Guides in the new uniform shirts Richard has bought them, and see if you can guess who.....



In the midst of all the activity, we often retreat to our roof-top garden, where a sweet dove now sits on two precious eggs and gives an aura of peace even when the winds buffet her precarious nest.

Our mid-week days off have included a visit to a Mediterranean beach, south of Tel Aviv, a successful foray to find the "Burma Road", a makeshift by-pass by the Israeli forces in early June 1948, to relieve the siege of Jerusalem by the Arab Legion. The main highway between the coast and the city at Latrun, was also barricaded and this rag-tag group who forged a highway following the course of an ancient Roman road, consisted of Holocaust survivors, newly arrived off boats from Europe. An amazing, if not miraculous, achievement few know about today. I feel so privileged to live in this country, steeped in Biblical history and archaeology everywhere one walks. Yesterday, Richard and I visited the newly re-opened Israel Museum and had an excellent guided tour around five millennia of artefacts on display in the museum. Exhibit highlights: the ossuary of Caiaphas, that infamous High Priest; the stone of the Temple trumpeter, from high off the Second Temple, completely destroyed by the Roman legions; the Dead Sea Scrolls and a huge panoramic model of Jerusalem from the first century AD, not to mention beautiful Monet paintings too.

Meanwhile, life in the Garden, tended lovingly by our wonderful staff continues, with many arrivals and departures of our volunteer members who serve us so graciously short-term. This summer, we have recruited two ordinands, and two recent post-graduates, one of whom is our David, who joins us next week.

Thank you for your interest and prayer for this work in Jerusalem which we love.