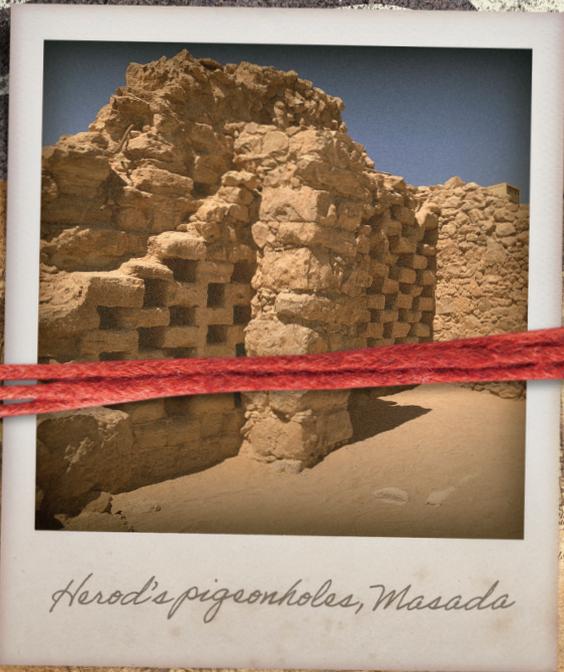


THE RED-HAIRED ARCHAEOLOGIST

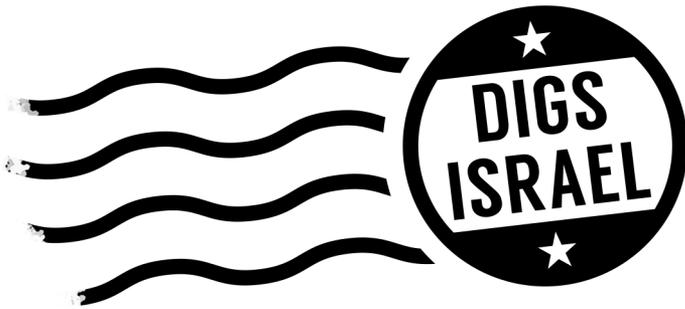


Herod's pigeonholes, Masada



AMANDA HOPE HALEY

THE RED-HAIRED ARCHAEOLOGIST



AMANDA HOPE HALEY



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Verses marked THE VOICE are taken from The Voice™. Copyright © 2012 by Ecclesia Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover design by Kyler Dougherty

Cover photo © ZU_09, sqback, yai112, LiliGraphie / gettyimages

Cover photo Polaroid by Amanda Hope Haley

Interior design by KUHN Design Group

Maps and illustrations by Michelle Pitts

Author photo on back cover by Matthew Stevens

Photos on pages 193, 195, and 196 taken at Yad Vashem and used with permission. No other use, including in reviews, is permitted.

For bulk, special sales, or ministry purchases, please call 1-800-547-8979.

Email: customerservice@hhpbooks.com

The Red-Haired Archaeologist Digs Israel

Copyright © 2021 Amanda Hope Haley

Photographs © Amanda Hope Haley

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN 978-0-7369-8093-7 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8094-4 (eBook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 / VP-SK / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*For all who long to see God's creation
and to know about the people who have lived in it*



CONTENTS

Introduction: Meet the Red-Haired Archaeologist	7
1. Logistics in Modern Israel	21
2. Fighting Philistines on the Mediterranean Sea	35
3. Death and Life in Negev's Dusty Desert	55
4. Bobbing in Water and Hiking to Caves at the Dead Sea . . .	77
5. Meeting Disciples at the Sea of Galilee	93
6. Wine, War, and Walls in the Golan Heights	105
7. Rolling Through Galilee	119
8. Friend and Foe in Hebron	137
9. Just Jerusalem	163
10. Living History	189
Notes	199
Acknowledgments	205
About the Author	207

INTRODUCTION

**MEET THE
RED-HAIRED
ARCHAEOLOGIST**



I was first exposed to archaeology in the fifth grade when a teacher decided to prepare a unit on the science. She brought in plastic bins filled with layers of colorful dirt and tiny objects hidden in the homemade strata. It was raining outside that day, so we had to “dig” under the harsh fluorescents in the portable classroom. We had tiny instruments—miniature trowels, artists’ brushes, tablespoon “shovels”—and strict instructions to keep ourselves and the classroom clean. My friend Charlie started tickling my ear with one of the brushes, and in my zeal to get away from him, I turned over my plastic “site.” My cheeks flushed as red as my hair as the teacher scolded, “You’re my quiet Little Red-Haired Girl, not a Pig-Pen!”

As filthy as I was when I arrived home that day, the rainbow stains were nothing compared to how I would look at the end of every dig day at the archaeological sites in Israel. Sometimes the dirt would pour out of my shoes, but usually it had blended with sweat and been ground into crevices not even a loofah could reach. No doubt, I was the Pig-Pen of Ashkelon in 2004, and I loved every dusty moment.

Growing up, I was certainly more princess than Pig-Pen. I delighted in baking fancy desserts and hated every moment of mowing the lawn. Even my sport of choice, swimming, was clean; I loved that no one

could see me sweating during practices or events. So no one was more surprised than I was to discover my affinity for digging.

In the spring of 2001, I was a college sophomore and International Studies major working toward law school. Since Rhodes College has a Presbyterian heritage, all students were required to take four religion courses, and I had chosen biblical archaeology as my last one. During a weekend at home, I shared what I was learning with my parents and asked if I could go dig at Tel Rehov that summer with my adviser and Israel Finkelstein, one of Israel's most famous and controversial modern archaeologists. They agreed—if I could get a full scholarship to do so. One week later my trip was fully funded, and my dad and mom were wondering why on earth they had said yes to sending me to such a dangerous part of the world.

That summer, Israel was in the middle of the Second Intifada, a time of political unrest and violence between Israelis and Palestinians characterized by suicide bombings, bus bombings, kidnappings, targeted military attacks, and failed international interventions. The conflict was so bad that archaeological digs were canceled in Israel during the 2001 season. I was very sad and a little relieved (my parents were just relieved!), but the cancellation gave me the opportunity to date a guy named David Haley.

Three years later, I was married to David and studying biblical archaeology at Harvard University under Lawrence Stager, a scholar who could be thought of as the anti-Israel Finkelstein. (The two men had a public disagreement over whether or not kings David and Solomon were historical or legendary.¹ I often wondered if Harvard would have accepted me had I dug at Tel Rehov in 2001.) I was invited to dig at Ashkelon in 2004, during what was supposed to be the closing season. It was intense. We dug six days a week from five o'clock in the morning until noon. We would then shower, "do laundry" in the bathroom sink, eat lunch, and rest a bit before returning to the site to clean and catalog the day's finds. The day would end with just enough time for dinner and a phone call home before bedtime in a small room with two roommates.

The 2004 Ashkelon staff was small. We only dug in one grid that



A gufa (basket made from recycled tires), dustpan, and brush next to a wall I pickaxed.



Because most volunteers and staff members have the same brand of trowel, I had a friend personalize mine with my first initial.

season, so everyone knew and helped everyone else—and everyone did everything. In one day, I might start out pickaxing an area. Once it was down five-or-so centimeters (or however deep my supervisor told me to go), I'd smooth the area with my trowel and then sweep the loose dirt off the compacted dirt just below it. If something other than broken pottery sherds or bones was discovered, I'd use a tape measure



with leveling strings and a plumb bob to locate in three dimensions exactly where the object was buried, and then precisely draw it on a plan sheet.

Excavating the bottom of a bowl-lamp-bowl foundation deposit buried by the house's owners sometime around 1000 BCE. The date designation BCE means "before the common era" and is used by archaeologists instead of BC (before Christ) for various reasons, including the calculation that Jesus was actually born in 4 BCE, four years before the Christian calendar states. Likewise, archaeologists use CE (common era) instead of AD (*anno domini*, "in the year of our Lord").

The schedule was the same every dig day, but activities could change with every new object we uncovered. The worst days were those spent excavating the ancient streets. Every swing of the pickax would bring up the trash of the ancient world. We picked countless pottery sherds and broken animal bones out of the dirt, and then we had to scoop up the dirt, haul it out of the square, sift it, and finally wheelbarrow it to our own growing "trash heap" of excavated dirt adjacent to the grid. When the heavy work was over at the end of the day, we'd do a final sweep of the square, brushing loose dirt into dustpans so the site would be ready the next

morning. This monotonous, hot, heavy work taught me how susceptible fair-skinned, red-haired girls can be to intense dehydration that can lead to sunstroke.

My happiest memory of that first dig was excavating a perfectly

preserved artifact. During the Iron Age, which roughly corresponds to the time when the land was ruled by Israelites (1200 BCE–586 BCE), Philistines would sometimes bury two unused bowls and a new lamp under the corners of their houses as a sort of blessing, just as we might dedicate a cornerstone to a new building. I had to lift the bowl-lamp-bowl foundation deposit out carefully using artist brushes and a nasal aspirator so the ancient pottery would not crack as it saw its first sunlight in 3,000 years.

But not everything that came out of the ground was inanimate. One day, as I was working next to a wall in the kitchen of an Iron Age house, I was chatting with a friend who was tracing a floor on the other side of that wall. We were both squatting (it is best not to sit on your bottom or rest on your knees while digging) when a scorpion wiggled out of the wall. My tall and stocky friend, who had seemed undaunted by anything all season, gave a high-pitched shriek as he performed the most magnificent land-based backstroke dive I've ever seen. I responded by lifting my trowel and calmly stabbing the furious little creature where it stood next to me with its tail raised. (My heroics are yet to be duplicated; 15 years later I was the one screaming as a yellow jacket crawled out of a balk.)

To enhance your reading experience, visit www.redhairedarchaeologist.com. There you will find more than 200 color photographs taken during my trips to Israel!

In 2019, I made my less-than-glorious return to archaeological excavation at Tel Shimron. This was a new dig staffed by many of my 2004 friends and led by Daniel Master, a professor at Wheaton College and former assistant director of Harvard's Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon. At the age of 38, I was almost old enough to be the mother of the other volunteers on the dig. I had worried for months about being so much older than all the other volunteers. Would they accept me as a team member? Would I be physically up to the task of digging?



My square mates (Abby, Nick, Kaz, Max, me, and Avie) on our “stone throne” at the edge of Grid 39.

The answer to those questions would be yes—mostly. Surrounded by undergraduate and graduate students, I oscillated between being their “wise woman,” addressing (if not answering) the theological and sometimes-philosophical questions they asked me, imagining cartoon characters who might appear in a children’s version of the very book you are holding, and marveling at their love of “classic” music from the 1990s, which made me feel included and old at the same time. As we worked, they streamed that music on their iPhones thanks to unlimited wireless data plans; it was a constant reminder to me of how the world has changed in 15 years. We would never have dreamed of bringing our cell phones overseas in 2004; I had used a calling card and a hotel pay phone to talk to David each day!

The introduction of wireless music to the grid was just the beginning of how technology had revolutionized archaeology since I’d been at Ashkelon. The manual dig techniques I’d honed came back quickly, but the new instruments took me a while to understand and use. Gone were my hand-drawn plat maps, leveling strings, and plumb bobs; no

longer did we handwrite bucket tags. In the middle of the grid stood a giant tripod that allowed us to take three-dimensional measurements of any depth, structure, or artifact using GPS. Each square supervisor had his or her own laptop to note finds as they came out of the ground, and we tagged them with barcodes from a tiny, dust-covered printer. Final photographs at the end of the season were taken by drones.

Fifteen years of new technology had made digging faster, easier, and (most importantly) more accurate. Fifteen years of life and its stresses had made me stiffer and heavier. When I woke up at 4:00 a.m. on my four-inch-thick foam mattress the morning of day three, I could barely move. For the first week, I constantly shifted between squatting, standing, and bending over to trowel or sweep the ground beneath me. I ran out of ibuprofen almost immediately. My plan of digging during the days and writing during the evenings immediately went out the window as I needed to sleep away my free time in hopes of feeling a bit better the next day. By the third week, thanks to cutting all carbohydrates, drinking nothing but water, and consuming a mega bottle of ibuprofen bought for me by one of my dear square mates, I could finally focus more on the dirt than on my aching neck, back, and legs.

An absolute requirement for every staff member and volunteer on an archaeological site is attention to detail. In the ancient world, civilizations often built directly on top of one another, creating layers of dirt, debris, and artifacts unique to each community. As all those layers stack on top of each other over millennia, a large mound is created called a *tel*. One must be able to see and feel the differences in the ground to know when occupation levels are changing. For example, if I am sweeping the loose, yellowish, ash-rich dirt out of an ancient fire pit, then I need to see and feel when I reach the



As I reported on social media that morning, “Off to a bad start for dig day 3. I basically can’t feel my legs. This is the reality of excavation when you’re waaaay out of practice!”

bottom of the pit, which is likely to be a different color and made of denser soil. If I keep digging through the bottom, then I'd be removing dirt from an earlier civilization's occupation and might damage as-yet-uncovered evidence of those residents.

At the bottom of one fire pit, I found evidence of an ancient floor. There was a thin, white substance that covered the bottom of the pit and could actually be traced up and out of the pit and across an ancient courtyard. By "tracing the floor" (using a trowel to carefully flake the dirt lying on top of the white substance up and off), archaeologists can see a layout of an ancient space. They can see what objects were dropped on the floor and can tell what activities may have happened on it. In an ancient kitchen, for example, one might find often-broken cooking pots, pieces of ovens, animal bones, and even seeds. From those artifacts, we can learn about the diets and cooking methods of the ancient homeowner.

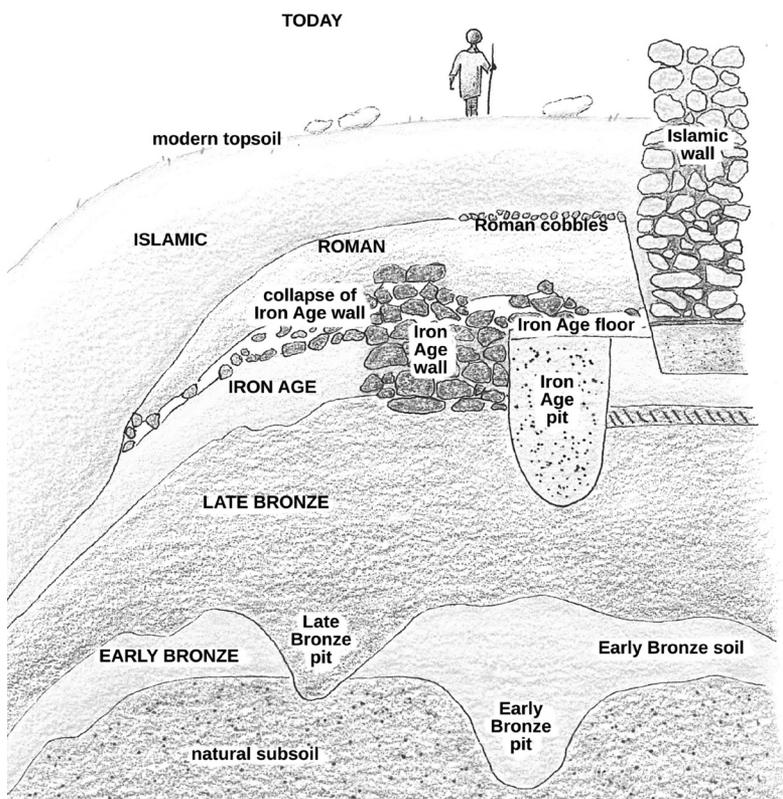
One must dig cleanly in order to recognize the changes in dirt, and that takes time. Tracing a plastered floor, articulating a stone wall, and exhuming a corpse are all delicate tasks that can take days to complete; but dig seasons only last a few weeks each year, and there are thousands of years of civilizations yet to be uncovered in Israel and all over the rest of the world. The need for care and the shortage of time create tension between digging well and digging quickly. Archaeologists don't want to lose any valuable information, but we would like to learn as much as possible about a city each season.

In an ideal world, tels would be "strip excavated"—Islamic archaeologists would begin work at the top of the tel, excavating the whole area until they hit Byzantine artifacts. Then Byzantine scholars would take over until they reached Roman remains and handed the site off to Roman experts. And so on, and so on, until the tel was leveled. During each season, all sorts of scientists—biologists, botanists, epigraphers, geologists, and zoologists, to name a few—would be consulted on site. Tests would be run, photographs and videos would be taken, and money would never run out. But there isn't much about this world that is *ideal*. Time, money, and volunteers are all finite.

In the real world, one site is excavated by a team of scholars at the

same time. After ground-penetrating radar has given experts an idea of what artifacts may lie below the surface, “chunks” are removed from the tel by heavy equipment in different areas down to different depths. Newer civilizations, such as Islamic and Byzantine, will be evidenced closer to the surface of the tel; older civilizations, such as those from the Iron, Bronze, and Chalcolithic ages, will typically need to have much more dirt removed before the staff and volunteers arrive to exhume artifacts. All time periods of a tel are excavated simultaneously each season by teams who have specialties in the civilizations they are digging.

Although artifacts of newer civilizations may be lost when back-hoes make their first cuts into the side of a tel, there is one major perk



to “spot excavating”: Parts of a tel remain untouched for decades and centuries. What we don’t exhume today will remain *in situ* (that is, “in place” and undisturbed) for future archaeologists who will likely approach the same tel with more technology and more knowledge than we have today. If all layers of a tel were stripped away by one team of excavators at one point in time, then it would be practically impossible for future archaeologists to reinvestigate ancient cities when nothing remained of them in the dirt.

As all scientific fields are advancing, so does archaeology. Decades ago, excavators and scholars would have assumed that my white floor was simply plaster and been thrilled to catalog what artifacts were left on top of it, knowing they were all in use at the same time by the same people. But thanks to advancements in microbiology, specialists from the Weizmann Institute were able to see that the floors contained *phytoliths*, microscopic plant structures that remain after a plant decays and disappears. Scientists such as Steve Weiner can identify what plants were present on top of that floor thousands of years ago but that we can no longer see.² Remains may indicate what people and animals ate and drank, what fibers were spun and woven into garments, and what parasites lived with humans in those pre-antibacterial-soap days. What we can’t see with a naked eye can tell archaeologists more about ancient civilizations than what we can see.

On the surface, digging for broken bowls, discarded animal bones, invisible plants, and the occasional necklace doesn’t seem necessary or even useful. Why spend so much time and money excavating mundane objects when there are great treasures still undiscovered? With advancing technology that can make the unseen seen and biblical clues from God Himself, why haven’t archaeologists found Noah’s ark or Moses’s ark of the covenant or Jesus’s last wine glass? Surely all volunteers and staff members at a dig dream of their own “Indiana Jones” moments, but searching the world for one object isn’t archaeology—it’s treasure hunting.

If any of the Bible’s Big Three artifacts were ever discovered, then most of the world would pay attention. Jews and Christians would make pilgrimages to see them, and we’d likely all marvel at just how

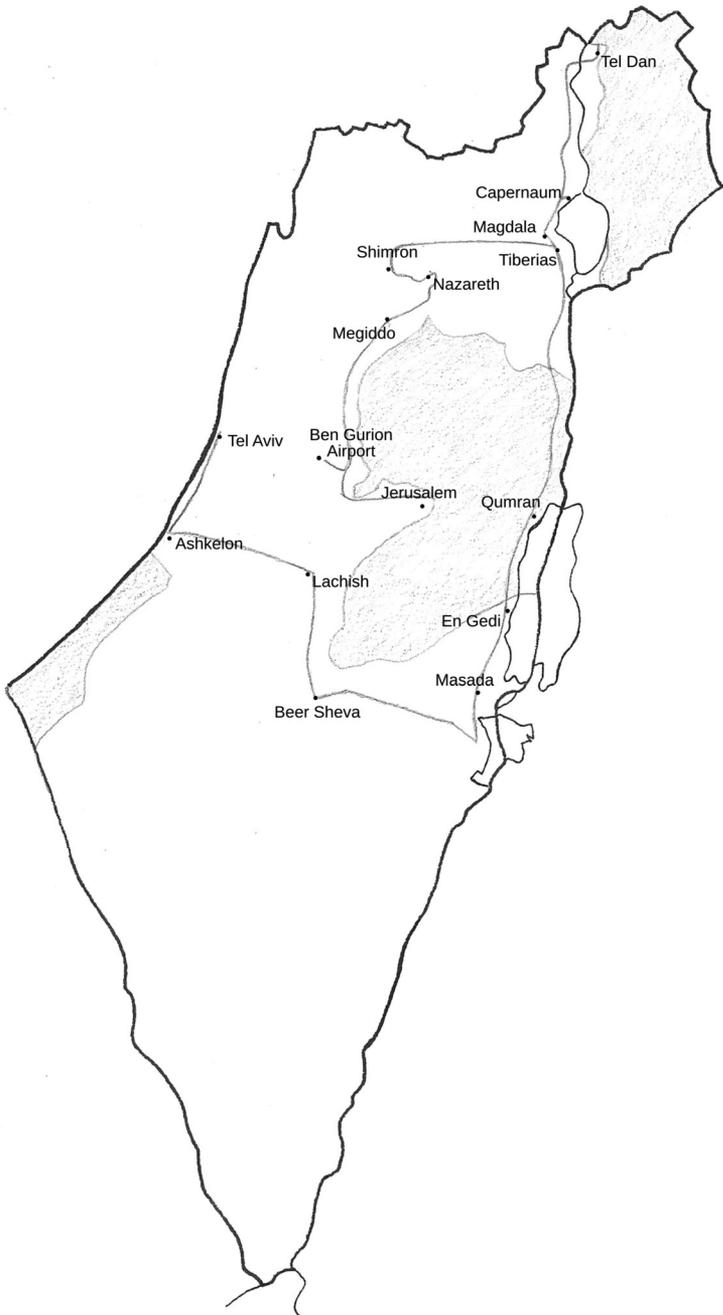
wrong our individual visions of those objects were based on our Bible translations and traditional descriptions. But how would their discoveries benefit humanity beyond the spectacle of it all? Would seeing two-, three-, and five-thousand-year-old *things* help us better understand the ancient cultures into which God first breathed His Scriptures? Will they help us to know Him better?

True biblical archaeology, when practiced without a specific goal such as “prove the Flood happened,” or “find God’s seat,” or “drink from the cup of Christ,” teaches us about the people and societies of the ancient world. We can identify with the woman who cooked bread in her kitchen or the man who smelted copper, bronze, or iron into tools. We live mundane lives, so we are more likely to be impacted by the ancients’ mundane lives than by history’s spectacular oddities. When we understand their lives, we are more likely to connect with their stories and metaphors. We can feel the hunger and sorrow of the widow as she presses some of her last dough onto the side of her ancient oven to make a cake for Elijah (1 Kings 17:8-16); we can understand the heat and horror of the Hebrews’ slavery when Egypt is likened to a crucible (1 Kings 8:51).

I invite you to come along with my family and me as we spend two weeks touring Israel, both ancient and modern. Together we will visit many archaeological sites and see artifacts that make the words of the Bible tangible. We will walk streets and shorelines where Jesus walked, imagining ourselves as His followers and wondering what He must think of modern Israel. We will enjoy the varied landscapes, endure oppressive dry heat, stand in maybe-too-many air-conditioned museums, and swim in three distinct “seas”—all while interacting with the “mundane” people of the land—Jewish and Muslim, Israeli and Palestinian. What begins as a quest to better understand the contexts and meanings of Scripture and better know the One who made them and us just might end with us having a better understanding of our neighbors and how Jesus would have us love them today.

CHAPTER 1

LOGISTICS IN MODERN ISRAEL



While I was at Harvard in the early 2000s, I worked for a small tour company called New England Sights. We did a lot of party planning for Boston elites and some vacation planning for out-of-towners. People would contact us through our website, the owner would design the ideal trip for them, and I would execute her plans. We provided beautiful vacations for companies and families to locations and events they could never have found themselves.

In the age of online travel sites, Yelp reviews, Waze maps, and Google Translate, it is tempting to think we can all craft our own vacations to exotic locales with just a few clicks. Technically, this is true, but it is far more time-consuming and accident-prone than taking a cruise or joining a bus tour where all of the logistics have been figured out for you by locals. If you are like me, and you don't want to be tied down to someone else's schedule or visit only the "usual" places where everyone goes, then you have to do your own research, reserve your own lodgings and transportation, and be your own guide. You also have to be ready to interact with people confidently and kindly.

GETTING TO ISRAEL

Row Buddy

Traveling to Israel from Chattanooga required twenty-two hours, four cities, three planes, a train, and an automobile. Patience, grace,

and efficiency were helpful as I encountered countless other travelers and travel professionals. Most interactions were brief, but one of those



Lior and sibling during an air raid in 1991.

people would be stuck in the seat beside me for the 11 hours it takes to fly from JFK to Tel Aviv.

I boarded the plane and found my row buddy already in his aisle seat. He stood up and let me slide over to the window, then waited politely as I rummaged around for my electronics before stowing my carry-ons. I put out my hand and introduced myself to Lior, who was traveling from his new home in Boston to Haifa,

where his mother had just had surgery. We talked nonstop for the next four or so hours about our plans in Israel, our lives back home, and world politics.

Lior and I are the same age, but he was born in Jerusalem and grew up in Haifa, while I am a Tennessean. We found ourselves discussing the first Gulf War (August 2, 1990, to February 28, 1991) and the strikes on Israel in the run-up to it, when we were both about nine years old. I didn't remember very much from that time period, other than CNN broadcasting the bombing of Israel and National Guardsmen talking to our classes when they returned home, but I had studied the war a bit in college. Lior's memory of the events surprised me: "I remember going down into the bomb shelter and putting on a gas mask, and then we got off school for a whole month. It was great as a third grader! No school for a whole month! Of course, my parents didn't explain to us exactly what was happening. It just seemed like a lot of spontaneous fun."

According to building codes, bomb shelters are required in all Israeli houses.

Airport Security

I haven't had the best luck with customs agents. When I was 17, my parents and I were returning to the US from London when we were told to enter the glass-walled interrogation room that was then called the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). "Don't worry," my dad told my mom and me, "I've been traveling a lot lately, so they probably just want to question me about it."

For 30 minutes, we waited in an otherwise-empty room for the armed, uniformed agent to call us up to the front where he "held court" from an elevated platform behind a six-foot-high wooden wall. After we approached, he looked down on us and asked, "Which one of you is Amanda?"

The color drained from my face, and my dad tried to take over: "She's my daughter. We are returning from London..."

"I wasn't talking to *you*," the agent bellowed. This would be the only time I ever saw my father tuck his metaphorical tail between his legs.

The agent started shifting papers and asking me identifying questions. It turned out that a girl fitting my physical description with my first and last name, my birthday, and a social security number one digit different from mine had gone missing in Arizona. When the customs agent had scanned my passport, the system had flagged me as the runaway and my parents as potential kidnappers!

Since that happened, I've developed a slight fear of customs agents. Twenty-one years later, as I approached the Israeli agent in Ben Gurion airport, I broke into a stress sweat. He was locked in an elevated glass box with a computer and scanning device (and a weapon, I assumed) that I could not see. I had to stand on my tiptoes to speak into and listen from the six-inch break in the glass. I slid him my passport and an official letter identifying me with the Tel Shimron excavation.

The first questions were normal: "Tell me your name. What is your business here? Are you excavating for a private group or a government group? Do you plan to go to any adjacent countries while you are in Israel?" But then he started telling me things about myself, as a charlatan fortune-teller might do.

"You are from Tennessee."

“Yes.”

“But you’ve never lived in Tennessee.”

I was flummoxed. “Well, I live there now. And I grew up there.”

He interrupted me with something that wasn’t quite statement or question: “You were born and raised in Tennessee.”

“Yes.”

“But, madam, *you have no accent!*”

I stammered, “Thank you?”

He stared.

“Well, my dad’s family is from Virginia, so maybe that’s why?”

He asked me more about the excavation and my educational background, and then quietly slid the visa into my passport and waved me toward the crossing. I quit the stress sweating sometime that evening.

Six weeks later, as I was preparing to leave Israel, I remembered just how difficult it had been to get out of the country in 2004. For the Ashkelon excavation, I had traveled into Israel with a group, but I left by myself. That raised the first red flag. The customs agents opened my luggage and searched it in front of me, and then I was pulled out of the regular security line. A pin in my right ankle set off their highly sensitive metal detectors, so I was patted down while a specialist investigated my shoes. Then the questioning began. I sat in a windowless room as multiple people came in asking me the same questions:

“Why are you in Israel?”

“Are you taking anything home with you from the dig?”

“Why are you leaving Israel before other members of your group?”

“Did anyone give you anything to transport?”

“Did you travel to another country at any time while you had an Israeli visa?”

Luckily, I’d celebrated my twenty-third birthday during the dig, and someone had given me copies of some drawings from Ashkelon’s Grid 38. I pulled them out and explained to each interviewer what I had been working on. The investigation took two hours to complete, but El Al (Israel’s national airline) held the plane for me. I made it back to JFK just in time to make my connection home.

While this process sounds scary, I mostly remember that everyone

was so kind to me. Before each question, they would apologize for making me uncomfortable and explain they were trying to make sure my flight would be safe. At no point did anyone believe I was anything other than a graduate student and dig volunteer (I don't think!), but the Israelis' vigilance is why El Al is one of the safest airlines in the world.

Thankfully, I didn't have the same trouble leaving in 2019. I had done the opposite on this trip—I had entered alone and was exiting with a group. My husband, David, and my parents, Ross and Dana, had never been to Israel; so they joined me for the tour portion of my trip. We didn't have any problems crossing back into the US either; no one thought I'd been kidnapped this time!

TRAVELING THROUGH ISRAEL

Driving

It never ceases to amaze me that a US passport allows me to drive a car in any country. Although their symbols and lines are different, their signs may not be in English, and they may drive on the left side of the road from the right side of the car, I can hop into any international driver's seat and go.

The day before my family arrived in Tel Aviv, I had ridden on a bus from Tel Shimron to the airport with several other volunteers including Abby, one of my square mates. She needed to get to Jerusalem before she began working on yet another excavation the following day, and I couldn't check into my Tel Aviv hotel room until 5:00 p.m. that evening. We decided to drive the 30 minutes between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and spend the day roaming around the Old City. I would drop her off at her hostel that evening before returning to Tel Aviv.

Not only was I happy for the company on my one totally unplanned day in Israel, but I was in need of a navigator. I need time to adjust when I enter a vehicle other than Dory, our 2014 Subaru Forester. I may brake too firmly or misjudge blind spots for the first few miles until I have a feel for the new-to-me machine. I had rented a Mitsubishi Eclipse (which is a small SUV and not the sports car I envisioned

and feared as the clerk handed me the keys!), knowing it would be heavy laden with four adults and floor-to-ceiling luggage for most of the trip. But I did not expect another encounter with technology. Abby and I sat in the airport parking structure for at least 30 minutes trying to figure out all the buttons and inputs. This would be my first experience with Android Auto, lane assistance, start-stop technology, and something called SafeCar.

SafeCar is an aftermarket anti-theft system that has drastically reduced car thefts in Israel. All Israeli cars—personal and rentals—come equipped with a small keypad near the steering column. Before the driver inserts the key into the ignition, she must enter a four-digit code followed by the star. It is a simple concept, but it was difficult to insert in the middle of my 23-year-long muscle-memorized routine of sitting down, buckling my seat belt, and inserting the key. Up until the day I turned the car back in, David would yell at me, “Punch in the code!” every time we entered the car.

Abby and I got out of the parking garage slowly but with no problems. My first drive to Jerusalem was exciting and easy with her running the navigation and sound systems. We found two-hour, not-parallel parking in Jerusalem near a lovely restaurant, Etz Café, where we ate our first nonkosher meal in weeks and enjoyed a cool August morning at a sidewalk table. Then we returned to the car.

Upon entering and without thinking, I inserted the key before typing in the four-digit code. The car beeped angrily, so I removed the key, opened and closed the driver’s door, and waited ten seconds as the rental clerk had told me to do. I am certain I did it correctly the next time, but SafeCar beeped at me again. For the next five minutes, Abby and I both tried to figure out what was going wrong; as panic set in, we even tried to enter the numbers in reverse because Hebrew letters read from right to left (although their numbers read left-to-right, and we knew that). Inexplicably, the car started rolling backward, making a circling angry taxi driver think we were leaving. But it never actually turned on. By the time the car’s back end was halfway into traffic, that taxi driver stopped to help us. He and Abby pushed the car back into the parking space, and I set the emergency brake. I called the car rental

company, they reset the SafeCar system remotely, and it worked perfectly from that moment forward.

The next day I confidently walked into Ben Gurion airport. I knew where I was going, I'd had almost 24 hours without a car mishap, and my family was arriving! We got settled in the car into what would be our permanent spaces for the whole trip: David next to me up front, my dad behind me, and my mom beside him. The luggage was in the back, stacked to the ceiling, and my father and mother were squished with a couple of bags in the backseat between them.

When you are navigating in Israel, use Waze. It was invented in Israel, so its maps of streets, alleyways, and traffic are significantly better than the other services we tried.

Pulling into Tel Aviv rush-hour traffic, I learned three things quickly: Israeli drivers are aggressive, I had a significant blind spot on the passenger side in the back, and Israeli roundabouts don't have inner and outer lanes as American ones do—everyone just tumbles in together no matter which lane they are coming from or turning into. The rules of the road may not be too different from US highways, but the driving culture is. There is no time for timidity when everyone around you has pushed the gas pedal before the light has turned green, and a “safe distance” must be less than a car length if you don't want to be constantly cut off and sideswiped.

By far my biggest driving snafu started between two roundabouts in a residential area of downtown Nazareth. We were trying to get to the Basilica of the Annunciation (where tradition states that God's messenger, Gabriel, told Mary that she would soon be carrying Jesus), and our GPS kept telling me to turn down a tight-looking alleyway that wound between ancient three- and four-story buildings. We passed by the alley, all agreeing there must be a better way to get to the church. At the next roundabout, the GPS sent us back by the same alley, again telling us to turn. Then the next roundabout turned us around again

with the GPS's ever-angrier-sounding demand that we turn! I hesitated. My dad said, "Let's go for it," just as David said, "Nuh-uh." With a car flying up behind me, I turned.

I'm not sure when my mom started crying. It could have been in the first ten seconds when a little red sports car flew by us going the opposite direction, or maybe it was when a local gave us a strange look as we approached his stoop. The alley had been curving left and right as we drove down at a steep grade—and it was getting noticeably narrower. The Arabic-speaking gentleman walked up to my window and asked where we were going in internationally recognizable hand signals. I pointed up to the church's spire. He furrowed his brow and then nodded vigorously that we should continue down and to the left instead of reversing to the right and driving out.

We kept going, and the alley narrowed.

We flipped in the side-view mirrors, and the alley narrowed more.

Our tires rubbed against a bottom step, and there was a column—the base to someone's second-story expansion—blocking the middle of our path.

We were stuck.

As I sat there thinking, *This is going to be expensive to correct*, and imagining a helicopter with magnets for landing skids lifting us straight out of this predicament, my dad sucked himself in and wiggled himself out of the backseat. He continued down the alley on foot and quickly found a bar where men were playing cards and the bartender was wearing a Nike shirt. The bartender spoke English, and he walked back with my dad to the SUV.

But before they arrived, a mother appeared with six children. The boys were running circles upon and around the vehicle as my father and the bartender appeared. The man and woman spoke to each other in Arabic and got on their cell phones. To the right of the SUV were four parking spaces crammed full with five cars, and one by one the owners came down to move them. The children were shooped upstairs into their home, and what ensued was the most complex expression of a sliding-block puzzle in which I've ever participated. Somehow, we all got the SUV turned around and the cars back in their parking places.



We made it to the church just in time for a Latin mass to begin outside the cave where tradition says Gabriel appeared to Mary.

Throughout it all, my father remained cool as a cucumber. He decided that on our way out he would walk ahead of the car just in case we met another vehicle around one of the tight turns. As David, my mom, and I slowly climbed up the alleyway behind my pedestrian father, the Mitsubishi's start-stop technology repeatedly shut off the engine and then lurched forward, to which my distraught mother responded, "Don't hit your father!"

It took half an hour, a literal village, and my mother's constant prayers, but we made it out of that Nazareth alleyway without a scratch. As I took my first full breath since turning down that road, I asked my family, "Do you think we are done with Nazareth?" We all agreed that we were, and I headed toward the highway, only to find parking for the basilica two blocks away from our adventure.

Lodging and Dining

When you book a hotel in Israel, you'll notice they offer boarding options, meaning you can pay up front for one, two, or three meals per day. This is nothing like free continental or grab-and-go breakfasts offered at some express hotels in the US; every meal is a gigantic buffet

offering all types of food at all times of day. If you are feeling traditional, you can ask the staff to make you a fresh pancake for breakfast, but then pile pizza, pasta, casserole, cheeses, breads, and at least five different salads alongside it. Have some complimentary kosher wine on Shabbat, and get ready to stand in long lines for the espresso machines every other day of the week.

Aside from a fresh fish staring at you from your breakfast plate next to a slice of roast beef and fingerling potatoes on some mornings, the hardest thing to get used to is eating kosher. Meat and dairy will never appear in the same meal—so forget about a cheeseburger—and all shellfish and pork products—including everyone's favorite artery-hardener, bacon—are off the menu entirely.

Don't think you always have to eat at a hotel. Israel has some delicious, stylish, and award-winning restaurants. While visiting Akko, a largely Arab city on the Mediterranean just north of Haifa, another one of my square mates, Avie, and I had our first restaurant meals in Israel. We had traveled to the city with most of the other Tel Shimron



The Crusader fortress at Akko.

volunteers that weekend to tour the Crusader sites. Avie had never seen the Mediterranean Sea before, and I was happy to go down to the golden beach with her and take some pictures of this memorable day in her life. While we were walking along the coast, I noticed a seafood restaurant called Mina overhanging the sea's edge. Deciding we'd both seen enough old things for a while and wanting some comfort and fresh seafood, we walked over and got an outdoor table. She had their fresh fish of the day, I had a pot full of mussels, and we shared 13 small salads.

When we sat down, we figured we had a little over an hour to eat and walk back to the bus. Unbeknownst to us, the restaurant expected we would spend at least two hours eating. Service was kind but incredibly slow (which I would appreciate in any other situation). We had barely received our seafood when it was time to panic: We needed the check immediately so we wouldn't miss the bus. Avie went inside to try to get someone's attention while I boxed up our food and got my credit card ready.

While digging in my purse, a particularly strong gust of wind caused the canopy over our table to collapse on the right side. Avie hadn't been able to get anyone's attention, but that dramatic crash certainly did!

I texted the volunteer coordinator and told her what had just happened. She responded, "That is hilarious and horrifying! We will wait for you."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amanda Hope Haley holds a bachelor of arts in Religious Studies from Rhodes College and a master of theological studies in Hebrew Scripture and Interpretation from Harvard University.

She maintains a blog where she encourages readers to challenge themselves to a deeper understanding of Scripture and live whole lives in community with God, family, and each other. Her podcast, *The Red-Haired Archaeologist*, is also available on her website:

<http://www.amandahopehaley.com>

Amanda is the author of *Mary Magdalene Never Wore Blue Eye Shadow: How to Trust the Bible when Truth and Tradition Collide* and *Barren among the Fruitful: Navigating Infertility with Hope, Wisdom, and Patience*. She cowrote *In Unison: The Unfinished Story of Jeremy and Adrienne Camp*. She contributed to The Voice Bible as a translator, writer, and editor; and she has been a content editor and ghost-writer for popular Christian authors.

Amanda and her husband, David, live in Chattanooga, Tennessee, with their scene-stealing, snuggle-loving basket hound, Copper.