

GROWING IN GOD PODCAST



GIG81 – Bruce Larson Interview About Israel

Gary: Hi everyone, and welcome to the podcast, *Growing in God*. Today, we have something very special. We have Bruce Larson with us, and we will be doing an interview about his recent trip to Israel. Bruce Larson is a director of Hargrave ministries and is in charge of planning and organizing our annual Grafted-In tour to Israel. Bruce, it's good to have you with us today, and joining me on this podcast.

Bruce: Thanks Gary, and hi everybody. It's great to be on this podcast with you, and I am excited that today we get to talk about Israel. There is something so special in the heart of the Lord about the land and the people of Israel. In Genesis 15:18, and Genesis 17:8, He promised all of the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants as an everlasting possession. In numerous Scriptures, many we are familiar with, including Ezekiel 11:17 and Ezekiel 28:25-26, He promises to bring them back to the land of Israel, where they will dwell securely. For me, it is really amazing that, number one, we get to go to Israel, and personally experience God fulfilling His Word. But also to be able as Christians to position ourselves to be part of that fulfillment in blessing the Jewish people.

Gary: I agree, Bruce. I am so thankful that the Lord has given us a revelation and a relationship with Israel and the Jewish people. I believe it is something that the Lord opened up to us, and we are hoping to be a real blessing back to them and part of what God is doing in seeing His people return to the land and the land grow and flourish under their ownership. So, Bruce, would you like to tell us about your recent trip? It sounds really like it was quite an adventure.

Bruce: You know, that's true. My wife and I even started calling this the trip of faith, because when we bought the tickets and we made the plans, we had no idea if I could get into Israel because of the COVID restrictions. Then in late October, Israel announced that they would ease the restrictions for visitors arriving from the US on November 1st. So with a lot of prayer and faith, on October 31st I went to the airport, not knowing if I would even be turned around. And in fact, interesting, at the gate in San Francisco I was told that I would have to turn around. There were many others at the gate that were being told the same thing. One of them even called a member of the Knesset, which is the Israeli parliament, and got the member of the Knesset on the phone to talk to the personnel at the gate to explain that the rules were changing. This went on for quite some time. And then very suddenly, minutes before my flight was to leave, they told me to get on the plane. It felt like each step of this trip, each event as it unfolded, God's hand was on the trip and that He was opening doors by His grace. So I got on the plane and the very next day, November 1st, I landed in Tel Aviv and went right up to Jerusalem.

Gary: Well, I know that the main purpose in going to Israel was to prepare for our Hargrave ministry November, 2022 Israel trip – which we are all very excited about, by the way; and we are praying very much, after two years of COVID interruption, that we will be able to see this trip happen. But I also know that while you were there in Israel, you were able to visit and connect with the eight very special organizations that Hargrave ministries partners with, and donates to on a monthly basis. Can you tell us about those visits?

Bruce: In Jerusalem, I stayed at the AMI Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies and Research. This is one of the organizations, as you just mentioned, that Hargrave ministries sends monthly support. I have to say, staying at the AMI Center, I had such a wonderful feeling of family right there in the heart of Jerusalem. The AMI Center was founded by our dear friend, Shlomo Hizak, with the vision of bridging the understanding between Christians and the Jewish people. It carries out this vision through education, relationships, bringing Christians to Israel, and it has distributed millions of Bibles worldwide. People sometimes ask me, "Well, what does the name AMI stand for?" AMI is a Hebrew acronym representing God's people, the Scriptures, and the land of the Bible. I am thankful we do support the AMI Center, because it has opened the door for thousands of Christians from around the world to bless and support Israel; and to come, and to get a relationship and receive from the Jewish people, and experience the land of the Bible.

Gary: Yes, Shlomo has been a great friend, and had a tremendous impact on my life, personally. As you are saying, Bruce, the teaching of relationship between Jews and Christians has been such a forefront of the AMI Center; and even after Shlomo's passing, it still is a major focus for them. It is something that we need right now in the church, a greater revelation of the Jewish people and the relationship that we as Christians should have together with them. So I am glad that you got to make that trip to the AMI Center. And I know from there, I think you traveled up north, didn't you?

Bruce: Two days after arriving in Israel, I did leave Jerusalem to head to Northern Israel. And of course, I had an excellent guide in Mordechai Weiss. And, by the way, many of you are familiar with Mordechai; he will be our guide again for our upcoming November 2022 tour in Israel. He and I first stopped at ancient Shilo, which in English is pronounced Shiloh. Shilo is in the heart of Israel. And there I talked with Mr. David Rubin, who founded the Shiloh Israel Children's Fund. Years ago, David and his small son were driving in Israel and were attacked by terrorists. They were both shot, and his son was seriously injured. Both recovered, but David realized the trauma involved, especially in small children who are subject to terror attacks. He founded this center in Shilo, and he brought in trained therapists and teachers who in many cases were also victims of terror to work with these children. While talking with David, we were in a small central courtyard, and there were many children that must have been on break from classes that were running around and playing all around us and laughing and having just a wonderful time. And as David talked, I felt the real-life stories that he told, along with witnessing the tremendous success at healing trauma, and it touched my heart very deeply.

Gary: I know David is such a tremendous person. I so respect the fact that he was able to take a very difficult situation and rather than becoming bitter, he really had forgiveness in his heart; and was able at the same time to found the Shiloh Israel Children's Fund to help all the children in that area that have been subject to the trauma of terrorism. So we really bless and pray for David Rubin and the Shiloh Children's Fund. It is another one of the organizations that we feel very much a part of, and we do contribute to on a monthly basis.

Bruce: Next, we went to the Levi Forest in Galilee, which is being planted by the Jewish National Fund. This organization has planted over 240 million trees in Israel.

Gary: Are you saying million trees?

Bruce: 240 million trees in Israel, turning many areas that a hundred years ago were a bleak, rocky land into beautiful, beautiful forest, fruit trees, and literally changing Israel's climate. This also fulfills many prophecies about the land of Israel blooming again. I met with some of the top people responsible for

this beautifying of Israel; and I was taken by their love for the Scriptures, their love for the land of Israel, and their scientific approach to making Israel the only developed nation in the world which is greener today than a hundred years ago.

It is fun that we are able to share in this fulfillment of these prophecies concerning the land of Israel by Hargrave Ministries giving monthly to the Jewish National Fund, and we designate this money to plant trees in the Levi Forest.

Gary: That is true. And we, especially, in our donations give for the creation of what is called the Gospel Trail project. The idea of the Gospel Trail comes from Matthew chapter four, verse 13, which reads, "And leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali." So the Gospel Trail is a wonderful way to follow in the footsteps of Yeshua, Jesus, as He made His journey from Nazareth to Capernaum. If you are ever in Israel and have time while there for a bike or hiking tour, you should seriously consider touring on this Gospel Trail, and taking this journey from Nazareth to Capernaum. It is a true adventure.

Well, tell us, I think next you went up to Haifa, if I am correct.

Bruce: Yes, we did. We arrived in Haifa and we visited the Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors, which was founded and is operated by the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. This is a global organization, but is centered in Israel. At the Haifa Holocaust Home, it was an honor to meet with the ones who had survived the horror of the Holocaust and today are living testimonies, and very, very important living testimonies, of what happened during World War II. After surviving the Holocaust, these ones came to Israel to fight for and to help create the nation of Israel. It was really fun to see at this home the volunteers minister such tremendous love and a real sense of family to these brave men and women.

Gary: That really is a tremendous project, and it is so really heartwarming. I am so thankful to the ICEJ for the care that they take, really for all of us, of the Holocaust victims. Another program of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem that we support on a monthly basis is their Aliyah initiative. Now Aliyah, if you are not familiar with it, is about the Jewish return to the covenant land of Israel. The ICEJ Aliyah program has assisted over 160,000 Jews to move back to Israel from the Diaspora. Many times, the transportation of these people back to their Homeland in Israel is carried out under urgency and pressure due to the persecution and other circumstances that exist in the countries they are departing from. We know we are seeing in the world today a true resurgence of antisemitism and violence against the Jewish people. And this is one way in which we can see people assisted out of areas they are living in, which really present danger to their lives, and watch them brought back into Israel to start new lives in the safety of their home country. So I am very thankful for the International Christian Embassy, all that they do; we have very close relations with them. And as we are saying, on a monthly basis, we support both this initiative of Aliyah as well as the Home for the Holocaust Survivors.

Okay. So Bruce, now tell us about the next organization that you visited with.

Bruce: Well, from Haifa, we went south to Tel Aviv, and we met with the chief executive officer of the Israeli Defense Forces Widows and Orphans Fund. The IDF Widows and Orphans Organization was founded in 1991 as the sole organization recognized by the state of Israel; they represent the widows and orphans of Israel's fallen defense and security forces. I found out that today, they work with over 8,000 women, men, and children whose loved ones have made the ultimate sacrifice to protect their Homeland. They provide these ones with financial and emotional support that I feel is really needed.

Thousands of children's lives have been touched by this organization, giving these children a sense of hope and even a feeling of belonging to family. I felt it was such a privilege to be able to minister to the widows and children of ones who have given their lives to create and to defend the state of Israel.

Gary: Yes, I know when you talked to me after returning home, you were so really touched by the heart of those who work within this organization, and how much they step up to be involved with these families in a way that helps them with their loss. And we are thankful, because we know as Christian believers, the Scriptures are very clear that we are to support widows and orphans. And this is a tremendous opportunity for us at Hargrave Ministries to monthly contribute to all that is being done by this organization.

This next organization that you are going to talk about is equally as impacting on Israel and her needs right now. So tell us about Yad Eliezer, and what you experienced visiting there.

Bruce: Yes. Back in Jerusalem, I visited Yad Eliezer, which distributes thousands of packages of food every week to the most needy in Israel. They also distribute clothing along with crucial supplies to those in need. They told me the stories of providing blankets to children sleeping with old towels; jackets to people who have none; and food to those without. And again, hearing the personal stories was very, very moving. It reminded me of the many Scriptures where the Lord asked us to provide for the poor and give hope to those who are without hope.

Gary: Tremendous. I'm so thankful, again, for our ability to be involved with them. And I was really thankful that you were able to go as a personal representative for us, since we have been so blocked from being in Israel for the last two years. Not just that we are donating monthly to the need, but that we really are a people and a ministry standing with them in all that they are doing. There is so much that this ministry does, and it is just beyond what we have time to go into now. But, I am honored to be a part of all they are doing.

I know some of these needs and organizations that we work with are dealing with difficult and heart-wrenching, at times, problems within Israel. But this next one is really exciting. It is kind of a spot of joy and delight in the midst of all that we do and all the needs that we see, because your last stop was to Ir David, the biblical city of David. Tell us about this adventure.

Bruce: Well I agree. It's always really fun for me to talk about the biblical city of David excavations that are going on. Ir David – Ir is the Hebrew word for city – is the actual location of the Jebusite city captured by King David over 3,000 years ago. The Ir David Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 1986. I found out it is dedicated to the preservation, development, and archeology in the biblical City of David; which actually, for those familiar with Jerusalem, is just south of the current original wall of the ancient city. Here at the City of David, I had a fabulous behind-the-scenes walking tour through where King David's palace once stood, and the ruins of a twenty-seven-year-old Jewish home. I walked up the same street that Jewish people at the time of Christ would have walked, from the bottom of the City of David, where the pool of Siloam is, up to the Temple Mount. Of course, I was walking thirty feet under the ground. They are continuing to excavate there, and this excavation was ongoing. In fact, the last time we had a tour in Israel, this was not open to the public, had not been excavated. Only 5% of the City of David has been excavated; so we call these living excavations, because they are continually making new discoveries. And what is fun for me, these discoveries are continuing to show evidence of biblical stories being uncovered every single year. For example, they are finding seals. Now these are seals from the Royal Court, from either kings or high official serving in the Royal Court.

These seals are 2,500 to 2,800 years old. On these seals, you can read the exact names of people that are in the Scriptures, including one of the Israeli kings. Honestly, I can't wait to bring our November 2022 tour to this excavation and see the new discoveries that are being made.

And one thing I would add, concerning Jerusalem – everywhere I went, I was free to walk, with no restrictions. There were very few people. Everyone was excited to see me, they called me their quote, unquote “first visitor” in two years. And even at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which many of you know is normally extremely crowded, I was amazed to be by myself and free to explore, and so thankful to again be in Jerusalem.

Gary: That is tremendous. Well, I thank you, Bruce, for being with me today on this podcast. And I really want the Lord to bless you and your family for all that you do for Israel and for Hargrave Ministries. I can't wait for my wife and I to be with you this November on the annual Hargrave Ministry Grafted-In tour of Israel. I am praying that the doors will be open, and that we will all be able to go to Israel and experience some of these things that you are talking to us about today.

I just want to say, do you have any last remarks that you would like to leave us with?

Bruce: You know, I would. It was life-changing to travel throughout Israel and see the faith and feel the heart of the Jewish people. You know, God has blessed Israel and continues to do so. But I also saw how important it is that we minister God's hope to the ones living in Israel. Jeremiah 29:11-13 says that God has plans to give the Jewish people a future and a hope. My wife and I are thankful that we can support monthly each of these great organizations by simply giving to Hargrave Ministries. In this way, we actually participate in fulfilling this Scripture by ministering hope to the children who have suffered trauma from terror attacks; Holocaust survivors; orphans of soldiers defending Israel; or just the poor people that are still living in Israel. Romans 15:13 says, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” I bless each one of us to abound in hope by the Holy Spirit, and to be able to minister this to our neighbor, to Israel, and to the world during these days in which we are living. I believe that it is in the heart of God to give each one of us a future filled with His hope.

Gary: Wonderful. Well, I hope this podcast has been educational and entertaining, as well as exciting, for our listeners. Thank you for joining us today on this trip through Israel with Bruce Larson. Until next time, Lord bless, and let's keep growing and maturing in our faith and our relationship with the Lord.