

May in Jerusalem, 2010

We are learning to accommodate to another calendar, it is the Jewish year 5770 and the months of Iyar and Sivan.

We celebrated "Jerusalem Day" on 11th May to commemorate the re-unification of Jerusalem after 2000 years, and our memories of it are clouded by the impossibility of reaching home that afternoon in the car with every road blocked because of the military parades which take place all around the Old City area, to the chagrin of many residents on this principally Palestinian side of the City. The Mayor of Jerusalem, a progressive liberal businessman, had kindly invited Richard and me to a reception at the Citadel adjacent to the Jaffa Gate, part of which dates from Herod the Great's building mania and remains a symbol of the nation. This was also where our own General Allenby walked into the City on 11th December 1917 to accept the surrender of the Turkish authorities, so ending 1900 years of Islamic rule since the Crusaders were driven out by Saladin. In fact, we never got to the Citadel that day, as we were visiting the amazing excavations at "David's City", walking up the water tunnel by which King David entered the Jebusite stronghold and captured the city as well as Hezekiah's tunnel (2 Kings 20.20) which still pours out water from the subterranean Gihon Spring into the Pool of Siloam, where Jesus would later tell the man blind from birth to wash (John 9.7). We relaxed at a little Arab café nearby where a fountain poured out fresh water and a channel nearby was full of the glorious life-giving liquid of this land, coming from aquifers deep under the earth.



Different views of the Dome of the Rock (neither is ours)

At the end of April, we experienced the Samaritan Passover, exactly one month after the Jewish full moon and travelled with many others to view this at Mount Gerizim where many of the remaining 750 Samaritan people live. We saw the remains of the Samaritan centre of worship referred to by the Samaritan woman at Sychar mentioned in John 4, and could picture the scene between our Lord and the ostracised, multi-married woman who promised her the gift of living water that the one who drinks from it will never thirst again. We witnessed the sacrifice by the white clad Samaritan priests of several large, unblemished lambs, and were reminded again of the Lamb of God whose death on the Cross was a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. I can't really say that we actually saw that much in the crowd, but the anticipation as the sun went down was quite electric, and we were privileged to peep into a ceremony which dates from the Exodus, but which the Jewish people no longer perform because they no longer have a centre, the Temple, for their worship or sacrifice; yet the formerly despised Samaritan people still carry out.

Yes, this is another month for Christian and Jewish celebration with the festival of Shavuot, harvest festival, meaning seven weeks or in Greek, Pentecost, fifty days since the Feast of the First Fruits, or our Easter Day. Shavuot today is a commemoration too of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai and many of the Jewish people stay awake all night reading from the Torah. At early dawn, as many as can follow the crowds down to the Temple Mount at the Western Wall for a service and Richard and I were able to hear the noise of this from our bed in the Garden, such was the throng of people crowded there. Of course, our own Shavuot, Pentecost is on Sunday, so we had to wait until last Sunday to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, ten days after the disciples saw Jesus ascend into heaven from the Mount of Olives, which we can view from our roof, knowing that the promise of the Father to send a Comforter who "will be with you always" did happen here in this City. When we welcome the groups here from all over the world, and hear them singing all around the Garden in praise and worship to the Living God in all their own languages, truly we can understand what an amazing thing happened that Day in Jerusalem.

One of the most moving experiences I have had recently was to hear the Messiah sung in Hebrew for the first time by a choir from all over the country. It was the heart desire of my lovely 90 year old Hebrew teacher, Irene, that she would not die before she heard this sung in God's own language, and she was instrumental in bringing this to fruition. We sat in front of an Orthodox man with his long "peyots" (the hair uncut from the temples) and wondered what he thought of that heavenly refrain of the Hallelujah Chorus and to hear Yeshua, Adonai, Messiah (Jesus the Lord our Messiah) heralded in actual Hebrew words, yet such an anathema to them.

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, Shout O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold thy King cometh unto thee!"

With every blessing in His Name from The Garden Tomb, or the Resurrection Garden. Rosalind