



# *Forge Israel*

**Perspectives from the Holy Land**



Spring 2020



## Dear Forge Champion,

How incredible is it that in only one calendar year, a college-aged individual comes face-to-face with state politics and the legislative process, federal domestic policy and national influencers, and international affairs and American foreign policy in the Middle East?

This is exactly what a student gains through the Forge experience!

Each of our quarterly newsletters focuses on either alumni success stories or a different component of the Forge experience: the Forge Leadership Summit at a state capitol; “Forge 201” in Washington, D.C.; and “Forge 301” in Israel. To learn more about how these training experiences flow in the Forge sequence, please go to [ForgeLeadership.org/About](http://ForgeLeadership.org/About).

This quarter’s newsletter will focus on the third leg of that experiential learning, our students’ nine-day crash course in Israel, where they deepen the roots of their biblical faith and gain incredible knowledge of the geopolitical realities surrounding the U.S.-Israel relationship, American foreign policy in the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more.

The Forge 301 experience in Israel is the only aspect of Forge programming that we do not run ourselves. We partner with Passages, a nonprofit whose mission is to help Christian college students deepen their faith and encounter modern Israel through a nine-day experience in the Holy Land. When friends of mine launched Passages five years ago and generously extended an opportunity to partner, we thought it was an incredible chance to tie together the Forge training experience at three complementary levels of policy education: state, national, and international scope. If we were going to have a foreign affairs plank in the Forge experiential training, why not choose the epicenter of Western Civilization, a land that has been sought after and contested for 6,000 years, seen the rise and fall of empires, and a nation and region that plays an outsized role





in our own American politics, foreign policy, and international affairs? It has been a phenomenal learning experience, and thanks to the generous founders of Passages, it has been made available to our students at an unbelievable discounted cost.

Five years later, the partnership with Passages has flourished and this plank in the Forge program has transformed lives and ignited careers more than we could have imagined. In November's newsletter, you read about Peter Burns advocating elected leaders on behalf of religious minorities in the Middle East, and you read about Danielle Price (pictured above), a nurse heading into Mosul, Iraq to provide trauma medical care to the victims of ISIS attacks. Many of the Forge students working in foreign policy or in international ministry, like Peter and Danielle, respectively, saw these goals and callings take shape and clarify thanks to their experience in Israel. Passages and Forge have together celebrated many mutual alumni, many Forge students have returned to Israel as Passages' student mentors to lead new students, and one Forge graduate – Rachael Powell – works as Media & Communications Director for Passages!

In this newsletter, I hope you'll see from our students' words why this experience is so transformative and builds into them personally and professionally. Please enjoy reading our newsletter, and let me know if you would ever want to join us on our annual trip to Israel!

Shalom,

Adam Josefczyk  
President and Co-Founder  
Forge Leadership Network





## Letting Faith Find You

### Matthew Brokke

In 2019, I had the privilege of being a part of the Forge Mentorship Academy. I got to meet amazing people, learn valuable life lessons, travel to faraway places, and grow in my faith.

I did not subscribe to any religion back in 2018, however throughout 2019, I found God and grew in my faith. Then, as a new Christian, right before my trip to Israel — the land where Christ lived, died, and lived again — I started getting nervous. I was building up an expectation that because I was traveling to the Holy Land, I had to have a spiritual experience. Once I arrived in Israel, I became afraid because I didn't feel any different. As the days went by, the fear turned to guilt and my expectations developed as we traveled through Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee, and the Jordan River, and nothing seemed to change for me.

Finally, once we arrived in Jerusalem and we traveled to the Western Wall, the place where the Jewish people go to pray and get closer to God, I realized something as a very good friend and mentor of mine looked at me as we watched the people pray and said, "Aren't you glad we don't need to go anywhere to feel closer to God?"

It hit me like a ton of bricks. No wonder I didn't feel any different! Yes, I was standing in the place that Jesus walked just 2,000 years ago, but as a Christian believer, I know Christ already lives in me through His Holy Spirit. No matter where we are, our prayers reach God all the same. I am so thankful that I learned about the transcendence of our Savior, even though I did have to travel halfway around the world to discover this!





# A Pilgrim's Burden

Logan Alexander

Scenes flooded through my mind as I stooped to touch the Mediterranean Sea. Accounts of Abraham and the patriarchs, of Moses and ancient Israel, of judges and kings and prophets, of nations and empires, of apostles and the kingdom of God, of a special land wherein God chose to proclaim His presence and name before all the world, all flashed through my mind and stirred my soul. Here I stood, not simply as a tourist but a pilgrim, a person of faith seeking a deepening and enlivening of his faith.

Why come to Israel for the sake of faith? Perhaps most obviously, the multitude of historical sites brings the pages of Scripture to life. Another reason is that – for those sincerely pursuing truth – interaction with others of differing religious perspectives cultivates a genuine faith, one based in understanding and experience.

My primary motivation, however, was hope for a closer relationship with God. I set out for Israel in one of my life's darkest moments, barely holding on to the faith that God would somehow use the experience to break through the gloom, and I learned something: Scripture matters, places of hallowed heritage matter, but fellow pilgrims matter just as much. Most of the change begun in Israel came through interactions with my Forge Mentorship Academy fellows, and the Grand Weaver wove everything together in His time and in such a way that I am still being affected and helped by the experience, the pilgrimage. Genuine faith is not vain, as my story and those of countless others verify.

I believe Passages – having a character and program of such high caliber – was uniquely primed to facilitate such a wondrous journey, and Forge's influence throughout was invaluable. It was a once-in-a-lifetime adventure that I cannot recommend more highly and for which I will be forever grateful.





## **Open Air Classroom – A Staff Perspective**

Jennie Simunek

Imagine teaching middle school children Old Testament and ancient world history for several years in the classroom, and then getting the opportunity to teach a group of students – albeit older and much more interested in the subject matter, in an outdoor classroom on the Mount of Olives! That dream to go on the “field trip of all field trips” came true for me when I traveled to Israel with the Forge Mentorship Academy class of 2018-19 last summer.

On our Passages trips, two “faculty” members help lead the Forge students to Israel. Their role is more than a chaperone – more of a mentor – to be available to the students for in-depth spiritual and mentorship conversations and to teach the biblical context and faith applications at the various sites in Israel. Having left my classroom (teaching high school and middle school history, Bible, and comparative worldviews) in 2017 to come on staff with Forge, I was given the opportunity to be one of these faculty members.

One of my favorite times of sharing with the students was at the Mount of Olives. In the quiet gardens of a convent, it really did feel like an outdoor classroom. We took the time to reflect on Jesus passing through right where we were on His triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, and how there He wept over the Holy





City of Jerusalem. Jesus taught about the destruction of Jerusalem and end times in the Olivet Discourse and His promise of His Kingdom now and yet to come. We took time to reflect on the prominence and significance of the olive tree in the Bible and to Israel itself. Before heading down the hill to the Garden of Gethsemane and then up into the heat and crowds of the Old City following Jesus's steps during his Passion, we stopped to pray for Jerusalem, the nation of Israel, and the region of the Middle East and all its people.

I was further blessed to go with this group of students because one of them was a student of mine during her middle school and high school years in Cincinnati. We had come full circle from doing a project on the Maccabees to years later standing with each other on the Teaching Steps - also known as the Southern Steps - of the Temple Mount. I have always endeavored to teach using the Hebrew model which is built on relationship, falling back on the Greek model (relying on reason and logic) when necessary or expedient. This trip was perfect for building relationships.

Justin Powell, Forge co-founder and Board Member, another faculty member and I tried to sit with as many different people on each leg of the trip as we could to spend time with and to get to know the participants. We were able to invite some of the Forge Champions, supporters of Forge, to come to Israel to see Forge in action. They toured and trekked right alongside the students. It was great to spend time getting to know them and hearing about their impressions and conversations with the students. There was time for sharing deep conversations about life, our journeys with Christ, discussions and debates about economics, the geopolitics of the region, or sometimes just sharing some water, a snack, and a shoulder to nap upon!

As a staff member of Forge, I have the annual opportunity to spend a week meeting the students during the Summit in Ohio. Then, we get to know each other deeper during the week of Forge 201 in D.C., making our time in Israel a special, awaited reunion for us all!





# A Day in Jerusalem

## Clairece Marker

During my trip to Israel, I had the amazing privilege to visit the beautiful city of Jerusalem. Visiting possible locations of Jesus Christ's burial before His resurrection was one of the experiences that stood out to me the most. We were able to visit the beautiful Church of the Holy Sepulchre, located in Old City Jerusalem, and another tomb called Garden of the Tomb, which was a smaller but beautiful outdoor site. It was an incredible experience knowing that there was a possibility of being in the very location of Jesus's burial. Both of these locations served as an important reminder of Jesus's physical resurrection.

While in Jerusalem, we were able to attend a Shabbat dinner with a local Jewish family that welcomed us into their home. The experience was spectacular as we all sat around the table together and spoke about topics that varied from politics to our favorite movies. We spoke much about Israel's culture and way of life. We got to experience the quiet of the city at night from their balcony due to nearly everyone using that time to be with their families during Shabbat. Being able to meet and have dinner with this amazing family was such a memorable and wonderful moment in my life.

Lastly, perhaps the most memorable moment of being in Jerusalem was visiting the Western Wall during Friday evening Shabbat and experiencing how that time is used spiritually. I got to witness hundreds of men and women pray, touch, and write prayers to leave in the crevices of the Western Wall, and I was able to touch and pray at the Western Wall, too. Being able to physically touch this piece of history that was responsible for helping to support the temple thousands of years ago was an experience of a lifetime and very surreal.







# Save the Date

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**Forge-For-A-Day and the Showcase Reception**  
**Friday, July 24, 2020**  
**Columbus, Ohio**

**For more information or  
to RSVP, visit:**  
**[ForgeLeadership.org/RSVP](https://ForgeLeadership.org/RSVP)**



# Recommend a Student

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Do you know any talented young conservatives  
[ages 18-25] who would benefit from the  
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Any students you recommend will  
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To recommend, visit:  
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# Experiencing Israel Together – A Tour Guide's Perspective

## Gadi Ben Dov



I am an Israeli. I grew up in this land and I serve as a tour guide for many visitors. I am always excited and amazed at the awe and wonder in their eyes as I lead them through this land that means so much to so many. This is the land that was home to Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca; the place where King David played the lyre, wrote prayers and poetry, and fought to defend his people. This is the land that Jesus walked, he lived and died here, and left his mark on so many.

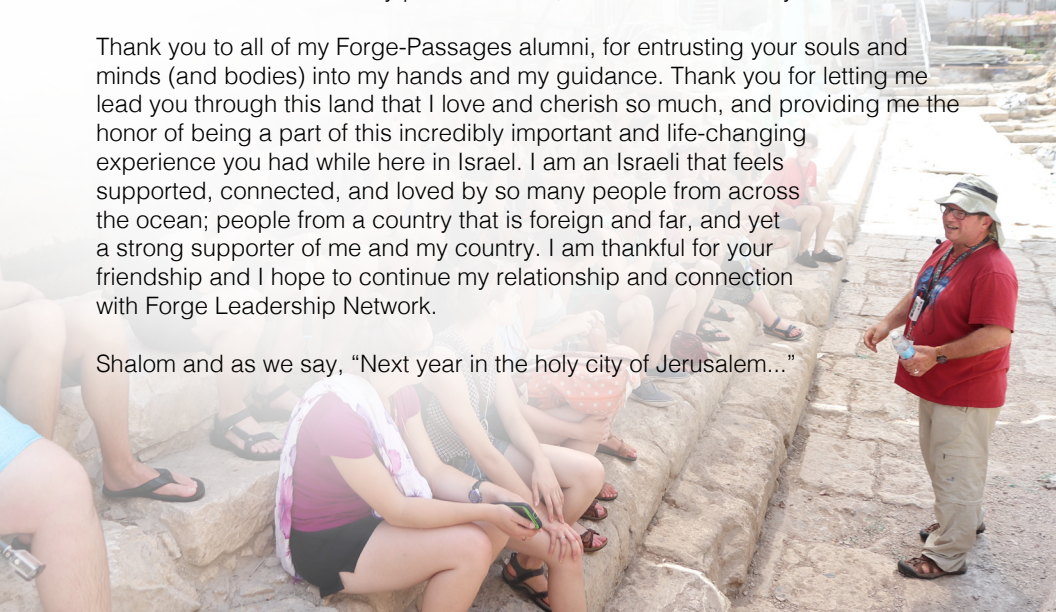
These emotions are even more amplified when I tour with Forge Leadership Network groups. I watch and share in their excitement as these young adults view this incredible land for the first time. Every tour with Forge, I am filled with emotions and excitement as I experience Israel together with them for the first time through their own eyes. Something I especially appreciate about Forge students in relation to their age group is they are more self aware of the world around them. They care and are socially and politically active and involved in their communities.

I have made numerous friends with the staff and faculty of these programs as well as many of the students that have returned to visit here. They continue to stay in touch with me and this amazing place that I call home.

I am thankful to Adam and Justin for their continued commitment to sending Forge participants to Israel with Passages. I believe it is extremely important for all young American leaders to connect with this place. Visiting and connecting to this land is a must for any person of faith, no matter where they come from.

Thank you to all of my Forge-Passages alumni, for entrusting your souls and minds (and bodies) into my hands and my guidance. Thank you for letting me lead you through this land that I love and cherish so much, and providing me the honor of being a part of this incredibly important and life-changing experience you had while here in Israel. I am an Israeli that feels supported, connected, and loved by so many people from across the ocean; people from a country that is foreign and far, and yet a strong supporter of me and my country. I am thankful for your friendship and I hope to continue my relationship and connection with Forge Leadership Network.

Shalom and as we say, "Next year in the holy city of Jerusalem..."





# Israel's Struggle for Peace

Adam Retych

What is necessary for there to be peace between Israelis and Palestinians? As this question directed the stories we heard, the places we walked, and the topics we discussed, Passages showed me first-hand how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has perpetuated beyond a simple solution.

Gadi Ben Dov, our insightful Israeli tour guide, explained that Israel's borders, like its statehood, have been vehemently protested within the past century. From my visit atop Merom Golan, I will never forget the view of the barbed wire-laced hills along Israel's Syrian border, a place where undetonated landmines from the 1973 Yom Kippur War wait as reminders of the Khartoum Resolution's "No peace with Israel; No recognition of Israel; No negotiation with Israel."

As we overlooked the Gaza Strip from Nativ HaAsara, a southern Israeli Moshav settlement, Raz Shmilovich, a local resident, summarized his perspective of the Israeli and Palestinian peace predicament as, "My side, your side, and the truth." His recognition of the unwavering and irreconcilable truth-claims between Israel's pro-expansion groups and Gaza's radical Hamas as minorities among larger, peace-hungry populations in both countries point to a theoretical two-states-for-two-peoples model where Palestinians and Israelis mutually prosper.

Our bus guide in the West Bank, Rami Nazzal, a Muslim Palestinian and founder of Beyond Borders Tours, proposed how an Israeli capital in West Jerusalem and a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem might be a reasonable compromise between Israeli Zionist Jews and Palestinian Islamist Arabs in achieving peaceful coexistence in their Holy Land.

While these solutions do not guarantee peace between these complicated individual states, Raz and Rami agree that nonviolent Palestinians and Israelis must aim beyond temporary ceasefire agreements and recognize each other's sovereignty by showing willingness to negotiate their regional and religious ties. Even if Israel could be shared or secularized, it is unlikely that Israelis and Palestinians will overlook their intertwined history of conflict.

My trip with Passages showed me that, for a country of comparable size to New Jersey, Israel's struggle for peace is far greater than I could have imagined.





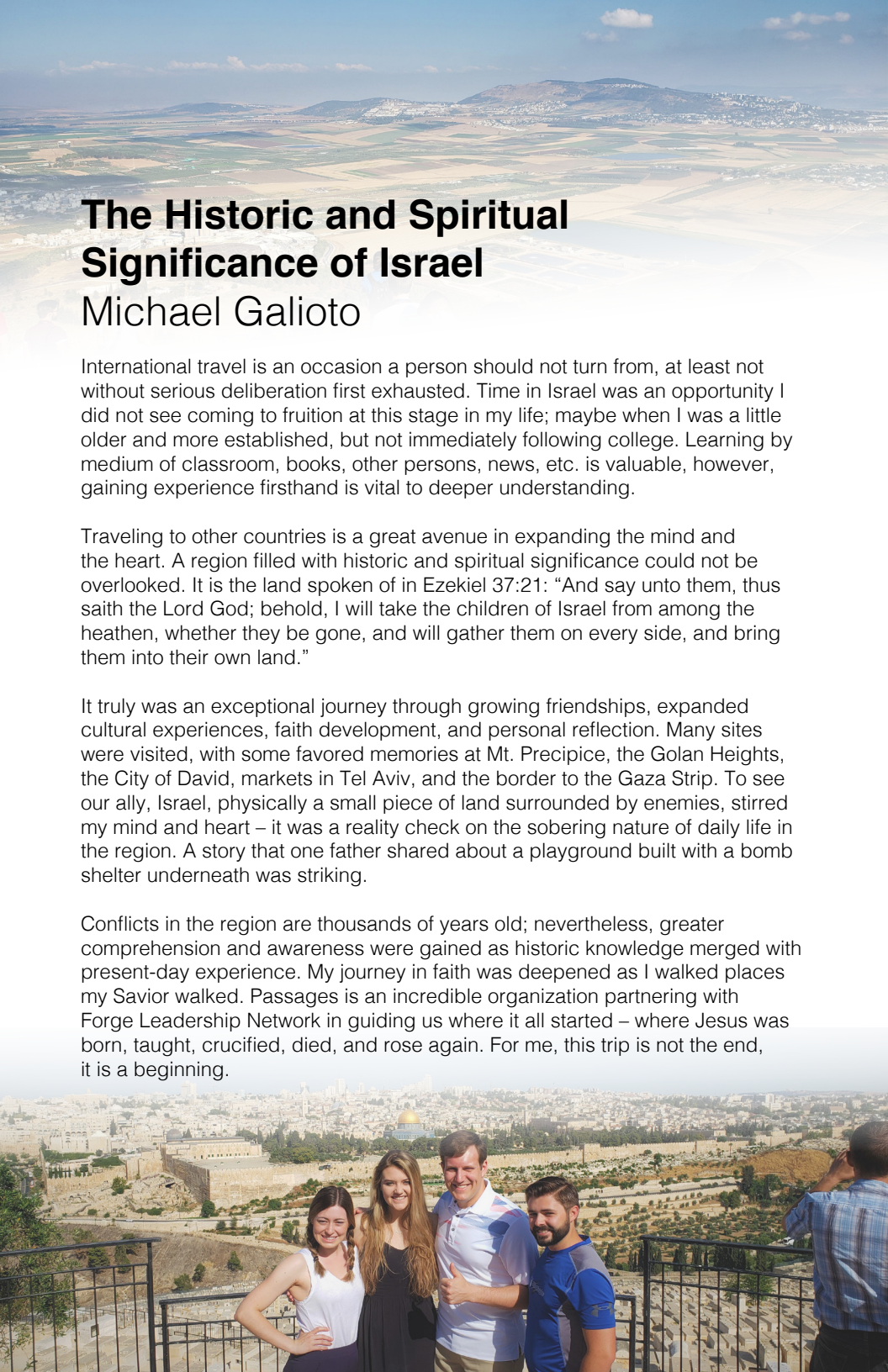
## A Returning Sojourner

### Navy Schrock

Forge Leadership Network gives students many incredible opportunities, and perhaps the most impactful is the nine-day trip to Israel. As a 2018 Forge alumna, I can say from experience that the trip shifted my perspective and deepened my faith. This past summer, I was given the chance to help lead a new group of Forge students during their time in Israel as their student mentor. It was exciting to watch them absorb the beauty and complexity of the biblical sites and the expert speakers during our fast-paced days on the ground.

One of my favorite things about Forge students is their intense curiosity. In the middle of many adventures and fun moments, I watched our group wrestle with challenging questions. It was inspiring to watch them dive into a deeper understanding of difficult geopolitical and theological issues while realizing that not all questions have easy answers. The passion and character of Forge students takes them far, and I have seen firsthand that the time in Israel plays a significant role in their growth as individuals while also strengthening their friendships as a group. I look forward to seeing how God continues to use our lives and this once in a lifetime trip for His Kingdom!





# The Historic and Spiritual Significance of Israel

Michael Galioto

International travel is an occasion a person should not turn from, at least not without serious deliberation first exhausted. Time in Israel was an opportunity I did not see coming to fruition at this stage in my life; maybe when I was a little older and more established, but not immediately following college. Learning by medium of classroom, books, other persons, news, etc. is valuable, however, gaining experience firsthand is vital to deeper understanding.

Traveling to other countries is a great avenue in expanding the mind and the heart. A region filled with historic and spiritual significance could not be overlooked. It is the land spoken of in Ezekiel 37:21: "And say unto them, thus saith the Lord God; behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whether they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land."

It truly was an exceptional journey through growing friendships, expanded cultural experiences, faith development, and personal reflection. Many sites were visited, with some favored memories at Mt. Precipice, the Golan Heights, the City of David, markets in Tel Aviv, and the border to the Gaza Strip. To see our ally, Israel, physically a small piece of land surrounded by enemies, stirred my mind and heart – it was a reality check on the sobering nature of daily life in the region. A story that one father shared about a playground built with a bomb shelter underneath was striking.

Conflicts in the region are thousands of years old; nevertheless, greater comprehension and awareness were gained as historic knowledge merged with present-day experience. My journey in faith was deepened as I walked places my Savior walked. Passages is an incredible organization partnering with Forge Leadership Network in guiding us where it all started – where Jesus was born, taught, crucified, died, and rose again. For me, this trip is not the end, it is a beginning.





# Thank You, Champions and Sponsors!



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