

Devotions from a journey
through the Holy Lands
from Caesarea to Petra.

A Closer Walk with God

**Devotions from a
Journey Through the Holy Lands**
by Sue Loeffler

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SUE LOEFFLER

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Introduction

Gaza was one of the five major Philistine cities in the Bible. Our tour did not take us there because of continuing problems on the Gaza Strip. The name *Gaza* means “strong” or “stronghold,” but the city has been conquered so many times it has taken on the negative meaning of *Hell*. Think of the impact that gives to the story of the Ethiopian eunuch who had been to Jerusalem to worship God. He was on his way to Gaza when he stopped his chariot to read in the book of Isaiah.

God sent Philip to him at just the right time. “Do you understand what you are reading?” he asked.

“How can I unless someone explains it to me?” the Ethiopian said (Acts 8:31). He invited Philip to sit with him. The Ethiopian was reading: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth” (Isaiah 53:7-8).

Philip explained the good news of Jesus’ through this Scripture—that He suffered crucifixion for the forgiveness of our sins and rose from the dead for our eternal life. The two came to some water and Philip baptized the Ethiopian. Then Philip was taken away and the Ethiopian did not see him again.

Like this man on his way to Gaza, we are all destined for hell unless we come to know the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Nothing we do could ever make us worthy of God’s salvation. Jesus did it all for us on the cross.

My purpose in writing this devotional book is to share how I was drawn closer to God as I hiked through ruins of old cities and walked the streets of modern cities of Israel and Jordan. The

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Bible stories came alive when I saw the countryside and the cities. It is my hope that you will be drawn closer to God too.

Prayer: *Lord God, make us more like Philip. Empower us with an urgency to tell people the good news that will save them from their sin and give them everlasting life. In Christ Jesus, Amen.*

Spring of Living Water



En Gedi, an oasis in the Judean desert

The sound of children's laughter drew me up a rocky path to En Gedi, an oasis in the mountain desert near the Dead Sea. Men, women and children splashed in the waterfalls and pools. The spray from a waterfall cooled me from the intense heat. Healing water, rich with minerals, rose from springs deep within the earth. This is the water, which is often referred to in the Bible as living water. Moving, exhilarating water restored my soul.

Jesus talked about living water with the woman at the well (John 4). He was tired and thirsty from a long journey. The

woman trudged to the well in the heat of the day. Jesus asked her for water and told her about water that would spring up into eternal life. He described worship that is in spirit and in truth, not tradition. Even though Jesus knew all about the woman's sinful life, He showed love and respect to her instead of judgment or rejection. Moved by his compassion, she left her water jug at the well and ran into Sychar to tell the people about a man who knew all about her. "Could this be the Christ?" she asked. Compelled by her story, the people walked out to meet Jesus and listened to what He had to say. They confessed to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). They invited Jesus to stay with them a couple days, and because He did, more people believed.

Jesus knows what it feels like to grow tired and weary. He is aware of times we need rest and refreshment and often surprises us with an oasis of physical, emotional or spiritual renewal, which En Gedi was for me. I wanted to stay there, but Jesus led me home to tell people about the living water I found in Him when I visited Israel.

David found refuge at En Gedi when he was running for his life from King Saul but left the refreshing springs to become king. Ravens fed Elijah and he drank from the brook at the Kerith Ravine. As much as he probably wanted to linger there, God called him to defeat 450 prophets of Baal. The woman left the well, and while she was gone, Jesus said to the disciples, "I sent you to reap what you did not plant. Other men labored, and you have entered into their work" (John 4:38). Even though the woman didn't hear Jesus' words, she demonstrated their meaning. She didn't go to Bible school or learn special techniques or big words. Empowered by the love Jesus showed her, she couldn't wait to tell others about Him.

Jesus met the woman's deepest need, the need to know Him. He also meets us at our point of need. He said, "If any man thirsts, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of him will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38). David responded to the love God showed him at En Gedi: "O God, you are my God: early will I seek you: my soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1). The sons of Korah sang, "As the deer pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God (Psalm 42:1-2).

Jesus is our *Living Water*. He has promised us a future oasis in the New Jerusalem found in Revelation 22:1-7. The river of the water of life, as bright as crystal, will flow from the throne of God and run through the city. It will nourish the tree of life, which will bear a different fruit for every month of the year. Its leaves will heal the nations.

Prayer: *O Lord, draw us to the spring of Living Water. Empower us to bring others to the life-changing water so they will experience hope instead of fear and peace instead of anxiety. In Christ Jesus, Amen.*

A Time of Blessing



A young woman plays the harp in a passage way near the City of David.

People pushed their way into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was so crowded I could hardly move one way or the other. Intense fear grew in me that I might get separated from my friends. My head screamed in pain. Once out of the church, our group met in a nearby outdoor café for lunch. My headache persisted.

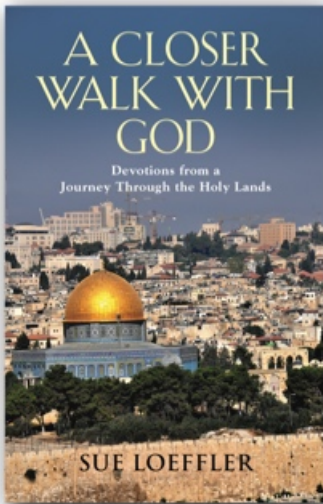
Then we walked down a narrow passage. I heard a heavenly melody from a harp and sat down on a short stone wall of a tree planter. I closed my eyes. The music relaxed me and soothed my stress. I opened my eyes and was glad to see my travel buddies

around me. I asked them where the music came from. They pointed. I walked a few steps in that direction. A young woman played the harp. Behind her was a golden statue of David playing his harp.

I knew in that moment why King Saul's servants called for a harpist to soothe the king's debilitating headaches. Someone in the palace knew about a shepherd boy named David. They called for him to come and play his harp for the king. Then whenever the disturbing spirit came on King Saul, David played his harp for him (1 Samuel 16:14-23).

Although Saul disobeyed, God had mercy on him. He sent David to play the harp and Saul's aching pain dissipated. In the same way God revived me. I spent the rest of the day seeing more of Jerusalem—walking on stone streets, enjoying the clanging of church bells, the chants of Jews and Muslims, visiting museums and shopping.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the harp music. It soothed my troubled soul and inspired me to move on to learn more about the city Jesus loved. In His name, Amen.



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