

## A Trip of Tears - A Holy Pilgrimage to Rome and Jerusalem - Part 2

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### The Day of Reconciliation

All night through, our Unificationist brothers and sisters prayed. At 5 am we gave all the participants a wake up call. There was a fresh spirit and high expectation in the air, like on an Easter morning.

At 5:30 the buses left to go to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, on the other side of the city. The city of Jerusalem was still sleeping. As we left the buses to walk up the road, the morning sun reflected off the beautiful bright stone buildings. There were palm trees near the city wall. It was peaceful and holy there. The pastors in their Sunday robes solemnly walked up the hill. When we reached the top, suddenly we heard sirens approaching; a few seconds later, several police cars passed us, one almost hit me. Something must have happened. We later found out that at six o'clock a bomb carried by a suicide bomber had exploded on a bus just two blocks from our hotel. No doubt, this is a life and death battle.

We needed to go down another street, and as I tried to catch up with the group, someone in the front started singing, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" The sound traveled back to me; everyone joined in this beautiful hymn. Tears came to my eyes when I saw my black brothers and sisters, who have gone the path of suffering, about to liberate our brother Jesus on behalf of True Parents. What a privilege to be part of it!

The small Church of the Holy Sepulcher, marking the place where Jesus was laid to rest, is squeezed between other buildings, with a good-sized yard in front of it; it was rather dark on the inside. We heard Hebrew singing from part of the sanctuary, an early worship service.

We gathered around the place of the tomb, and Rev. Jesse Edwards began the ceremony with a beautiful prayer, saying that the clergy had come to take down the cross once and for all. We had come to remove the age-old obstacle, the symbol that has caused division between Jews and Christians, and we were there to reconcile with our brothers.

Archbishop Stallings, Pastor T.L. Barrett and other clergy leaders entered the small sanctuary and paid their respects to the tomb. Then we all proceeded to another altar in the church. It was there that our medium-sized, white cross was laid down by a woman pastor and covered with the Family Federation Flag by Dr. Yang. Archbishop Stallings and others led us in another powerful prayer. It was history in the making.

There was one more place to go before we were to meet our Jewish brothers and sisters. We had finally to bury the cross in the ground. We headed toward Potter's Field, sometimes called the Field of Blood, a

piece of land one Bible story says was purchased with money Judas was given for betraying Jesus. A big wooden cross, about six feet high, was lifted up by the pastors as we marched down a winding road leading to Potter's Field, which is a long green field with a Greek monastery on one side. "Were you there, when they crucified my Lord?" rang through the crowd of ministers again as they approached the final resting place for the cross.



Once at the site, we found a grave had already been dug out by our Israeli Family Federation members, exactly the size of the cross. Several Bible quotes were read before the cross was lifted and then put in the ground forever. A family Federation flag, dated and signed by representative leaders was placed on top. A Jewish rabbi was the first to pray, followed by a Christian representative and a Muslim and finally Dr. Yang representing the third Israel and True Parents.

I was holding hands with two sisters, crying out, during those stirring moments. It was as if I were one of the women shedding tears below the cross where Jesus was hanging. This time, though, the tears shed were those of joy and liberation. It was as if we witnessed the body of Jesus being lifted off that cross and set free. Especially when Dr. Yang prayed, I sensed the presence of our True Parents, who had laid the foundation for this and made it possible. I thought of Father's incredible suffering and of how much he has helped Jesus. Tears, tears and more tears.

We all put a shovel of dirt on top of the cross. It was finished! Good-bye cross, rest in peace forever. Jesus is free now. Hallelujah, peace will come now!

On the way back to the hotel, it transpired that one minister needed to go to the hospital. Another sister and I took him by taxi. When we returned at lunchtime, there was a buzz of excitement over Archbishop Stallings' stirring speech of repentance on behalf of Christians that had moved the hearts of the Jewish rabbis.

More speakers and discussion were scheduled for the afternoon before the signing of the Jerusalem Declaration, the highlight and most important part of the trip.

After lunch I sat with three rather young Jewish women, a black pastor and a state leader from America. When I joined them, they told me that three Jewish leaders had left that table after the morning discussion. The Christian minister was very sad, because his humble heart was ready to learn from them and to inherit from them. Yet it seemed that God has provided replacements. The young women were nearly ecstatic when they heard the presentation by Dr. Wilson, which in a very challenging yet loving way explained to the Jewish audience why they might consider Jesus a great rabbi and embrace him. As other presenters continued, the young lady next to me kept nudging her friend and saying, "It is happening. It is happening. We are going to have real peace!" They stood up and cheered excitedly. Then Archbishop Stallings began to read the Jerusalem Declaration for the first time. There was a sudden tension in the air. Would Rabbi Brodman sign it? The archbishop asked him if he would.

Oh, yes, and not only did he want to sign it, but he would sign it only if his Islamic brother signed it first. It was amazing. It was more than we all had asked for. The three brothers of Abraham all signed and embraced one another. Tears came to my eyes again, tears of joy, gratitude and relief. Nearly everyone streamed toward the front to add his or her signature to the historic document. We then celebrated with coffee and cake, embraced one another and exchanged contact information.

I walked outside on the hotel veranda overlooking Jerusalem. With me came a young Jewish woman and Claire Daugherty, a Unificationist. Each of us prayed in her native language, German, Hebrew and English. Tears flowed down our cheeks, and at the end our Jewish sister said, "Thank you for your prayer and your presence. I could feel Jesus through you." She then explained that only a few weeks earlier she and some friends felt compelled to learn more about Jesus of Nazareth - who he was, what he had been trying to accomplish and why the Jewish people have shunned him until now.

Clearly, the spirit world has prepared many people for this time. All the Jewish participants who came

that evening came to a hotel that was two blocks from a suicide bombing. They were truly committed to reconciliation.

A glorious banquet followed, ending the day with singing, sharing and dancing. After the signing of the document, a spirit of joy and celebration filled the air. A powerful seed for peace among the three sons of Abraham was planted that day. It needs to be watered, cultivated and nurtured to grow into a beautiful family tree.

We had one more day of sightseeing at the Dead Sea, the Qumran caves and the Daemona community of Hebrew Israelites, who have lived in the desert for thirty-six years to build the ideal Kingdom. We left our beloved Jerusalem and drove into the desert going down to the Dead Sea. It is the lowest point on the globe. We passed by Bedouin settlements, goats, sheep and dust until we neared a stretch of green where luscious fruit and vegetables grow.

A wonderful, spirited welcome awaited us at the Daemona community, whose leadership has been in contact with our movement. They all welcomed us "home." It was a good ending to this first historic trip to Israel.

My personal relationship with Jesus, whom I have known since early childhood has changed and deepened tremendously, having seen where he once lived and preached and where he was trying to reach his Jewish family with a new but ancient truth. I shed many tears during this trip. I felt Jesus' presence with us from the beginning to the end. One clear message he gave me was, "You must love aggressively - especially your enemies." He was talking to me from his heart. By following this, all religions will come together as one family, and the dream of God and True Parents and our own dream, the substantial Kingdom of Heaven, will become a reality.

**Endnote:**

I would like to acknowledge the immense foundation of sacrifice, tears, sweat, and blood of our True Parents that supported this trip. In addition, substantial conditions of repentance and reconciliation between Jewish and Christian brothers and sisters in our movement were made here in America, in which our leadership participated. The brothers and sisters of the Family Federation in Israel also made conditions. All of these contributed to the success and gave us ownership. Finally, the many behind-the-scenes prayers and fasting conditions by brothers and sisters in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere helped to open the heavy gate between Christians and Jews a crack wider, in a very moving way.

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*More than 130 Christian pastors and leaders visited first Rome and then Israel between May 12 and 19. They went with the purpose of healing the division between the Christian faith and Judaism. Minister Angelika Selle, who is involved with interfaith work in the Washington, D.C. area, was one of our members who joined the group. This is from her testimony.*

*Angelika Selle was blessed with her husband Bob in the Blessing of 2075 Couples in 1982. They live in the Washington D.C. area.*