

I graduated as a Knight in 2013. After I entered college and the workforce, I came to appreciate how valuable my HCA education truly was. I realized that a high school program focused on cultivating thoughtful students and staffed by teachers who invested deeply in their students' growth was an extraordinary gift—one that prepared me for life far more than I had anticipated. Since graduating, I've had the opportunity to continue onto post-graduate biblical studies. During my undergrad at Liberty University, I concentrated on Hebrew and Old Testament which led to my Hebrew professor recommending me to a master's program in Jerusalem. I never imagined such a door would open for me, but the Lord showed Himself strong, providing for me to pursue a two-year degree in Israel.

As I settled into campus my first semester, all of the students were taught missile drills in case of an extraordinary event. We never suspected how routine these drills would soon become. October 7, 2023 turned the first semester upside down and upended the region. Calls and texts pouring in, rockets exploding overhead, racing in and out of shelter, ground rumbling, and in between we studied for exams and wrote papers. A handful of us students determined to stay and continue the program.

The conflict touched every part of my time in Israel. Words don't capture the tension between the deep gratitude of living into my dream right alongside carrying the weight and bewilderment of the war. Life in Israel drastically changed its pace to meet the circumstances. As life marched on and Israelis and Palestinians tried to maintain some normalcy of life, the few students who remained worked to keep in step and carry on with our program. Each semester I left, I wondered if it would be the last. The conflict widened, drawing Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iran into the fray. The attacks and strikes continued to scale up. During our second year, Iran launched the largest ballistic missile strike on record. We watched the night sky light up and felt the ground shake as Iron Dome concussions filled the air. I spent times gripped by a heavy spirit and uncertainty. On one hand, my faith had never been so tested; on the other, it had never been so deeply anchored. In my hardest moments, I was overwhelmed by a flood of prayers, words of encouragement, and loved ones reaching out to be assured that I was secure. With so many lifting me up, fanning the flames of my call, and reminding me of the faithfulness of the God I serve, the Spirit poured out His grace and the strength to persevere. I look back with gratitude, knowing it gave me a hope that I will always carry.

I've had opportunity to build relationships with wonderful Israelis and Palestinians here. My Israeli Hebrew professor, a Jewish rabbi, would work border patrol before coming in to teach our class. While not a believer in Christ himself, even he couldn't deny Jesus' power to change hearts. In the midst of the war, he shared with us, "Bullets and bombs will never solve the conflict between Jews and Muslims in this land. The only thing I have ever seen break the hostility of Muslim radicals towards Jews is Christ." Many words circulate about the animosity between Arabs and Jews. There's a well-known hymn in Israel based on Psalm 133. At the Israeli church I attended, led by a band of Jewish and Arab believers, we all sang its words: "How good, and how sweet it is, when brothers and sisters dwell together as one." There is only one place on earth you'll hear Jews and Arabs lifting up one voice together about how sweet their unity is

– in the body of Christ, and under His cross. His gospel - bought by His blood - is the one thing powerful enough to purchase a reconciliation like this.

I could not have imagined all the strain in store for me and my family when I bought my first plane ticket to Israel. However, I found it true that Christ is sufficient in our need, and perfects His strength in our weakness. I have never sensed living in the middle of a pivotal place and moment like I have these past two years – reading the headlines, and sitting down to hear the stories of the people in the headlines: Israelis and Palestinians trying to carve out a life together here in the Land. I have seen how the Lord has turned this troubled time for good, plowing the ground for the seed of the Gospel. Confronted head-on with the depth of brokenness and complexity of the conflict has renewed my sense of Christ’s mission and the abiding need for His church to be His hands and feet in the world. I was hard-pressed and challenged, but I’m certain it was no accident the Lord led me here in such a time. Two thousand years ago, Jesus stepped into a boat and said to His disciples, *Let’s cross to the other side*. On their way across, a storm broke loose. Two years ago, I boarded a plane – and a war broke loose. Often, the call of Christ leads us into troubled waters. But in the depth of those waters, we, like the disciples, come to know Christ as Master over the mighty storm.

In spite of the conflict, the Lord gave me a rich two years full of opportunities to pour into Palestinians and Israelis, to serve communities in need, to travel all through the land, to take part in the worldwide family of believers, and to be part of important, ongoing biblical research. In the course of my studies, I have seen how the Bible’s message is woven into the fabric of its land and culture. While the Bible’s meaning remains clear, we come alive to its depth and force when we situate its words in their native context, allowing the message to cut through our own cultural sensibilities, and ancient voices to speak with new clarity. In recovering its proper background, we truly sit at the feet of the apostles, prophets, and evangelists. The more we are grounded in context, the more their words breathe life into our understanding and position us to hear the Scriptures speak with power. From beginning to end, the Scripture is the story of redemption, and when we embrace the story, we take our place in the unfolding drama of the Kingdom.

Having come to the end of my degree in Israel, I hope to continue onto a PhD program in Biblical Studies in order to become further equipped to help men and women cultivate a robust, dynamic relationship with the Scriptures. My heart is to empower the Church at large to engage more deeply with the Scriptures and, in so doing, be called into deeper discipleship to Jesus. As I continue to follow the Lord’s call on my life, I am reminded of Hudson Taylor’s words that “God’s work, done in God’s way, will never lack God’s supply.” So far, He has proven Himself faithful to provide for me to pursue this path, and I ask for your continued prayers that He would sustain me along the way. For those of you who would like to stay up to date on my journey, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me!

Every blessing,

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