

## Dona Thompson: Living Beyond Cancer

By Frank Houck

Dona Thompson was a Mayfair member who died of cancer in June 2022. I thought about Dona shortly after she passed, and what she must have been experiencing in heaven. I began thinking about what it means to “beat cancer.” We’ve all seen tee shirts and bumper stickers that say, “I beat cancer.” Of course, they mean they survived cancer. That’s how you “beat” it. To live is victory; to die is loss. (To be clear, I rejoice for anyone who survives cancer.)

But by that definition, Dona didn’t beat cancer—cancer beat her. At one level that’s obviously true, but it’s not the whole truth, because as followers of Jesus, we walk by faith, not by sight. That doesn’t mean we close our eyes to the painful realities in front of us, but it does mean we open our eyes to the bigger picture God paints for us in his Word. That’s what it means to walk by faith. Faith is the conviction of things that we don’t yet see but which are promised by God in his Word (Hebrews 11:1).

If we walk by sight, we’ll conclude that cancer beat Dona Thompson, but if we walk by faith, we’ll see a bigger picture that is more glorious. To help us do that, I’d like to share three biblical and practical reasons why Dona Thompson did, in fact, beat cancer.

### 1. Cancer Didn’t Kill Dona’s Faith in Jesus

You might be tempted to think the worst thing cancer can do is destroy your body. But it’s not. The worst thing cancer can do is destroy your faith—make you think God isn’t really good, doesn’t really love you, or that you really don’t know him because why else would he allow this to happen to you? That’s the worst thing cancer can do.

It didn’t do that to Dona. Whether it was years earlier when she first got the diagnosis and was given just a few months to live or six weeks before her death Dona always gave the same response: “God is



**Dona Thompson**

good. He’s been good to me—and I’m ready to go meet him” Dona trusted in him.

And the reason Dona had that confidence was not that she was a perfect woman. She had plenty of sins, as we all do. Remember this, because someday you’re going to die. And if, like Dona, you have time to see death coming, Satan will haunt you with your long track record of transgressions: all the people you’ve hurt, all the times you’ve failed, and all the reasons you don’t deserve heaven. And the more you focus on that, the more afraid you’ll be of dying.

But Dona wasn’t afraid because she wasn’t looking backward; she was looking forward (Philippians 3:13). And when she did look back it wasn’t at her sins but at the cross where Jesus paid for them. As the Scripture says, *“This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 John 5:4 NKJV)*. With that in mind, Dona Thompson overcame. She beat cancer because cancer didn’t kill her faith in Jesus. It only refined it.

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## 2. Cancer Didn't Separate Dona from Jesus

If Satan's goal was to cut Dona off from Jesus, he failed miserably. Not only did cancer not separate Dona from Christ, but it only drew her closer to Christ (Philippians 1:23). There was never anything that cancer could do to separate Dona from the love of God. Jesus was never going to lose her because Jesus loved her and purchased her and prayed that Dona would be with Him where He was (John 17:24). And now Jesus's prayer has been answered.

Just consider the contrast between what Dona experienced during her last six weeks on earth and what she's experiencing now. Not only is she free of pain and sin, but she is also filled with righteousness and has been reunited with family and loved ones who have gone before her. And best of all, she's finally gotten to see the face of Jesus and say, "Thank you for the cross! Thank you for loving me! Thank you for bringing me here!"

Can we believe all this and still think cancer somehow beat Dona? If this is "loss," then the sooner we all lose, the better. But the Bible doesn't call it "loss;" the Bible calls it "gain" (Philippians 1:21). Far from



beating Dona, cancer delivered her straight into the presence of Jesus.

## 3. Cancer Can't Keep What It Took from Dona

The single best argument that cancer beat Dona is that her body was taken and buried in the ground. Cancer did take her body, and that's worth the tears we shed. Yet during World War II, Germany and Japan won a lot of battles —real victories—but in the end, they lost.

The same is true with cancer. The most that can be said for cancer is that it has won a battle. But the outcome of the war has been decided. D-Day has already been waged and won. As the old saying goes, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and to those in the tombs granting life."

All cancer could take from Dona was her body, but it can't even keep that. Because when Jesus died on the cross and sent the Holy Spirit into Dona's heart, He was making a down payment on Dona's body (Ephesians 1:14), and someday He is coming to collect (Romans 8:11). When that happens, the body now sown in weakness will be raised in power. This mortal will put on immortality, and this lowly body will be transformed to be like Jesus's glorious body. O death, where is your victory? O cancer, where is your sting?

We weep over Dona, but as those who believe in a risen Christ, we do not sorrow as those who have no hope. Faith sees the big picture. And even now, as we wait for the final victory, we can say by faith that Dona Thompson beat cancer.

## Prevention: Physical and Spiritual

By Claude (Butch) Kinzer

In the last issue of this newsletter, I wrote about the prevention of Diabetes Type 2, so let's follow up by discussing the most beneficial development of modern medicine, vaccinations. It is a controversial topic and even more so in the last fifty years, yet, no other development in medicine has saved more lives.

My experience with vaccinations dates to my childhood when I had all the recommended vaccinations and then some. My memory of getting those shots is not good, but I fondly recall that my father, a physi-

cian, was dedicated to ensuring that his patients received the vaccinations that were recommended.

My sister and I got to make frequent trips with Dad to the old Huntsville airport at the west end of Airport Road where Dad would receive shipments of vaccines. These vaccines were shipped over solid carbon dioxide (dry ice). Once the vaccines were properly stored, we disposed of the dry ice by placing it in the sink under running water. The whole kitchen floor would be covered with "fog." My sister and I thoroughly enjoyed it, even though, I think our dad enjoyed it even more.

My father's medical training occurred at a time

(Continued on page 3)



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when whooping cough, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, and other childhood illnesses were prevalent. He saw the death and devastation these diseases caused.

During the time I was privileged to practice with him, he shared an observation with me. He pointed out that church nurseries were developed during the latter part of the twentieth century and that prior to the development of the numerous vaccines those nurseries exposed young boys and girls to childhood illnesses, which could lead to severe illness or death.

My own experience with a now preventable infectious disease came from an attempted resuscitation of a young boy less than fifteen months old who had contracted Hemophilus influenza meningitis, a dis-

ease that needs to be recognized immediately. Unfortunately, even with rapid recognition, survival is not a guarantee. The resuscitation failed. Today there is a vaccine that has made Hemophilus influenza a rare occurrence.

There are many diseases addressed by preventive medicine today. The most successful approach for prevention is with vaccines. The future of vaccines holds the prevention of many cancers (cervical cancer is already being prevented by a vaccine).

Certainly, my comments pertaining to vaccines are my opinion. Yet, please recognize these are opinions that have grown out of memories, experience, and most importantly, reproducible medical evidence.

Considering prevention further, I think you can draw a parallel to studying the Word. The Word does have an immunizing effect. It immunizes students of the Word to the way of the world (to sin) - prevention that we all need. The Word warns of the dangers of succumbing to sin. The Word tells how to be in the world but not a part of the world.

Although vaccination doesn't guarantee we won't become ill, it provides protection and improves survival in a mortal sense. Likewise, God's Word does not guarantee that we won't fall into the "allure" of the world, but it does imprint knowledge of a better way that improves survival in the eternal sense.

## Good Eye or Bad Eye

By Dick Savage

*<sup>19</sup> "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. <sup>22</sup> "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup> But if your eyes are unhealthy your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! <sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money! (Matthew 6:19-24 NIV).*

All languages have figures of speech that are difficult to translate into another language such as "raining cats and dogs," "beating around the bush," or "that drives me up a wall." Jesus uses phrases in the Gospels that make little sense to us until we understand that they are really Hebrew idiomatic phrases.

For example, from our perspective, in the Matthew passage above, a part of the sermon on the mount, it isn't clear why Jesus inserts a discussion about eyes into a discussion about money and storing up treasure in heaven. The word He used to describe the eye is translated, as "single", "sound", "healthy", or "good" depending on the English translation one reads. However, this phrase is actually a Hebrew expression used to describe a person's attitude toward others. The Hebraic understanding of "seeing" goes way beyond using one's eyes. It refers to seeing and responding to others' needs. A person that has a

(Continued on page 4)



(Continued from page 3)

“good eye” is viewed as generous; that is, he sees the needs of others and acts to help them. In contrast, someone with a “bad eye” or “evil eye” is focused on his own self-gain.

With this understanding, this part of Matthew 6 can better be understood as saying that if we love others sincerely and have a generous spirit, our life will be full of light. If we think only of our own gain, turning a blind eye to the needs of others, our life will be dark indeed.

Did you know the evil eye concept is in the Bible? Throughout the Old Testament, the Hebrew “evil eye” is often translated into English as “stingy.” It’s a good translation: ancient people of the Middle East associated the evil eye with the stinginess of finances and the stinginess of the heart. It’s easiest to find this “eye” imagery in Proverbs, where contrasts such as wise/foolish, righteous/evil, and diligent/lazy are paralleled by generous/stingy (“good eye”/ “evil eye”). A couple of examples include, *“Don’t eat with people who are stingy; don’t desire their delicacies. They are always thinking about how much it costs. ‘Eat and drink,’ they say, but they don’t mean it.” Proverbs 23:6-7 (NLT)* and *“A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him” (Proverbs 28:22 ESV).*

In both verses, the Hebrew thought behind “stingy” is *ra ayin*, “evil-eyed.” The Hebrew *tov ayin* (“good eye”) lies behind the English word “generous” such as we find in this passage: *“The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor” (Proverbs 22:9 NIV).*

As westerners, we often misunderstand elements of the Bible, like this one, that are deeply embedded in cultural symbolism. So, we have misunderstood Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 6, Jesus says, *“If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy your whole body will be full of darkness.”*

Jesus instructs us not to store up treasure on earth, He declares it impossible to serve both God and money, encouraging us not to worry about what we will eat, drink, or wear. Why would Jesus, in the middle of teaching about financial provisions, change the subject to good and bad eyes? He didn’t.

Can our light in the world really be darkened by



### Good Eye or Evil Eye

stinginess – by selfishness or anxiety of heart that causes us to be tight-fisted with our finances? Or can our generosity be what causes us to shine in the darkness and pain of the world?

It’s easy to spiritualize this into an issue of the heart only. But the content of our hearts naturally overflows into our actions, and so it is with money and possessions. A stingy heart, inwardly calculating and anxious, will manifest itself in stingy finances. It will lead to hoarding, fearful giving, selfish refusal to give, giving out of obligation rather than joy, or pervasive financial anxiety. A generous heart, on the other hand, results in a generous hand, giving freely out of true concern for others and the trust that there is enough

For those of us who too easily close our hearts and narrow our eyes at the needs of others and who are too quickly envious of God’s generosity to others, there is good news! We can grow into generous people!

Understanding this Hebrew idiom helps us understand the whole passage in Matthew 6 that begins with *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,”* then talks about the “good/evil eye”, and then ends with *“You cannot serve both God and money!”* All three of these sayings are part of a greater teaching on having the right attitude toward money and others.

Now we understand better what Jesus means in terms of how we can be filled with light and darkness. If we love others and help them by sharing our money, life, and time, our life will be full of light. If we think only of ourselves and our bank accounts, turning a blind eye to the needs of others, we will be blind indeed.

### Mayfair Assistance Helpline

256-704-3384

Mayfair offers a helpline for members who require assistance with home or automotive repairs, or transportation needs. Call to leave a message and you will be contacted for details.

## ***“Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life” (Proverbs 16:31 ESV)***

In this issue of “JOY in the Journey”, we begin a series on some of Mayfair’s senior members who truly wear a “Crown of Glory.” We begin with our Sisters Libba Whitten and Alice Johnson and Brother Luke Spears.

### **Libba Whitten**

By Bob Rieder

A birthday is always a special event. A 99th birthday is even more special! Libba Whitten had such a "more special" event earlier this year when she reached that remarkable age.

Libba was born in Huntsville in 1924 with the given name, Elisabeth Echols Watts and spent almost all of her adult life in the area. Her parents and grandparents were Huntsville/Madison County residents as well, placing her family's presence in Huntsville back within several decades of the city's founding in the early 19th century.

As a child, Libba remembers fondly growing up in the Watts home on Locust Street. Her grandfather, John Parks Watts, a widower who raised four children after his wife's early death, lived next door. He was a country doctor who often traveled to his patients' homes on horseback and received payment in the form of farm produce.

The Watts household in which Libba grew up was a busy one. She was the fourth of five children, with two older brothers and an older and a younger sister. Her mother (one of the first female graduates of The University of Alabama) taught in Huntsville's public schools, and her father was a local attorney. She recalls having several "farm" animals in the backyard, whose feeding and care were the children's responsibility.

She was blessed to grow up in a Christian home and to be part of a line of several generations of believers. Her family was an integral part of the Randolph Street Church of Christ in downtown Huntsville. In fact, the Watts' association with that congregation goes back many years. Her grandfather was among the group of believers in the late 19th century who helped start that congregation, which became the first Church of Christ in Huntsville. Both he and Libba's father served as elders there.



**Libba Whitten**

She and her family came to Mayfair some years ago, but her aunt, Anna Watts Rosborough, and sister, Margaret Rieder, were active members at Randolph until health conditions prevented their involvement. Libba's family and the history of that "pioneer" congregation were intertwined from its beginning.

Those in her generation experienced the Great Depression and World War II, events that taught them important life lessons like persevering in hard times, fulfilling one's duty without expecting praise, being industrious, and valuing frugality. Those values and virtues stayed with her throughout her life.

She met her future husband, Louis Salmon, while they were both attending The University of Alabama. They raised two children. The oldest, Jack, has five children, and he and his wife live in Shreveport, LA. The youngest, Mimi, was a Mayfair member along with her husband Chuck Austin, until her death in late 2021.

Libba has faced her share of hardship. Louis died

*(Continued on page 6)*

*(Continued from page 5)*

unexpectedly in 1993. After several years, Libba married Bruce Whitten, a former Air Force/NASA test pilot. He died in 2002. She has outlived not only her parents, but two husbands, all her brothers and sisters, and her daughter. Notwithstanding these losses, she has maintained a positive, upbeat spirit, holding on to the hope that her faith provides. She is an example of someone who has grieved often and then moved ahead to face whatever life has brought her.

Though she's been through two knee replacements and a broken hip in recent years, Libba has been blessed with overall good health. She still drives, does most of her own grocery shopping, occasionally goes out for errands, cooks her meals, and is able to do most of what needs to be done in her home.

Those around her often remark that she could pass for someone a decade or so younger! She attributes much of this to her diet (lots of steamed vegetables), vitamins, and not worrying. Her outlook on life has surely contributed to her longevity.

Almost anyone who meets her - repairmen in her home, store clerks, physical therapists, etc. - can expect to receive an invitation to attend Mayfair, "a church you'll find most welcoming," she promises. And if you go by to see her, she'll do her best to make sure you don't leave empty-handed. If you ask how you might help her, she'll try to find a way to help you. Her cheerful disposition and characteristic smile brighten the day of those around her. It's this kind of spirit that has helped her and will help us all, to live long and well.

## **Alice Johnson**

By Frank Houck

Alice Adair Johnson was born on January 11, 1926, in Des Moines, Iowa in her maternal grandmother's home. However, she grew up living in a home her paternal grandfather John Wesley (JW) Adair built in 1895. She shared that home with her grandmother Margaret Adair and her parents Mary and Earl Adair.

She was one of six children in the family. Three of her five siblings lived long lives. Her sister Margaret was killed in an accident at 86; Dorothy died at 99, and John died at 93, but sadly two other siblings, Marjorie and Francis lived only a few weeks.

From Iowa, if you drive South on Highway 169 and stop right before the Missouri border, all you'll see are acres and acres of untamed farmland moving with the wind. There's nothing left of the farmhouse her grandfather built or the barns that were home to generations of animals. There are no traces of the farmers who tilled the land or threshed the wheat for countless seasons but what is left is peace and quiet and the stories that Alice holds close to her heart. When asked about the farm Alice says "You can take the gal out of the farm, but you can never take the farm out of the gal."

Her childhood on the farm was sandwiched between two of the biggest wars the world has ever seen. During this time the US experienced the worst financial crisis in its history and the country's most



**Alice Johnson**

devastating drought. However, when she reflects on this time it's not these hardships that shaped who she became but the incredible full childhood that was given to her through the strength and love of her family.

JW, her grandfather, loved to joke with visitors. Greeting them with "Make yourself at home. I'm at home. And I wish you were too" and "And the next time you get within a mile of our place—stop." He always said it with a straight face and a twinkle in his eye.

Alice's mother Mary Bailey was born in Maine and was a Quaker. "Whenever we kids grumbled about a bad day we were having, whether a broken toy or

*(Continued on page 7)*



spilled milk,” Alice says, “mom would say ‘What’s done is done. Now get on with today.’ I have gratefully carried that saying throughout my life.”

Her dad Earl was born on the farm where he lived all his life. “Whenever we got a little fussy dad would say ‘if you can’t say something nice don’t say anything.’ Dad could cut through the complexities of life and make everything sound simple. To milk a few cows at the barn with him, would do a person more good than a dozen psychiatric treatments.”

Alice went to elementary and high school in Reading, Iowa. She graduated in 1943 as one of ten in her graduating class. She then majored in Physical Education at the State University of Iowa, which is now known as “The University of Iowa” and graduated in 1947. She is very proud of the fact that the university was one of the first institutions in America to grant a law degree to a woman or a law degree to an African American. The university was also one of the first to put an African American on a varsity athletic squad and was the first to incorporate Title IX prohibiting discrimination based on gender in education programs and activities such as athletics.

She taught physical education to children in kindergarten through twelfth grade in Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. She remembers her grandfather saying, “Do you mean to tell me they pay money for playing all day?” She taught physical education for several years and then became the health education supervisor of the Milwaukee school system.

Alice blended into each group in which she partici-

pated, especially in sports. She saw the best in everyone and wasn’t critical. Miss White, her third-grade teacher, wrote in her autograph book “Continue as the song says, ‘to stay as sweet as you are’” and she has. She is compassionate and thoughtful.

In 1957, Alice married Ralph Johnson. They have one daughter Helen who married Michael Cole and became a NASA engineer. They have given Alice three grandchildren, Michael, Elizabeth, and Stephen, and one great-granddaughter May.

Ralph passed away in 1995, so, Alice moved to Huntsville to be with family and started going to Mayfair with Michael and Helen soon after arriving. She studied with Malcom Rives and was baptized by Lem Tipton on April 30, 1997. She quickly became an active member and only slowed down a little when she broke her hip. Thankfully she is back in the harness and pulling hard for the Lord.

Alice had just one more thing to say, “My advice to anyone who may be thinking of doing the same things I did, DO IT! You’ll meet and make many good friends, and you’ll wonder how you had gotten along without them. Mayfair Church of Christ has been the highlight of my living in Huntsville. Mayfair has many activities that may help you in your golden years. They give special attention to their members. I enjoy visiting with my friend Diane Houck. We visit the elderly, shut-ins, and the sick. I love spending time making pillows that we give for their comfort.”

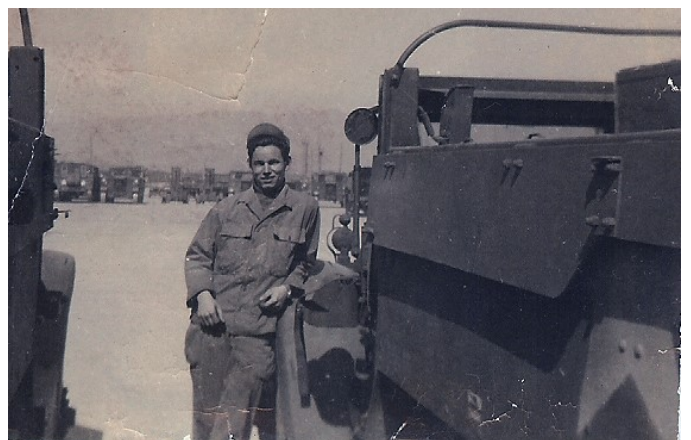
Truly Alice is a beautiful person inside and out and most of all, a servant of God.

## Luke Spears

By Dwayne and Gayle Duke

Luther Thomas Spears, Jr. was born December 12, 1926, in Hamburg, Arkansas, and grew up in Warren, Arkansas as the oldest of three boys, graduating from Warren High School in 1944. Luke had many jobs in high school including picking cotton with one of his brothers, delivering newspapers and groceries, driving a taxi, working in a café, and working in the parts department of the local Ford dealership.

After graduating high school, Luke worked in the machine shop at an Air Force base in Arkansas. From there he was sent to school in Gadsden, Alabama, for a few months of training in machine shop practices which probably led to his decision to pursue a degree



Luke Spears serving in Japan in WWII

in mechanical engineering a few years later.

Due to heavy losses in the Battle of the Bulge, the U.S. needed more infantry. After entering the Army at age 18, his group underwent infantry combat

training in the hot Louisiana weather. However, the war ended during that training; and he and the group were spared combat duty. Instead, they were sent to be part of the occupation of the Japanese mainland—in Luke’s case as part of the Ordnance Corps.

When Luke’s stint in the Army was over in 1947, he attended Arkansas Tech and then the University of Arkansas where he earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering in 1951. Upon graduation, Luke started a job with General Electric in Schenectady, New York, but due to the Korean War, he was called back into active duty with the Air Force at Wright-Patterson AFB near Dayton, Ohio.

Luke considers that move to Dayton to be one of his great fortunes because that is where he met and married Carol Elizabeth Brose in 1952. When Luke met Carol, she was 19 and working at Wright-Patterson AFB. Their daughter Nancy was born in Dayton in September 1953.

When Luke left the Air Force in 1956, he took a job with Douglas Aircraft in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Working initially on a large transport aircraft project, their group transitioned into work on Thor-based rocket vehicles—including the development of the original Delta launch vehicle.

Their son Jim was born there in 1956. Carol had grown up attending the Church of Christ. While living in Tulsa, they worshipped with the Fifteenth Street Church of Christ where Luke was baptized in 1958.

Douglas Aircraft moved the project Luke was working on to California, so Luke returned with his family to Dayton as an Air Force civilian employee. While working there on studies of advanced space projects, he made contacts that led to his transfer to Huntsville in 1961 to work with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) at Marshall Space Flight Center (MSFC). Becoming part of the MSFC Future Projects Office presented the opportunity to work on and be a part of exciting new rocket/space projects.

In late 1961, the Spears family came to Mayfair which had just moved into a brand new building on Whitesburg Drive. It was a rapidly growing congregation and a great church home for their family resulting in many new friendships. Carol served as the church secretary for a while, and Luke served as a Deacon. The Spears family lived in the Piedmont area of South Huntsville for 15 years before moving to



**Luke Spears—today**

northwest Madison County in the seventies to have room to raise and ride horses.

In 1988, Luke retired from NASA after 27 years. He then took a job with a small firm in Research Park for about ten years doing space and defense-related work before finally leaving the workforce in 2000.

After a succession of illnesses, Carol passed away in 2010. She and Luke had been married for 58 years. Luke continues to live in and maintain their home and acreage in northwest Madison County.

Their daughter Nancy is a retired nurse living with her husband Larry in the Birmingham area. Her three sons, all married, and four grandchildren, are also in the Birmingham area. Luke and Carol’s son Jim who lived in North Georgia, passed away in 2020 at age 64. He has a daughter and grandson in the same area.

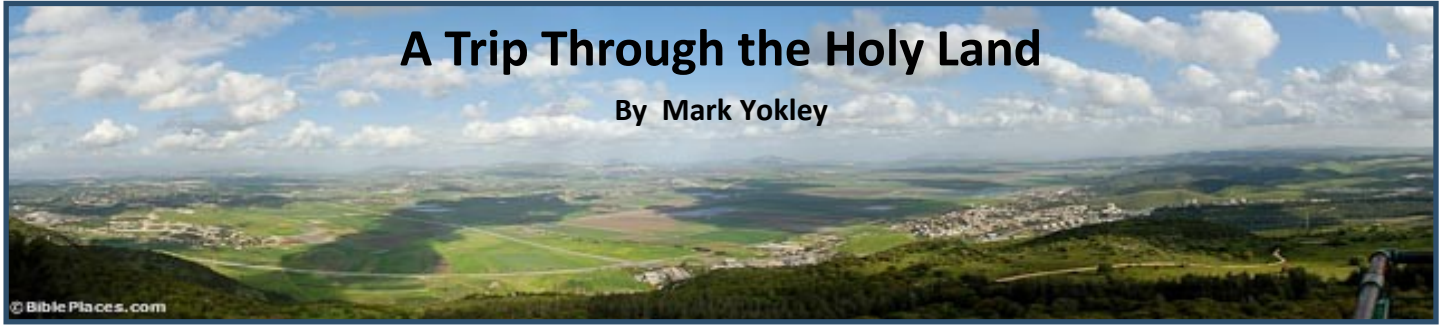
As a devoted husband, Luke cared for his wife Carol in their home for several years—while she was ill. He drives over 20 miles each way to Mayfair and does his own grocery shopping, errands, and doctor’s appointments. Until very recently, he got out on his property and cut down vines and other vegetation.

Luke is a very humble and independent man. He is remarkable for his age of 96. He has an amazing mind; reads extensively; is caring, thoughtful, generous, witty, and still has a full head of hair! Most importantly he is a faithful Christian.



# A Trip Through the Holy Land

By Mark Yokley



## A current day view of the Jezreel Valley

At the end of 2022, Pat McRight and Ron Curtis guided a group from Mayfair on a trip to the Holy Lands. Most of us who took the trip considered it a bucket list adventure.

There are so many wonderful moments from the trip, that it is hard to decide which to write about. I have picked two topics for the purpose of this newsletter: The Jezreel Valley and its surrounding environs, and the circumstances that led to the location of Jerusalem.

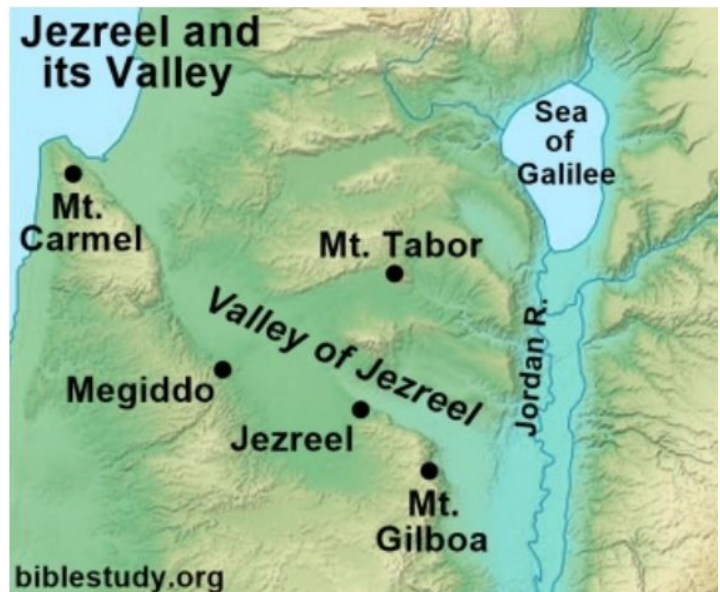
It is no surprise that one of the most interesting parts of the trip for me revolved around the landscape and terrain of the country of Israel. After all, I am a civil engineer and land surveyor. I tend to be a map geek and understanding the layout of the country of Israel was one thing that interested me the most.

One of the first stops on the trip was at Megiddo. As is common in Israel, different generations built and rebuilt on the same sites, resulting in multiple layers of civilization that led to a sizeable hill. This was very clear at Megiddo with approximately 26 levels of occupation.

American excavators from the Oriental Institute began work in 1925 with the ambitious goal of excavating every level in its entirety. They made it through the first three levels before concentrating the work on certain areas, resulting in a triangular wedge (think of a slice of birthday cake) being excavated through many different levels.

From the Early Bronze Age (3000-2100 BC) to the reign of Thutmose III (1479-1425 BC) to the future (Revelation 16), Megiddo assumes a prominent role in history. This is primarily due to its strategic location astride the Megiddo Pass and inside the busy Jezreel Valley where the modern roads follow the ancient ones.

Needing secure access to its water supply, Megiddo utilized different water systems throughout its history. In the 9th century BC, Ahab constructed a massive system with a 100-foot (30-meter) deep shaft and a 230-foot (70-meter) long tunnel that connected the bottom of Ahab's shaft to a spring. This system continued to be used until the end of the Iron Age. Before its construction, Megiddo residents had to leave the city walls to get water from the spring, which posed an obvious security vulnerability if they were ever attacked.



From the vantage point of Megiddo, we had a panoramic view of the Jezreel Valley. The spacious Jezreel Valley stretches southeast from Haifa on the coast of the Mediterranean, to Beth-Shan on the Jordan river. The fertile alluvial soil makes this the country's breadbasket as well. The Bible speaks of the gathering of armies in this valley as the place of Armageddon. It also is reported to be the site of more battles than anywhere else in the world, vali-

*(Continued on page 10)*

(Continued from page 9)

dating its worth and location as a crossroads between multiple kingdoms.

As we scan the Jezreel Valley from our viewpoint on Megiddo, we can see many obvious points of interest such as Mount Carmel which is located on our left and northwest of us. Biblically, Mount Carmel is referenced most often as a symbol of beauty and fertility. To be given the “splendor of Carmel” was to be blessed indeed (Isaiah 35:2). Solomon praised his beloved: “your head crowns you like Mount Carmel” (Song of Songs 7:5). But for Carmel to wither was a sign of devastating judgment (Nahum 1:4).

The monastery of Muhraqa is at the top of the hill signifying the site of Elijah’s contest with the prophets of Baal, but tradition places the contest slightly lower near a spring. The crowds of Israelites would have filled the spacious territory around to see whose god would win the contest between Elijah’s true God and Baal.

There is a statue at the Carmelite monastery that reflects the Lord’s victory over the prophets of Baal. Shortly after the fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, altar, and even the water, Elijah had the prophets of Baal slaughtered at the Brook Kishon, which should have happened long before!



**Mount Carmel**

Because Mount Carmel sits astride the International Highway (sometimes called the Via Maris), three passes through the mountain became significant routes of travel in the ancient world. Because the

passes were so narrow, they were relatively easy to guard.

The next site is Mount Tabor which looms large to the east, sitting at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley, 11 miles (18 kilometers) west of the Sea of Galilee and directly across from Megiddo. Its elevation at the summit is 1,886 feet (575 meters) high. It is used in Scripture as a symbol of majesty: *“As I live,’ declares the King Whose name is the Lord of hosts, ‘Surely one shall come who looms up like Tabor among the mountains, Or like Carmel by the sea”* (Jeremiah 46:18 NASB).



**Mount Tabor**

The Israelite tribes gathered on Mount Tabor in the days of Deborah. The Canaanites were assembled at Harosheth Haggoyim (likely on the opposite side of the Jezreel Valley) and Barak led the Israelite charge of 10,000 men against Sisera’s army. It seems that the Lord’s intervention on behalf of the Israelites was in the form of a rainstorm, such that the Kishon River flooded and made chariot travel for the Canaanites impossible (Judges 4–5).

Early church fathers, including historians like Cyril of Jerusalem (in AD 348), Epiphanius, and Jerome believed that the Transfiguration took place on Mount Tabor, but of course, there are others who have a different opinion. Eusebius was uncertain if it took place on Mount Tabor or on Mount Hermon.

Our next location, Beth Shean, (often spelled Bethshan in scripture), is located 17 miles (27 kilometers) south of the Sea of Galilee. Beth Shean is situated at the strategic junction of the Harod and Jordan Valleys. The fertility of the land and the abundance of

(Continued on page 11)



(Continued from page 10)

water led the Jewish sages to say, "If the Garden of Eden is in the land of Israel, then its gate is Beth Shean." It is no surprise then that the site has been almost continuously settled from the Chalcolithic period to the present.

We recognize Beth Shean from scripture as the location Saul and Jonathan's bodies were hung on the walls of the city after their deaths found in Samuel's account of the battle at Mount Gilboa: *"Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons. The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day (1 Samuel 31:1-6 NKJV).*



**Mount Gilboa**

Pompey and the Romans rebuilt Beth Shean in 63 BC and it was renamed Scythopolis ("city of the Scythians;" as it is referenced in Colossians 3:11). It became the capital city of the Decapolis and was the only one on the west side of the Jordan. The city continued to grow and prosper in the Roman and Byzan-

tine periods until it was destroyed on January 18, 749 by an earthquake. Even now, the destruction caused by this earthquake is evident by the dozens of massive columns that toppled over in the same direction.

Mount Gilboa is on the southeastern side of the Jezreel Valley. It was here that King Saul felt forced to commit suicide on these slopes when facing certain defeat by the Philistines. In light of Saul and Jonathan's deaths, David cursed the mountain: *"O mountains of Gilboa, Let there be no dew nor rain upon you, Nor fields of offerings." (2 Samuel 1:21 NKJV).*

The Harod Valley, which is at the foot of Mount Gilboa, is filled with biblical history. From this location, we have the story of the anointed, but not yet crowned, Jehu "driving like a madman," (2 Kings 9:20) on his way to killing the kings of Israel and Judah. Nine hundred years later, Jesus healed the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19), probably somewhere in this valley.

Gideon chose his army of 300 at the Harod Spring at the foot of Mount Gilboa. Judges 7 describes Gideon's actions in thinning out his army. He brought the men to the spring and sorted them on the basis of how they drank from the water.

My description of the Jezreel Valley started at Mount Carmel and continued clockwise to Mount Gilboa. I intentionally skipped Nazareth and left it until last. It is located directly across the valley, northeast of Megiddo. This was the hometown of Jesus and He probably spent much of his youth in and around the valley.

In the time of Jesus, Nazareth was a relatively isolated village with a population of fewer than 200 people, inside a bowl, on top of a Nazareth ridge north of the Jezreel Valley. Outside of the New Testament, very little is said about Nazareth from ancient sources. Nazareth is never mentioned until the Byzantine period (4th century AD). Archaeological excavations have confirmed that the city was only a small agricultural village during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

From scripture, we know that Jesus spent His boyhood years in Nazareth before beginning His ministry when He was about 30 years old. After moving His home to Capernaum, Jesus returned to teach in the synagogue of Nazareth twice more but was rejected

(Continued on page 12)



both times. On one occasion the townspeople were so outraged at Jesus that they tried to throw Him off a cliff to His death.



### Capernaum

I grew up in a river valley along the South Fork of the Little Barren River in southern Kentucky. If I were to walk from our house, I would pass the pond I watched my grandfather build with a bulldozer. I would pass the big silo barn where I overcame my fear of heights by having to climb to the top of the silo with each load of silage we added. I would then take a right up Sowers Hollow and pass the cave where I had my first spelunking adventures. Then on to the mill stream where I am told there once was a mill, but which we never found. Then over the hill to Hartfield's Pond and back to the house. Each area had a story or stories associated with it and when I passed them, the memories would come back and remind me of past events.

When I looked across the ancient landscape and saw Nazareth, I realized that this land might have been to Jesus just like my little corner of Kentucky was to me. Jesus grew up in the presence of the stories that we just read about in the Bible. I have heard it said that until you travel to the Holy Lands you read the Bible one-dimensionally in black and white and after you have been there you read it three-dimensionally and in vivid color. That was certainly my impression.

We were fortunate to have a wonderful guide named Ami Weiss from whom I got my second point. Ami gave us a Jewish mindset to what we were seeing by posing interesting questions to make us think. As we looked at the water supply system,

and the tunnels that accessed it, he asked us why David would attack a Jebusite city and move his palace there since he already had a palace from which he could rule in Hebron. Why move his palace to this place that would be called Jerusalem?

The answer is because of the spiritual importance of the site because this is the site where Abraham willingly put his son Isaac on an altar to sacrifice him in obedience to God's command. The Jebusite city of Salem was also on Mount Moriah.

During King David's reign, he decided to build God a temple, a permanent building instead of a tent like the tabernacle. God said "no" to David's plan to build a temple because David was a man of war, and God wanted a man of peace to build His temple. That man of peace was Solomon, David's son – and in the reign of Solomon, a magnificent temple was built – what is called "Solomon's Temple" or "The First Temple." However, it's easy to forget that though Solomon actually built the temple, David did much of the preparation work. David tells us of his preparation:

*"So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones and marble. Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God: 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver, for overlaying the walls of the house, and for all the work to be done by craftsmen, gold for the things of gold and silver for the things of silver." (1 Chronicles 29:2-5 NKJV).*

Solomon's temple stood for about 410 years until the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. The temple was built in Jerusalem because God's plans are always accomplished in His timeframe. Just like Abraham offered his son, Isaac, God offered His son Jesus in the same location many hundreds of years later. Even though God spoke to people with great spans of time in between, His will was always accomplished.