



Caspari Center NEWS



June 2013

Studying Theology at the Caspari Center



“Equipping His people
for works of service,
so that the body of
Messiah may be built up”
Ephesians 4:12

The Caspari library and classrooms were a little busier than usual during the month of April this year. Fifteen theology students from Norway were here as part of the second Caspari Theological Course in cooperation with the Lutheran School of Theology in Oslo, Norway. And so the air was filled with discussions on the Jewishness of the Christian texts, current political issues, the theology of the Messianic movement, the issues facing Palestinian Christians, and so much more.

The students took the course as part of their studies for a master’s in theology in Norway, but the program itself was planned and carried out by the Caspari Center. During the course of the program the students studied New and Old Testament backgrounds while touring the country to see the historic and biblical sites they studied. We wanted to help shed light on the connection between the two testaments, and to show just how much the study of first-century Israel can enrich the study of the Bible. A deepened understanding of the interdependent relationship between early Christianity and Judaism will hopefully serve to reveal Christian anti-Semitism as a self-contradiction.



**“We have
become better
theologians”**

But aside from the obvious benefits of being able to study the Bible in its original context, during their stay with us the students were also exposed to the Messianic movement through a visit to a Messianic congregation, a lecture by Messianic scholar Richard Harvey on the theology of the movement, and participation in a Messianic Shabbat meal.

During the concluding dinner we asked the students to reflect on how their stay in Israel had affected them, and several of them answered: “We have become better theologians.” We at Caspari Center feel privileged to take part in shaping tomorrow’s pastors and teachers. And in a way the students have become both examples of and ambassadors for Caspari’s vision: “To equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Messiah may be built up.” Examples because the students will someday serve God’s people in congregations and ministries in Norway, and at the same time ambassadors because hopefully they will be supporters of the local body of believers here in Israel. And in that way the global body of believers, Jews as well as Gentiles, may be built up into one body in Christ.



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Jakob Nielsen

With the Land as a Classroom

At times, we experience things that affect us profoundly. “It changed my life,” we might even say in retrospect. Sometimes for the better, sometimes not.

My first encounter with Israel was such a profound experience. For the better, that is. As a young theology student, it affected me profoundly to read the stories of the Bible from within its own historical, geographical, and cultural setting. I can even say that I was shocked by how many rich nuances and genuine “aha” moments my student year in Israel gave me. After all, I was midway through my theological training, and just by chance – or God’s good provision – I came to be a volunteer in the Danish church and at the Caspari Center with Bodil and Jens Arne Skjøtt.

“It changed my life,” I can fairly say. I returned to Denmark with my heart and mind on fire for studying the Bible through the lens of its land.

This April – some years, a few gray hairs, and a number of exams later – I had the opportunity to revisit this profound experience as a guide in Galilee for the Caspari Center’s study program for Norwegian theology students.

This is one great study program! The students come for a month. They are exposed to a variety of topics: from the history of Israel, to the Bible in its context, to the modern-day challenges of the people living in Israel in the midst of conflict and turmoil. Such things widen our horizons and soften our hearts!

In Galilee, we did our best to get as close to the story of Jesus as possible. We tried to reframe our understanding, especially of the Gospel of Mark, through the smells, the sounds, the heat, and the rain, and by reading – or “walking” – the narrative afresh.

Did we succeed? I hope so! Of course we will always be Norwegian or Danish in our perspectives and readings. We did not, actually, leave this behind. Rather, with the Land as our classroom, we had the great experience of a close encounter between our modern world and the ancient world of the Bible. This “double contextualization” gave us just the right amount of fresh readings and ideas needed to be students of the Bible and followers of Jesus in our world!

Morten Hørning Jensen

Morten Hørning Jensen is adjunct professor at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Oslo, and associate professor at the Lutheran School of Theology in Aarhus, Denmark. His PhD dissertation is on Herod Antipas and Galilee at the time of Jesus. To learn more, visit www.herodantipas.com.



“It changed my life!”



Caspari Updates

BridgeBuilders: Reconciled through Christ

BridgeBuilders is a faith-based peace and reconciliation project for young Israelis, Palestinians, and Norwegians. The project consists of two-part conferences; most recently, the first part was in Norway in August 2012, among fjords and mountains, and the second part took place during Passover/Easter 2013 in the Jordanian desert.



During the first part in Norway, the foundation for building relationships was laid through learning about one another's history and culture, sharing and listening and strengthening the bonds of fellowship the participants had as followers of Jesus. Since part one, the participants have taken the initiative to meet both inside and outside the BridgeBuilders program framework, despite the challenging circumstances. Even during the Gaza war in November 2012, group members from both sides of the conflict kept in touch.

In the second half of the program, the unity and relationships were tested once more as the group was brought into deeper issues, mainly the topic of identity. At one point, the discussion became quite heated and participants wondered whether the bridges that had been built would collapse – but in the end the opposite happened. The relationships and the commitment to our unity in Christ were strengthened. Participants learned that unity does not blot out every difference or disagreement, but it makes sharing a bond of love for each other possible. It also brings us all to a common purpose: to proclaim the love of Christ which can break down every human barrier and bring change that is so needed in our societies.

Read more about this on our website, at <http://caspari.com/new/en/ministry-projects/bridgebuilders>.

media review



Caspari Center publishes a weekly review of material from the Israeli press documenting attitudes toward Messianic Jews, the mission, and the Christian faith. To receive the Media Review free of charge by email, sign up on our website, www.caspari.com



Christian Tourism

Zman Tel Aviv, March 29, 2013

Yaron Avitov takes a look at the medically recognized phenomenon called “Jerusalem Syndrome,” in which tourists (mostly Christian) are overwhelmed by the intensity of their religious experience in the city and lose their sanity for a short time. Avitov writes that “the city’s charm is indeed alluring, often hypnotizing people and driving them crazy. The messianic fervor of the tourists, the city’s religious tension, and the gap that these people experience between reality and their biblical vision (with which they deeply identify) cause them to have an emotional breakdown exactly on the day that their dream of visiting the holy city is realized. The combination of the past and the present, religiosity and spirituality, mystery and history, ancient architecture and a labyrinth of narrow and winding alleyways blend together in a feverish concoction that causes strange behavior, even to the point of pathology. Jerusalem Syndrome is a religious psychosis.” This psychosis is, more often than not, expressed in a conviction that one is the Messiah, the Virgin Mary, or any one of the biblical characters associated with the city.

If you would like to know more about the Caspari Center and its activities, write to caspari@caspari.com or visit our website, www.caspari.com. You can support our work by prayer, volunteering, or financial gifts to help with individual projects or the general work of the center.

Not My Home

If you've ever relocated from a place you've lived for a long, long time, you may understand what it might have been like for aging patriarch Jacob when he left drought-stricken Canaan with his family to be reunited with his long-lost son, Joseph. But even if you're living in the same house in which you were born, if you are a follower of Yeshua, you, too, are far from home.

Think for a moment about Joseph's story, found in Genesis 37-50. The story begins with the unjust treatment he received at the hands of his brothers and climaxes with Joseph's final thrilling declaration that God had worked every bit of evil aimed at him for good.

However, on the way to that final thrilling declaration is another story that most of us zip past. It is the story of what happened after the family came together in Egypt. Listen to the words of Jacob, Joseph's father, when he was introduced to Joseph's boss, Pharaoh:

Pharaoh asked him, "How old are you?"

And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers." Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence. (Gen. 47:8-10)

The word for pilgrimage comes from the root meaning "lodging." It can mean sojourn, dwelling, or lifetime. Though it sounds like Jacob was referring to his lifespan, what he did after this conversation demonstrates his identity as a pilgrim in a very profound way.

Jacob was coming to the end of his life, and he knew it. Though the family settled into their new life in Egypt under Joseph's provision and protection for a number of years, Egypt was never meant to be his family's permanent home. When Jacob was dying, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, "[P]romise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried" (Gen. 47:29-30).

In the waning moments of his life on earth, Jacob released his family into God's care by blessing his children and Joseph's two sons, the grandsons who shared Joseph's blessing. It is a profound, powerful thing that Jacob asked Joseph, who probably hadn't been in Canaan since he was sold into slavery at 17: to take his dead body back home. I sometimes wonder if Jacob's request, and the family's journey to bury the patriarch's body, placed a sort of spiritual homing device into the clan.

After the burial, the family returned to Egypt. That homing device would sound in their hearts for 430 more years. It beeped in their souls as they eventually lost their protected status and became slaves. And it would continue to call them homeward until Jacob's descendants recognized its sound and cried out to God in harmony with it.

Followers of Yeshua have that same sort of homing device inside of them. The lyrics of an old gospel song describe the sound it makes perfectly:

This world is not my home / I'm just a passing through
My treasures are laid up / somewhere beyond the blue.

Though we are called to live fully and wholeheartedly for and with God in this world, we do so with the sound of that homing device calling us homeward.

May we have ears to hear.

Michelle Van Loon

Prayer Requests

- Give thanks for the BridgeBuilders conference, the Shabbat school seminar in Netanya, and the course for Norwegian theology students.
- Give thanks for the publication of the Youth Leader Manual.
- Pray for new contacts for leadership training in Hebrew-speaking congregations.
- Pray for the adaptation of Alpha Course materials for an Israeli audience, and for the promotion of Alpha-type evangelism in Israel.
- Pray for a smooth transition to a new Caspari CEO. Pray for Knut and his family as they get settled in Norway and for Elisabeth and her family as they move to Israel. Ask for provision for her as she takes over the responsibility for Caspari's ministry.