

PROMISED LAND

Forge Israel



Spring 2023





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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Why Israel?

As a non-profit that is building a pipeline of conservative leaders in America, it's a fair question to ask why Israel is a core element of our Academy training. No, it's not just that the weather there in January can beat a cold winter day here any day (but it does).

Forge Israel is a key milestone in the Forge Academy journey. At the Forge Summit, we teach young leaders how local and state policy works and the role that they can play in it. During Forge D.C., participants see the broader national policy realm and gain an understanding of the key organizations and leaders at the core of our American federal government. With Forge Israel, we build on this state and national education and expand it to the global scale so that our students can understand international policy and America's role in the world.

Nestled among intimidating Middle Eastern neighboring countries, Israel has managed

to carve out a nation that is small but mighty on the world stage. America's friendship with Israel goes back to the nation's birth. Nowhere else in the world is there a place with more historical significance, religious saturation, and political interest.

What makes Forge's Israel experience unique from other tours of Israel, is the pairing of religious sites, conversations, and teaching alongside an in-depth exploration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the politics of the region. Thanks to our host partners at Passages Israel, our Mentorship Academy students are able to deepen their faith AND expand their understanding of diplomacy and foreign policy.

I love accompanying the students on this trip and watching them walk in the footsteps of Jesus and encounter faith and history up close.

So, why Israel? Well, you'll find the answer to that in this newsletter through the



words of the students who have walked the cobblestones of Jerusalem and floated in the Dead Sea -- they have experienced the Promised Land first hand and no one returns quite the same. They have encountered Jesus in his own land and understand the changing political landscape in light of his unchanging promises.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam'.

ADAM JOSEFCZYK
PRESIDENT & CO-FOUNDER
FORGE LEADERSHIP NETWORK

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The Blessing of Beatitudes

Timothy Belev

It had been an exhausting day.

As the bus sluggishly slithered up the road, we grew quieter and quieter. Throughout the day, we rushed from location to location, site to site, and from one religiously impactful location to another. Our guide's voice, dripping with excellent information, was getting more and more difficult to listen to through closing eyes and drifting minds.

But, there was a palpable excitement in the air as well; we were heading to the Mount of Beatitudes, to the place where Jesus gave His most famous sermon. We'd

been to many amazing locations, but it was hard to imagine a greater location than this. After all, this is where Jesus gave his most impactful message. And we were getting a chance to walk there, to sit where Jesus or His disciples might've sat, to overlook the Sea of Galilee, and listen to the words Jesus spoke.

As we exited the bus and moved through the beautiful scenery, I was struck by how serene I felt. We calmly walked to a spot where we could sit down and listen to Adam read us the Beatitudes. And as I let the words wash over me, I noticed that there was a lot in the passage that often seemed to

go unnoticed. Christ shines as the example of those who receive blessings from God, as well as the provider of the blessings, both in His earthly ministry and through salvation. Christ, in every sense of the word, has fulfilled the beatitudes.

To go through every single attribute is simply not practical, but I'd like to mention a few of the ones that I scribbled into a tiny journal while I sat there overlooking the magnificent view.

Jesus was merciful; He showed compassion to the people laboring and ministered to them until He couldn't even



stay awake in a boat tossed by storms. He was mournful, He wept at the loss of His friend Lazarus, He cried out in grief over Israel, and He went to be left alone after the death of John the Baptist. He even serves as our example in being persecuted; He was called “the ruler of demons” by the religious leadership and promised His followers that they would not suffer anything that He had not before them. In all these things, Jesus, Son of God, has gone before us, suffering every humiliation, temptation, and trial imaginable.

Yet, He also serves as our example in providing for those going through difficult conditions. During His earthly ministry, He comforted those who mourned, raising loved ones and healing friends and relatives. He took pity on the lowly, those below everyone in society, saving adulteresses, calling

tax collectors, serving fishermen, healing Gentiles, and touching lepers. He fed those who were physically hungry on at least two occasions and spiritually hungry in nearly every interaction. He was known by everyone for delivering Scripture in a way different from the scribes and Pharisees -- in a way that freed people from their yoke instead of adding more atop of it. He was, in every way, a helper to those who the Beatitudes describe. All of this and more were daily activities within the Messiah’s schedule.

But, He continues to be so even though He is no longer with us physically. He comforts those mourning by reminding them that He suffered just as they are and that He will not allow them to suffer more than they can bear -- promising that He will return quickly, bringing a perfect and undefiled kingdom with Him. He helps those who are

lowly by making them heirs with Him of the heavenly promise, turning them from slaves and rebels into children of God. He takes those who are hungry and thirsty and gives them Himself, the bread of life and fountain of living water, so they may not hunger or thirst any longer. He alone understands the struggles of each person, and He alone is able to help them.

All of this washed over me like a wave of calmness, serenity, and peace. As I sat there, trying to receive the beautifully illuminated words of the Beatitudes, I felt relaxed. I was able to put aside the exhaustion I felt from days of traveling throughout the amazing country of Israel and simply be there, alone in a sea of people, with my Savior and my God.



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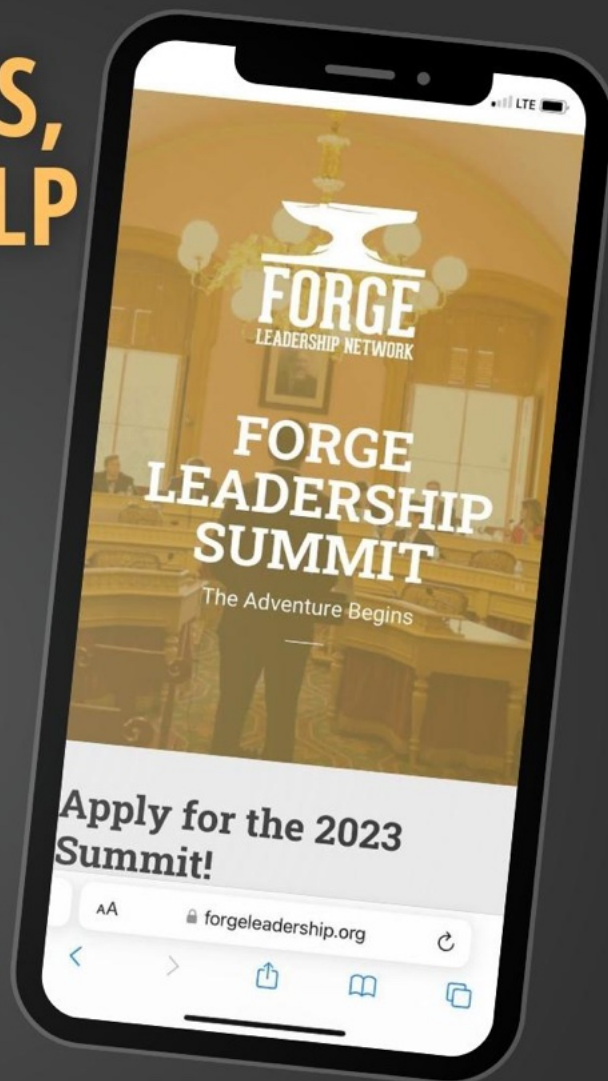
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At the Forge Leadership Summit, attendees hear from national experts on pro-life issues, economics, gospel-centered cultural change, and much more. Students also get first-hand policy experience while working to pass their bills at the Statehouse during a legislative simulation.



APPLY TODAY!

LEARN MORE ABOUT FORGE AT
FORGELEADERSHIP.ORG





Meet our Host Partner for Forge's Israel experience



Who we are?

Passages is a non-profit that strengthens Christian students' identity in Christ, exposes them to the complex realities of modern Israel and the middle east and provides them with opportunities to develop their leadership abilities. This journey includes a trip to the Holy Land, education before and after the trip, and access to an alumni network with leadership and career opportunities.

Why we exist?

Next generation Americans are abandoning their Christian faith at staggering levels. Most never to return! They are questioning everything. To them, their future is uncertain, and the world around them looks bleak.

Spiritual crisis is happening now across the nation. Passages exist to root Christian students deep in a transformational Holy Land experience to witness biblical sites firsthand while we introduce them to the complex realities of the region.

The result? A generational movement of students inspired to embrace their Christian faith, be change-makers in their communities, and build bridges of friendship with Israel.

Mission

Our mission is three-fold at Passages:

- 1 Strengthen student's identity in Christ
- 2 Expose them to the complex realities of modern Israel and the Middle East
- 3 Provide them with opportunities to develop their leadership abilities

Vision

The future of Christian faith and leadership in America, as well as positive engagement with Israel, depends on the next generation of Christian leaders being deeply rooted in their biblical faith and values, as well as being exposed to modern Israel firsthand.

"We have been a partner with Forge from the beginning of our organization. The work they are doing integrates so well into our program. Passages desires to see the next generation of Christian leaders rooted in their faith, connected to Israel, and be change-makers as they go into all sectors of society. The future is much brighter when we work together toward these goals."



Scott Phillips
Chief Executive Officer



DIVIDE

OWVILLE

The Conflict in Israel & The Fight For Peace

This essay was transcribed from a talk delivered by Gadi Ben-Dov to the Forge Mentorship Academy. Gadi is an Israeli tour guide and has led several Forge Israel trips. He was born and raised in Israel and resides there with his family.

Don't believe everything I tell you. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is very complicated. Everything I'm going to tell you comes from a certain perspective; I was born in Israel, I was raised in Israel as a Jewish Israeli, and I drank a certain type of Kool Aid. I try my best to be as objective as possible when presenting this issue, but it is complicated.

One word of advice: when you poke around the internet, especially regarding this issue, always be aware of who's writing the article. Remember that they represent a certain point of view.

I'm going to use the term Arab. When I say Arab, it's a general term for people who live in the Middle East that are not Jewish. There were millions of Jews living in all of the Middle East until 1948. Very few of those Jews are still there now. When I say Arab, I mean, mostly Muslim residents of the Middle East. Palestinians are Arabs. There could be Christian Palestinians, or there could be Muslim Palestinians -- most of them are Muslim.

There are some Israelis who would say that this is the land that God gave us, and therefore the State of Israel of modern times should be as big as the entire region first given to the ancient Israelites. They would say it's ours, God gave it to us, and that we have a right to this land.

The modern conflict in this region began during World War I with the man who is to blame for Syria as part of the mess in the Middle East today; his name is Lawrence of Arabia. Lawrence was a British officer that lived amongst the Bedouins in the Middle East. When World War I broke out, he convinced the British and the French -- the allied forces in World War I -- to promise the Bedouin tribes that they would join forces against the Ottoman Empire. The Bedouins were promised lands and their own states if they fought alongside the Allied Forces in a conflict known as the Arab Revolt.

At the end of World War I, the territory of the Ottoman Empire was divided between

the French and the British. There was an organization formed by President Woodrow Wilson and the rest of the allied forces called the League of Nations, which eventually became the United Nations that we know today. The League of Nations essentially gave the British and the French a mandate to control these areas with the understanding that they would foster national homelands for the local people living in the area.

“There are some Israelis who would say that this is the land that God gave us, and therefore the State of Israel of modern times should be as big as the entire region first given to the ancient Israelites. They would say it's ours, God gave it to us. We have a right to this land. ”

But the French and the British were trying to colonize the rest of the world and looked at these areas as colonies. So, the League of Nations had to step in, and the lands were divided up among the kings of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. It's important to note that the names of these countries were given by the British and the French, these are not names that the natives were using.

The biggest issue was that they really did not focus on ethnic groups, which meant that there were Shiite Muslims in Iran and Shiite Muslims in Iraq, even though the countries were ruled mostly by Sunnis.

The Jewish Holocaust happened from 1942 to 1945 and 6 million Jews were

slaughtered in the death camps by the Nazis. After World War II, there was a question about what to do with all the refugees. On November 29, 1947, the United Nations moved toward a solution for about 2 million Jewish refugees from Europe. About 600,000 Jews immigrated to this land which we call Israel today. These are Zionists, and the idea of Zionism is that the Jewish homeland is given to us by God.

At that time, England came out with a statement in favor of the creation of a Jewish homeland in the land of Palestine. Jews were ecstatic. It was the first time a world empire recognized the Jews' right to a Jewish homeland in this entire area.

The 1947 UN resolution stated that Jews and Arabs should have the ability to form their own homeland in the land of Palestine. For the first time in 2,000 years, Jews were allowed by the world to have our own Jewish homeland in our ancestral lands. It wasn't a great deal for us, but it was *something*.

The Arabs by and large said this deal was not acceptable. Not because of the land that was allotted to them, but rather because the Jews have no right to this land at all.

Now this UN resolution was not very successful, because there were three different and unconnected pieces of land for each one of these groups and it is difficult to govern when your lands are separated. It was divided up according to population, so the areas that had the most Arabs fell under Arab control and the areas with more Jews fell under Jewish control.

Jerusalem and Bethlehem were not divided between the two, rather it was supposed to be a separate area controlled by a United Nations force which allowed the mostly Christian European and American world to continue to control Jerusalem and Bethlehem (the holy sites) and make sure that neither Israel nor the Arabs get control of this land. Another problematic thing for the Jewish state is that getting to Jerusalem would mean going through pieces of the

Arab state.

So, a war breaks out between Jewish and Arab militias. On the 14th of May 1948, the head of the Jewish Agency, David Ben-Gurion, proclaims the establishment of the State of Israel and President Harry Truman recognized the new nation on the same day.

When the State of Israel is declared, the conflict turns into a war between states -- the newly formed state of Israel and the countries of Egypt, Trans Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Israel calls this War the "War of Independence," because Israel receives its independence through this conflict. It's regarded as an act of God among the Jews that Israel won, and many Christians around the world would say it was with God's help that we were able to survive this.

During this war, close to 700,000, non-Jewish residents of this entire area known as Palestine become displaced. Now, I'll try to be as objective as possible about this. Israel would say we invited them to stay, and they ran away and didn't stay there. The Palestinians would say they were forced out by the Israelis. Those who fled south towards Egypt were not absorbed by the Egyptians but rather placed in the area known as the Gaza Strip. Thousands of these Palestinians were placed in refugee camps and the Gaza Strip was created. Those who fled to the North were placed in refugee camps near Beirut and Lebanon. Those who fled towards the East were not absorbed by the Jordanians but rather placed in refugee camps.

This is the foundation of the conflict in the modern state of Israel. There have been many attempts to improve the Middle Eastern relationship between the two competing peoples, perhaps most notably in the Oslo Accords which resulted in the two-state solution. You may have heard of the two-state solution, it is essentially an effort to create an independent State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel. The borders for this agreement are still disputed to this day, so "solution" may not be the best word for it.

Israel is a relatively small country that is surrounded by powerful countries, and we have managed to protect ourselves against

A Brief History of Modern Israel

1948 Israel declares independence

1967 The 'Six-Day War' - Israel occupies the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights

1973 Yom Kippur War - The war was started by an attack on Israel by Syria and Egypt on Yom Kippur. The conflict lasted 20 days and resulted in the Sinai Peninsula coming under Egyptian control in exchange for peace.

1978 Camp David Accords - An agreement is signed between Israel and Egypt that led to a peace treaty a year later -- the first such treaty between Israel and another Middle Eastern State.

1987 First intifada - Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip aimed at ending Israel's occupation of those territories and creating an independent Palestinian state.

1993 Oslo Accords - The Oslo Accords comprised a series of agreements which resulted in Israel shedding responsibility for the Palestinian population while retaining strategic control of the territory. The Palestinians would be rid of Israeli military rule and gain self-government, potentially leading to statehood; this came to be known as the two state solution.

2000 Second intifada - Following an especially horrific suicide bombing that killed 30 people, the Israeli army launched Operation Defensive Shield to reoccupy the West Bank and parts of Gaza. One year later Israel started building a separation barrier in the West Bank to match a similar barrier erected in Gaza in 1996.

2006 Hamas elected in Gaza - Hamas opposed the secular approach of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and rejected attempts to cede any part of Palestine.

2008 Israel attacks Gaza - Along the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, the Gaza Strip, along with the West Bank, make up the State of Palestine.

2012 Israel kills Hamas military chief

2014 Hamas kills three Israeli teenagers

2017 U.S. recognizes Jerusalem as capital

2022 Netanyahu sworn in for sixth term

[washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/13/israel-palestinians-timeline-conflict/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/13/israel-palestinians-timeline-conflict/)
[britannica.com/](https://www.britannica.com/)

all the odds. But this fundamental conflict has underwritten Israel's entire history, and rather than closing with a bleak summation of where we have been or forecasts of the future, I would like to leave you with a picture of hope.

There's a political cartoonist name Kariel Gardosh that created the character called Srulik. When you look at him, he's got the flag of Israel and he's smiling; he is the symbol of modern Israel – a strong Jew.

On the Palestinian side, you have this a character called Handala which was created by political cartoonish Naji al-Ali. This is the Palestinian political character that represents the Palestinian plight. Notice he's got some

patches on his clothing, he's barefoot and has his back to us. In other words, he's protesting what's going on. This is a character that is used even today in the Palestinian narrative and the Palestinian political cartoons.

So, we have the Israeli character Srulik and the Palestinian character Handala. In most cases they are attacking each other and protesting each other.

In Tel Aviv, there's a beautiful drawing, graffiti essentially, of these two characters. Both are walking away from the conflict, hugging each other, standing together. It is communicating that if we try, we can probably solve this together. Hopefully, we can live together in coexistence in the lands.



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<https://jewishphilosophyplace.com/2016/01/05/two-israeli-caricatures-ko->



By Naji al-Ali - <http://arab.sa.utoronto.ca/handala-l.bmp>, Fair use, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11560691>



Bethlehem - The birthplace of Jesus. Bethlehem is under Palestinian control



Tel Aviv - The financial and artist hub of the city boasts Israel's most influential business



Masada - An ancient palace built for Herod the Great became the site of the last stand against the Romans



Dancing on a boat on the Sea of Galilee



us. Modern Bethle-



Capernaum - The site of many of Jesus' miracles and the home of the Disciple Peter



Jaffa - Most notably the location where Jonah embarked for Tarshish



Temple Mount - Honored by Jews as the site of the original temple and is also a holy Muslim site.



ub of the country, ntial businesses



The Garden Tomb - Believed by many to be the tomb where Jesus' body lay for 3 days



City of David - Considered to be the original center of the city of Jerusalem



Sea of Galilee - The center of much of Jesus' ministry including walking on water and calmed the storm.



for Herod which against Rome.



Dome of the Rock - An Islamic shrine at the center of the Temple Mount



Lunch on the shores of Galilee



Golan Heights - Located near the North of Israel, it was the focal point of the Yom Kippur War.



Galilee



Southern Steps - The place where Jesus and other ancient Jews approached the Temple



Academy members at Masada overlooking the Dead Sea



A camel by the Dead Sea



GROWING WITH GOD

Halli Gravley

This past winter, I traveled to the Holy Land alongside 49 other individuals from the Forge Leadership Network. This was an experience I had been praying about and preparing my heart for since being accepted into the Forge Academy Program in August.

I did not know exactly what to expect, but I prayed that during this trip, I would learn more about the Lord and grow closer to Him in a unique way. On the flight home, I was blown away by all I learned and all the work that the Lord was doing in my heart that occurred during our 10-day pilgrimage.

Growing in my faith is a daily process that

I have been striving for since I accepted Christ into my heart as a seven-year-old, and over the past 12 years, this growth was abundant as the Lord worked to transform my child-like faith into something more nuanced and sophisticated. I grew up in a Christ-centered home and am thankful for parents who clearly demonstrated how to follow Christ. I knew from a young age that I was a sinner in need of a Savior, and since accepting Christ, I've worked to grow in my faith daily. Growing in my faith means seeking the Lord daily and learning more about Him.

The past 12 years have certainly included their fair share of trials and tribulations, but there is no greater comfort than knowing the

Lord and knowing that He is with you and goes before you.

Knowing the Lord provides an unfathomable peace that surpasses understanding. I am thankful for my relationship with Him and have been striving to grow in my faith since day one of becoming a believer.

Going to Israel and exploring the Holy Land provided me with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to walk where Jesus walked and experience these places in person.

Growing up, I read all the stories in the Bible about these different historical sites, but seeing them in person is an indescribable feeling. And our chaplains did a wonderful

job sharing verses correlating to each site we visited, making it easier to simultaneously experience the physical and spiritual realities.

At night, I would journal about the sites we visited, which helped me to reflect and thank the Lord for His faithfulness. There is something surreal about seeing the places you always read about.

Seeing the Garden Tomb was incredibly impactful and helped me visualize the resurrection. The boat ride on the Sea of Galilee was a peaceful yet moving experience as we rode on the water upon which Jesus walked. It was a sweet time to pray, reflect, and thank the Lord for His faithfulness in my life. Being in this place was a visceral reminder that God can be trusted even in the hardest of times.

Unique experiences like this enable me to grow my faith in ways I had previously not thought possible. Being able to grow in faith and share these experiences with other Forge fellows simply made the experience that much more impactful. Together we were able to process everything we were thinking and experiencing. I grew in my faith and in my friendships.

It has been such a blessing to be a part of the Forge Mentorship Academy this year. The experiences and opportunities, friendships, and lessons learned have been such a blessing. I am so thankful for the opportunity to have gone to Israel and experience the Holy Land in person. The Lord is so good, and I am grateful for His plan and timing which is far better than mine could ever be! I am deeply thankful to the Lord, and Forge, for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!



Halli enjoying Fallafel in Israel



THE PROMISED LAND

WHY ISRAEL MATTERS TO CHRISTIANS

Ellen Fischer



Ellen attended Forge Israel through the Mentorship Academy, and later returned to Israel for a month long study program through Passages. Through a generous benefactor, Forge provided a scholarship for Ellen's trip.

It was sometime in the dead of night, but I could not sleep for the eagerness of my destination. I peeked out the airplane window to see the lights of Italy and then Greece go by—we were almost there! I watched a Jewish man in front of me get up and begin reciting his prayers and reminding me that very soon I too would be praying as I walked the streets of Jerusalem.

Upon landing and finding the six other people in my group, we weaved our way through the packed Tel Aviv airport to locate the Passages team. Then we were off on a journey to spend four weeks in the Holy Land, diving into the Bible and Middle East politics—my two favorite subjects. However, right away, I was faced with a dilemma. The Jewish mother next to me on the plane ride there was immensely curious as to why I would spend a month of my life in their homeland. I answered her, “because it’s Israel! Why wouldn’t I?” However, her questions made me start realizing I was not satisfied with that answer, that I did not understand the why behind what I believed.

The questions first began after finishing the pre-trip reading of Israel by Daniel Gordis. As I learned the specific details of Israel’s formation to create a safe place for the Jews, I realized I had been believing Israel was formed for the sole purpose of protecting the Jewish faith and preserving the history of the Bible. Yet, as I read Gordis’s book, I was surprised to realize that Israel was formed by Jews who wanted to create a secular Jewish state with little regard for religion.

As we traveled from the desert of Beersheba to the region of the Galilee, I asked myself again and again after every speaker, every site, and every conversation: why am I here? It bothered me deeply that I no longer believed the answer I had given since the age of thirteen. I would say, “I am a Christian, and my faith stems from the

land of Israel. I want to help God’s chosen people, the Israelites, and believe Israel deserves a homeland after their long history of suffering.” Yet, as I traversed along the Gospel trail and spoke with Palestinians,

“On my flight back home to America, the man next to me asked, “why did you just spend a month of your life studying the history of our small nation? Why do you care about my people?” I smiled gently and answered the young man, “Reason 1, your people have 100% earned a right to be a player in the geopolitical realm and are a necessity for the stability of the Middle East—this is of great interest to me. Reason 2, I am a Christian and believe that all people have the right to exist and live in peace—your small nation and your tenacious people have fought for survival. I applaud their determination and will support its continuation in any way I can.”

I realized that statement (though entirely well-intended) was a little out of touch with reality. If my most substantial reason for supporting Israel was because it was the place of my Christian heritage, that answer was not in touch with reality.

The main goal of most of the Jews who formed the state of Israel was to create a place where they could exist without fear of persecution. Many of the Orthodox Jews in Israel did not agree with Zionism—a movement that created the state of Israel for the purpose of protecting the Jewish people. Yes, the Jews are God’s chosen people and I believe He has a special plan for them as indicated in the book of Revelation. However, during Jesus’s time on earth, He made a way for all to become the children of God, no matter a person’s background or

culture. Salvation no longer requires one to become a Jew.

I began asking myself the hard questions after our time at Yad Hashem, the Holocaust Museum in Israel. Our guide gave a riveting three-hour tour through the horrors of the Holocaust and shared some of her personal family history. Something began bothering me that I could not quite put my finger on until about halfway through the tour. Again, I asked myself, “Why do I support these people? Is my only tie to them the roots of our faith?” I looked around at the stories and atrocities these people endured, and as it should, it deeply saddened my heart. But I also began asking, “Why just them?” So many cultures and groups worldwide have faced extreme suffering and persecution yet do not receive as much attention as the Jews. I thought of Mao and his great purge of China, supposedly “accidentally” killing unthinkable numbers of his own people. What about Stalin in Russia or the Armenian and Rwandan genocides? Why are they not as well known?

I walked among the museum halls and asked, “why does my heart go out to the Jewish people?” I could not find a clear answer to my ‘why’ anymore. Why should I give my support to the Jews when millions around the world are also suffering? There are people in Africa being hunted down daily by terrorists, minorities in China being used for organ harvesting, and gang violence is part of normal life in Latin America. Why do I not care so deeply about those groups?

As I asked these questions, I felt terrible. Terrible to even dare ask if the Jews deserve all this attention when they have suffered through extreme hardship. Maybe because of that, yes, they deserve the spotlight. Yet I knew if I wanted to continue saying I supported the state of Israel, I needed to find an answer.

One evening, I went on a walk through the streets of Jerusalem with a fellow student and shared how torn I was over my questions and how to find the answers. At one point, she commented that she, too, could not support Israel based on the religious argument because it fell short.

The wheels started turning, and I heartedly agreed—how could I say Israel deserves this land because their faith stemmed from here? What would happen if every culture started using that argument to defend their right to a piece of land? World chaos would ensue. Native Americans could reclaim America, Europe would be a hot mess, and Africa would be in complete uproar.

During one of our evenings in Jerusalem, we heard from a Christian shopkeeper who made it his mission to witness to his Jewish and Muslim neighbors. He looked us all in the eye and said, “Israel today is not the same Israel as in Jesus’s time...Israel is not here to bring about the end times—Jews only want to create a place for their people to live in peace.” The existence of Israel is to provide a place for Jewish people to live in peace, that is all. He explained that Christians tend to support the state of Israel because they want the end times to happen. They want the third temple rebuilt and for Jesus to return, but they are unwittingly telling God to act and bend to their will. Immediately I



Ellen at Masada with the Dead Sea stretching out behind her in the East of Israel



Ellen at Mount Precipice

was convicted: was I one of those Christians who supported Israel for selfish reasons? In examining my heart, I realized that yes, I did want God to obey me and reclaim Israel like He promised to do in Revelation. My answer slowly began clicking into place like little puzzle pieces.

The end of July quickly approached, and I found myself refreshed in the Word of God, amazed at the brilliance of Jesus, and my mind stretched and full of information about an entire culture. But I had found my answer: I believe that Israel 100% deserved to exist in the world order, not because of my Christian faith, but because Israel proved herself vital and irreplaceable in the geopolitical world. She came into existence when five other Arab nations competed for the land and stubbornly fought for survival. Governments would be foolish not to acknowledge and make alliances with this small country. Israel is leading in technology, medicine, agriculture, and innovation—their global contribution is vital.

Ironically, on my flight back home to America, the man next to me asked, “why did you just spend a month of your life studying the history of our small nation? Why do you care about my people?” I smiled gently and answered the young man, “Reason 1, your people have 100% earned a right to be a player in the geopolitical realm and are a necessity for the stability of the Middle East—this is of great interest to me. Reason 2, I am a Christian and believe that all people have the right to exist and live in peace—your small nation and your tenacious people have fought for survival. I applaud their determination and will support its continuation in any way I can.” The young man was amazed that I would consider devoting my time and mind to helping his people. What better way to be a witness to the nations?

My heart was satisfied as I made my way back through the New York airport. I had been blown away by the Scriptures again, learned valuable lessons in conflict resolution, and firmly believed that advocating for a people of a different faith is one of the best ways to represent the Gospel to the nations. Attending the Alumni Advance trip with Passages was one of the best decisions I have

Capernaum, located on the coast of the Sea of Galilee and the location of many of Jesus' ministry

The Dome of the Rock is an Islamic shrine in Jerusalem that defines the city's skyline





WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

Anna Young

I recall asking my mom that very question almost every day on the way home from school growing up. I was always curious about what she was preparing for dinner that night. My family gathered nightly around our kitchen table — phones away, TV off (unless the Tennessee Titans were playing) for a home-cooked meal followed by a devotion and time of prayer. I was often focused on what was for dinner rather than what was truly happening at dinner. I overlooked the simple uniting power of breaking bread with loved ones.

While in Israel with Forge, we were given the opportunity to attend a traditional Shabbat dinner in Jerusalem. Students were broken off into smaller groups and given the address of the home where they would partake in the ceremonial meal starting at sundown Friday evening. We arrived around 7 pm, completely unsure of what to expect. We left our phones behind but brought warm smiles to greet the New York native Jewish couple who welcomed us into their Jerusalem apartment. The wafts of food enticed me as we entered, and my innate Southern hospitality almost offered to help prepare the food, but then I remembered that the food was already prepared. That was part of Jewish law. In Judaism, there are 39 Melakhot or categories of activity that are strictly prohibited during Shabbat. Some of these prohibitions include turning on lights, walking more than three-quarters of a mile, writing, cooking, or anything considered “work.”

Shabbat is a time of structured rest for the Jewish people.

We started the meal with the Hebrew blessing of the challah and the wine and then proceeded through multiple courses of delicious food. We dined on tabouleh, eggplant, hummus, baked fish, stuffed chicken, and an array of desserts. We asked questions to the husband and wife about their faith, how often they go to the synagogue, their favorite part of living in Jerusalem, and much more. They were interested in learning about our faith, why we chose to come to Israel, and what we had enjoyed

so far on our trip. I shared about how my Christian faith acknowledges its Jewish roots. I shared that even at my Christian University, Hebrew is still taught, as well as classes on Judaism and Middle Eastern Relations. They were shocked that Christians take a vested interest in Hebrew. It was beautiful to see the common ground and appreciation for Jewish history that we share.

Overall, it was a joyous three hours of laughter, deep and meaningful conversation, and genuine connection. It is amazing what happens when we put aside social media, the 24-hour news cycle, and the distractions of the world and come together around the table. Sadly, the night eventually had to end. We pushed in our chairs and gave hugs goodbye to our newfound Jewish friends. Before we left, the wife revealed to us that this was the first time they had ever hosted Christians in their home. She was almost brought to tears as she shared with us how kind-spirited she thought we all were. She said she was amazed at our intentional questions and the joy we seem to carry and told us she hopes to host more Christians in

her home in the future.

To me, this experience represented the values Forge works to instill in its fellows, to be an ambassador for Christ, as found in 2 Corinthians 5:20. Forge has taught me to not only be a Christian in my private and corporate confession within the confines of the church but to bring the fruits of my faith to the public square — even to a stranger’s home in Jerusalem. We had no idea that this Jewish couple had never hosted Christians before in their home. We did not openly evangelize, as we were there for the specific purpose of experiencing Shabbat, but this couple still saw Christ’s love in each of us. I have no idea what the Lord has planned for this couple, but I do know that they had a positive experience with Christians that Friday night because of Forge.

When I look back, I don’t care what we had for dinner, although it was quite delicious. I look back and see a changed perspective, a seed planted, and a Shabbat well spent.



Anna in Israel during the 2023 Forge Israel



Foster the Next Generation of Conservative Leaders



Transform Young Lives

Forge Leadership Network mentors, trains, and connects young conservatives ages 18-25, equipping them to lead in politics, culture, and business. We are an emerging organization that is tackling the need for a long-term, formal way to raise up, steward, and deploy talented, principled servant leaders in the states. Here is how we do it:

Identify principled, talented conservatives nationwide

Train leaders at five-day Forge Leadership Summits in state capitols every summer

Mentor top students who stand out as the best and brightest

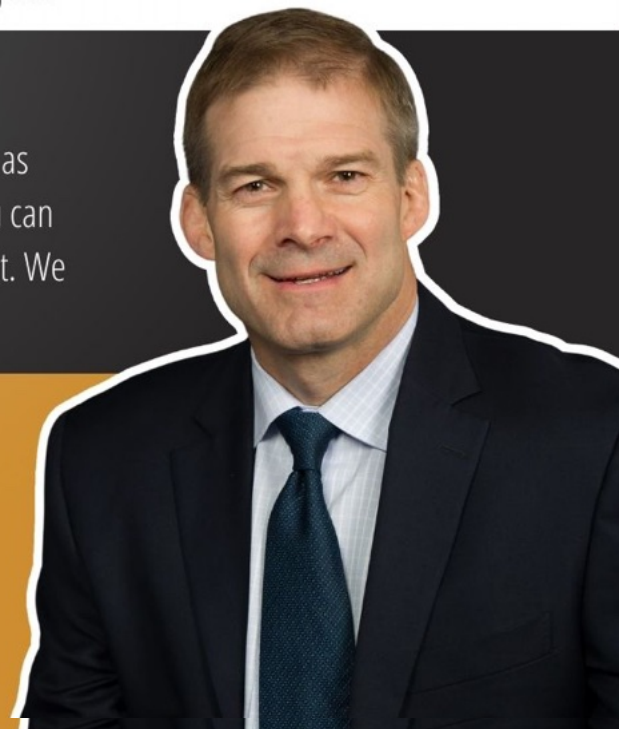
Launch young people's careers through influential internships and jobs

Build The Movement

The conservative movement will never reap what it does not sow. Just as Major League Baseball cultivates talent through its minor leagues, you can help build the state-based farm system for the conservative movement. We partner with passionate individuals and organizations like these:

"I'm proud to support the good work that Forge Leadership Network is doing to identify, train, and equip our state's best young conservatives. Together, we can empower the next generation of Ohio's conservative leadership to begin restoring our state and nation."

Congressman Jim Jordan, (OH-4)





500

Students
Trained

250

Students
Mentored

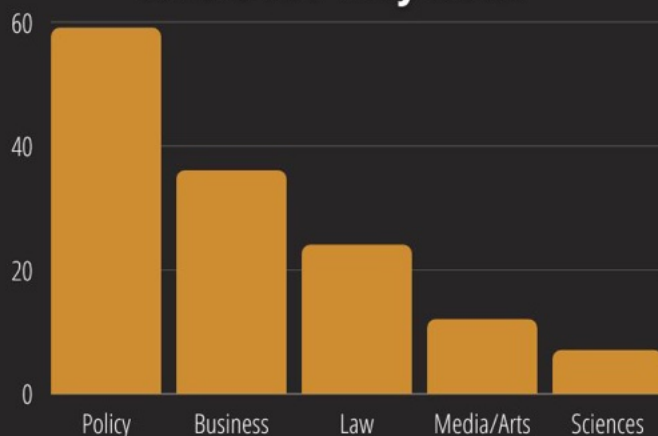
167

Campuses

41

States

Where Are They Now?



50

Grads have worked
on Capitol Hill

12

Grads have worked on
presidential campaigns

7

Grads serving in
elected office

100% INCREASE

The number of students who were
very likely to be actively engaged
in politics and culture **MORE THAN
DOUBLED** after attending Forge.



"Without the policy and hands-on training, the amazing experiences, and incredible friendships I received from Forge Leadership Network, I can confidently say I would have never run for office. If you want to be in conservative politics, the Forge experience is essential."

State Rep. Jena Powell (Ohio)



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