

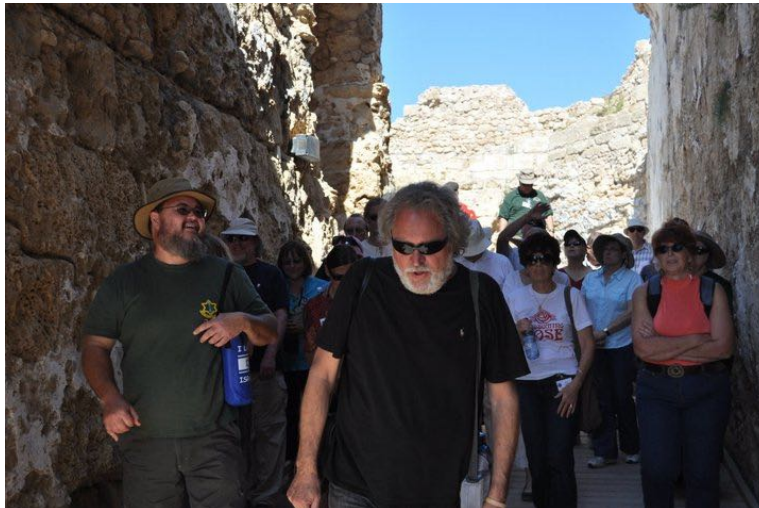
Dr. James D. Tabor

“Tracking Jesus”

An Exclusive Historical Archaeological Tour

*See the Sites, Go Behind the Scenes
Experience the Holy Land on a Level that Most Tours Miss*

September 18-28, 2024



Tour Highlights

Prof. James D. Tabor is leading an exclusive tour of the Holy Land May 14-23, 2024. Whether you have traveled to Israel before or have never been, but dreamed of such a trip, this well might be the tour you are looking for.

Most trips to the Holy Land are sponsored by churches and their pastors, synagogues, or other cultural groups and each of these has their value. This tour, however, is decidedly different, one that is oriented to the history and archaeology related to a single question—*“What do we really know about the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth and how do we know it?”*

Tabor has made 73 trips to Israel, Jordan, and Egypt but only 12 of them have been leading tours. By far most were for his research, filming, or working at archaeological sites. In 2010 he began developing this very special annual tour, limited to about 35 people, to facilitate maximum interchange between participants and with Dr. Tabor directly. He has continued to shape and refine it based on these years of experience. Many of the sites visited are ones at which Dr. Tabor has excavated, so we are able to go behind the scenes and experience things from the inside. This tour is different from most other tours. It typically draws a very diverse group of people in

terms of faith backgrounds and spiritual orientations—with the common denominator a love of *history and archaeology*, with no expectations regarding belief systems, politics, or faith orientations.

We walk the ancient paths—taking in the texts, geography, history, and archaeology—both on the ground and under the ground—that sheds light upon what our central question of what do we really “know”? We learn to rate assertions and ideas regarding the places we visit—from improbable to most likely and even quite certain—based on best evidence. Sadly, many of the sites people are taken to on Holy Land tours are often late, legendary, based on Byzantine or Crusader theological traditions, with no historical basis. Tabor has spent the past 40 years “tracking Jesus,” as he likes to call it. He has tried to sort out the differences between what we think we know, what is highly improbable, and how it all might fit together into an evidence based coherent whole—leaving theology aside. We are looking for those “ancient paths” and following them as much as is possible after two millennia.

No tour can cover everything, but we will take you, quite literally, on a full circuit through the Holy Land, from the Mediterranean coast, to the sea of Galilee, and then to the far-northern border near Mt Hermon, down to Jerusalem, and all the way south past Qumran and Masada—to the southern edge of the Dead Sea on the edge of the Negev desert.

This tour includes nine nights at 4-Star + hotels, personally selected by Dr. Tabor and his wife Lori Woodall. There are typical “Holy Land” tours that are priced more cheaply, but they all too often compromise on quality and size—with huge buses full of tourists crammed together. This tour is decidedly different and is limited in size for that reason. Dr. Tabor’s approach is providing a kind of “mobile classroom,” where those “enrolled” are exposed to the very best historical information currently available.

Anyone interested in biblical history and literature will find this tour refreshing and educational from beginning to end. Dr. Tabor has no expectations regarding belief systems, politics, or faith orientations. All that is required to go on this tour is a strong orientation toward learning more about the Bible and its history and archaeology. Each participant receives a copy of “Tracking Jesus: A Study Guide to the Sites,” personally prepared for *this tour*, with maps and textual resources directly related to this tour, so one can prepare ahead for this adventure even before beginning the tour. This experience is intended to be educational and stimulating, while at the same time enjoyable and lots of fun. One of the chief benefits is participants spend the entire time with Dr. Tabor and are able to have group and one-on-one dialogue with him related to all we are learning and experiencing.

Tour Leader – Dr. James D. Tabor



Dr. James Tabor retired as Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 2022 where he taught Christian origins and ancient Judaism for thirty-three years, serving as Chair of the Department for a decade. His Ph.D. is from the University of Chicago. He now devotes himself full-time to research, archaeological field work, and publishing. Tabor previously taught at the University of Notre Dame and the College of William and Mary. Tabor combines his work on ancient texts with extensive field work in archaeology in Israel and Jordan. Since 2008 he has been co-director, with Drs. Shimon Gibson and Rafi Lewis, of the acclaimed Mt Zion excavation in Jerusalem and he been involved in a half dozen other archaeological projects in the Holy Land over the past thirty years. In the early 1990s he was involved in the release of the unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls and was one of the first scholars to examine and publish several very important ones. In 1995 he testified before the US Congress on the Waco tragedy, drawing upon his expertise in understanding

ancient Biblical apocalyptic ideas. Tabor has published ten books: *Things Unutterable* (1985); *A Noble Death* with Arthur Droge (HarperSF, 1992); *Why Waco: Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* with Eugene Gallagher (UC Berkeley, 1995); *The Jesus Dynasty: A New Historical Investigation of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (Simon & Schuster, 2006); *The Jesus Discovery: The New Archaeological Find that Reveals the Birth of Christianity* with Simcha Jacobovici (Simon & Schuster, 2012); *Paul and Jesus: How the Apostle Transformed Christianity* (Simon & Schuster, 2012); *Paul's Ascent to Paradise* (Genesis2000, 2020); *The Book of Genesis: A New Translation from the Transparent English Bible* (Genesis2000, 2020); and *Marie: De son enfance juive à la fondation du christianisme* (Flammarion, 2020), which will appear in English in a revised version as *The Lost Mary: From the Jewish Mother of Jesus to the Virgin Mother of God*, with Knopf in 2024.

Blog: <http://jamestabor.com>; Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/jamestaborvideos>



Tour Itinerary

Day One

Wednesday – Sept 18 – *Arrival and Gathering Together our Group*



This is an the arrival day for most participants. Those flying in that day will gather at Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv and we will make our way to our hotel for the evening, the lovely Daniel Herzliya on the Mediterranean Sea. Others can meet us at the hotel, where we will have dinner together and begin to get to know one another. We will then rest up from our travels as we enjoy the beautiful sunset over the Mediterranean, imagining all the ships over the past several thousand years that embarked or debarked on those historic waters.

Day Two

Thursday – Sept 19 – *Caesarea Maritima, Sepphoris/Nazareth, Jerusalem*



Today we head north to the Galilee to Caesarea Maritima, the city built by Herod the Great (25-13 BCE). Named to flatter and impress the emperor Augustus Caesar, this site is situated on the Mediterranean Coast between Tel Aviv and Haifa. We will visit the theater, the hippdrome, and the palace area of Herod the Great that in the book of Acts is the scene of Paul's imprisonment and defense before King Agrippa and the Procurators before sailing to Rome as a result of his appeal to the emperor Nero. We will have lunch "seaside" at the famous Harbor that welcomed both the arrival and departures of many historic figures.

After lunch we will head into the Galilee and visit the ruins of ancient Jewish city of Sepphoris, the urban capital of Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, where Dr. Tabor has excavated. This important site is often overlooked by tourists as it is just four miles northwest of the tiny village of Nazareth—now a major Christian pilgrimage site. The first century Jewish historian Josephus calls it the "Jewel of the Galilee." We will walk the original streets and view the splendid mosaics, the ruins of the theater, and see the excavated synagogue with its amazing mosaic floor. We will consider what it might have meant for Jesus to grow up just outside this bustling and booming urban center, especially as one who worked in the building trades with his father and brothers.



We will then make our way south to the historic city of Jerusalem which will be our home for four nights at the centrally located Leonardo Plaza with its spectacular view of the Old City. It is also walking distance, as well to the historic King David hotel area, Mamilla Mall, and the Ben Yehuda area in the New City. That evening, after dinner, Dr. Tabor will lead those of the group who wish to go with him into the Old City for a short walking tour. Others are welcome to walk around the new city area, rest, and get ready for the big day ahead..Day One in Jerusalem!

Day Three

Friday – Sept 20 – *Mount of Olives, Dominus Flevit, Garden of Gethsemane, Church of all Nations, Kidron Valley, Zion Gate, Upper Room, Pilate’s Judgment seat, free time in the Old City*



We will begin our day with a bus ride to the top of the Mount of Olives. From this vantage point will look towards the west and view the Temple Mount and the entire ancient walled Old City before us. Our focus will be on the “last week” of Jesus in his final visit to Jerusalem—from his grand entrance into the Temple to his trial and crucifixion just before Passover. We will walk down the Mount of Olives visiting several places of interest along the way including Dominus Flevit, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Church of All Nations. Our walk will take us deep into the Kidron Valley, and then up to Mount Zion—passing Dr. Tabor’s

excavation of one of the priestly mansions on the east side in the area where Caiaphas lived. Along the way we will visit the traditional sites of the Upper Room and King David’s Tomb, where recent archaeological excavations have reshaped our understanding of these places. We will also visit the newly discovered site of Pontius Pilate’s Judgement Seat with the Gabbatha Pavement and the Praetorium where Jesus most likely taken for his trial the morning of his crucifixion.

We will end our day a bit early to allow for shopping on this day in the Old City. Tour participants will have plenty of time to walk the narrow corridors of Jerusalem’s Old City, going from shop to shop to find the perfect souvenirs from their time in the Holy City, or to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or other sites of interest.

Day Four

Saturday/Sabbath – Sept 21 – *Temple Mount, Wohl Museum Subterranean Jewish Quarter, and Jerusalem Archaeological Park – Davidson Center, City of David and Pool of Siloam, Hinnom Valley*



We will begin our day with a tour of the Temple Mount discussing its history, past, present and future and why it is the most contested real estate on the planet.

We will eat lunch in the Jewish Quarter, and then we will visit the Wohl Museum, descending 20 feet below the present city level to visit the Wohl Museum, which contains the best preserved ruins of 1st Century Jerusalem. We will make our way to the Jerusalem Archaeological Park – Davidson Center where we will view all the most recent archaeological discoveries that are transforming our understanding of ancient Jerusalem.

We will then tour the excavations south of the Old City in what is called the “City of David” area, with an optional chance to go through Hezekiah’s tunnel—ending up at the pool of Siloam. We will exit in the Hinnom valley—called “Gehenna” in the gospels—or “Hell Valley” and talk about the tombs of the area—including the notable “Tomb of the Shroud” discovered by Drs. Tabor and Gibson in the year 2000, as well as the family tomb of Caiaphas, the high priest who presided over the condemnation of Jesus to death, and the tombs of his father-in-law Annas, whose six sons all served as High Priests in the 1st century. We will return to the Plaza for a wonderful dinner, which is just across from the Great Synagogue of Jerusalem, as the Sabbath arrives and experience the changes that come over this busy city on Shabbat.

Day Five

Sunday – Sept 22 – *Israel Museum, Shrine of the Book and optional afternoon Walking Tour of “Bible Hill” and the west end of the valley of Hinnom*



We will spend the morning at the Israel museum and the Shrine of the Book, where we will see a spectacular scale model of Jerusalem in the time of Herod the Great, the original Dead Sea Scrolls, and various artifacts, followed by a broad survey of the “archaeology of the Bible.” Our focus will be on the late 2nd Temple period and the time of Jesus. Dr. Tabor will explain the significance of the ossuaries on display, and other artifacts, some of which that he has been involved in examining. We will have lunch at the Museum and then go back to the Plaza Hotel,

In the late afternoon, early evening, those who wish may accompany Dr. Tabor with an optional walking tour south of Mt Zion, passing by Oscar Schinder’s tomb, and climbing “Bible Hill” where Dr. Tabor’s will share his latest research on its historic importance with a new theory as to its possible connection to both King David and Jesus of Nazareth.

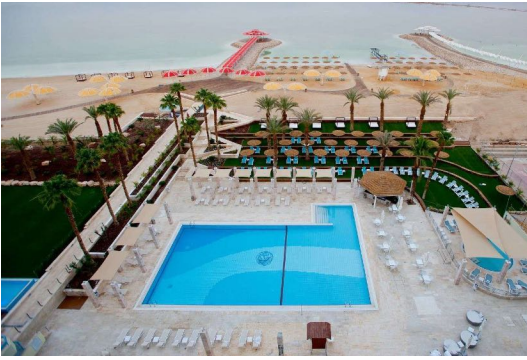
Day Six

Monday – Sept 23 – *Haas Promenade (Armon HaNetziv), the Talpiot tombs, the Dead Sea, Qumran, and Ein Gedi*



As we leave Jerusalem, we will have a last spectacular view of the Old City from the Haas Promenade on the south, experiencing the vantage point Abraham would have had in coming up to Mount Moriah. Dr. Tabor will lead us on a rare and special visit to the sites of the “Talpiot Jesus Family tombs” that some think belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. Although these tombs are sealed—and one is under a condo building, seeing the locations offers a perspective of the area, with the spectacular view north of the Old City, and south to Bethlehem and the Herodium, Herod’s the Great’s tomb—that other “King of the Jews.” We then travel down the famous “Jericho” road to the northwestern shores of the Dead Sea—the lowest spot on earth. We will visit the ancient ruins of Qumran where the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered in 1947. and Dr. Tabor will relate his own participation in excavations and research there, including a surprising discovery he made. We will discuss the significance of the group that produced this library, usually identified with the “Essenes.” Those who wish will have a chance to hike up to two of the caves in which scrolls were found. We will have lunch at Qumran with its lovely gift center.

Next, we will visit the beautiful En Gedi where among other things, the Bible relates David’s hiding place from King Saul. We will take a hike and enjoy the wildlife as we make our way to the caves and waterfalls.



We will drive further south along the western coastline of the Dead Sea to Ein Gedi—a spectacular National wildlife park and also the site of several historic events—from the time of King David down to the Jewish revolt against Rome.

We will end our day at the lovely Herod's hotel right on the Dead Sea, where we will stay two nights. There will be time to enjoy the beach, experience what it is like to “swim” in the “Salt Sea,” as it was called anciently, explore the hotel facilities and to unwind a bit after an adventure packed day in the desert.

Day Seven

Tuesday – Sept 24 – *Masada, the Museum, and the Dead Sea*



We will begin our morning with a tour of the famous Herodian fortress of Masada, site of the “last stand” of the first Jewish revolt against Rome, where Josephus relates that nearly 1000 Jewish refugees refused to surrender to the Romans and chose to die the night of Passover after their own “last supper.” Dr. Tabor will share his own research at the site, including what we know about the bones of those in the southern caves, discovered in 1963, and DNA testing that he has been involved in. We will learn that Masada was originally built by the Maccabees, and fortified by Herod the Great between 37-31 BCE as a refuge for himself in the event of a revolt. From the top of Masada you will be able to look

down upon the ruins of Roman encampments. We will visit an ancient “synagogue without walls” atop Masada and also the fabulous museum that is now part of the National Park. After lunch we will drive back to Herod's hotel and enjoy a wonderful afternoon and evening on the Dead Sea.

Day Eight

Wednesday – Sept 25 – *Jordan Valley, Bet Shean, Capernaum, Magdala, Arbel Cliffs, Horns of Hattin, Capernaum*



We will leave the Dead Sea and drive north up the Jordan Valley to the Galilee. Dr. Tabor will point out several significant sites along the way, particularly the Anon/Salim area where Jesus was baptized—in the north not the south of the country—across from which, on the Jordanian side, is Wadi el-Yabis (the biblical “Brook Cherith”) associated with Elijah, John the Baptizer, and Jesus himself, and the post-70 CE Christians, as a hiding place of refuge. We will tour Bet Shean, one of the ten cities of the Decapolis, also known as Scythopolis in New Testament times, one of the most magnificent Roman cities of the time.

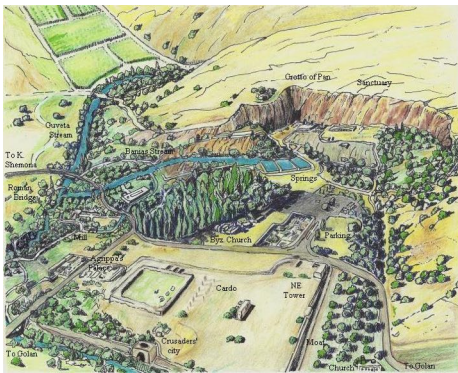


We will then continue north, up the west side of the Sea of Galilee, through Tiberias, to Capernaum, where Jesus and his followers made their HQ. There we will see the excavations exposing the first century levels of the town, including a house that can arguably identified with Peter, along with the magnificent ancient harbor where Jesus first followers fished and dried their nets on the shoreline. We will then go up to the magnificent Arbel Cliffs and learn about their historic significance and get a view of

the famous Horns of Hattin, where Saladin defeated the Crusaders in 1087. Next, we will visit the site of Migdal or Magdala, the town of Mary Magdalene, and the new exciting excavations there, including two first century synagogues. We will settle that evening in the newly designed Isrotel Gomeh hotel, just below Arbel, with a pool facing the Sea of Galilee where we will spend two nights.

Day Nine

Thursday – Sept 26 – Tel Dan, Caesarea Phillipi, Golan Heights, Mt Hermon, Gennesaret and Ancient Fishing Boat, Boat ride on the Sea of Galilee



We begin our tour of the upper Galilee with a stop at Caesarea Phillipi, mentioned in the the gospel of Mark as the area where Jesus ask his disciples, “Who do men say that I am?” Next we will visit the site of Tel Dan, with the rushing headwaters of the Jordan, where according to the book of 2 Kings, Jeroboam established the northern kingdom of Israel in opposition to the southern kingdom of Judah and even Abraham once visited. We then then travel further north up into the Golan Heights to the Mt Herman area, which Dr. Tabor identifies with the “Transfiguration” tradition in the gospel of Mark, where we will have lunch.



We will then return south to Gennesaret, where the first century fishing boat was found in 1986 and then finish the day with our own boat ride on the Sea of Galilee where we will watch the sun set. Dr. Tabor will share with the group why he thinks the earliest traditions of Jesus’ resurrection were shaped along those shores. We will spend our final night at the Gomeh hotel on the Sea of Galilee and begin to debrief one another on the trip as evening falls, packing for our return flights on Tuesday.

Day Ten

Friday – Sept 27 –*Tsfat, Haifa Bahai Temple, Joffa and departures from Ben Gurion airport*



For our final day, as we make it back to Ben Gurion airport for flights back home, we will drive northwest of the sea of Galilee to Tsfat—the “city set on a hill,” whose lights are visible at night on the shores. This important spiritual center of Jewish history is also known for its artist quarter which we will explore. Tsfat is known as the center of Jewish Mysticism since ancient times, with many graves of revered Rabbis, including Isaac ben Luria—the “Ari.” Remarkably, it is also the site of a little-known tomb just to the east of the city, that the rabbis note as that of “Yeshua HaNotzri,” listed among the “Tsadikim.”



We will then drive through the Galilee to the Mt Carmel area, though the Jezreel Valley and past the site of Megiddo—which gives us the name “Armageddon”—“valley of Megiddo” in the book of Revelation—a scene of many strategic battles in the past. We will enjoy the spectacular view of the port city of Haifa from the lovely grounds of the Bahai Temple and will then proceed along the Mediterranean coast to the historic port of Jaffa—associated with the biblical Prophet Jonah as well as Simon Peter’s encounter with the Roman centurion Cornelius—that opened the Jesus movement to non-Jews.

As evening approaches we will make our way to Ben Gurion airport by 8pm for our evening flights back home, checking in three hours early before departures beginning after 11pm.

