



NO ORDINARY WEEK IN JERUSALEM

Written by Ilse Posselt

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No Ordinary Week in Jerusalem

If it was not for God, their paths would never have crossed. English-born Ruth Fazal is a Christian worship leader whose long and distinguished career includes the release of over 30 CDs. As an internationally renowned violinist and composer, her love for Yeshua (Jesus) overflows into song. Native Israeli, Gil Pentzak is an Orthodox Jew who lives with his young family in the hills of Samaria, faithfully observing Torah and longing to live the life God desires of him. “In the normal

course of things,” Ruth smiles, “some would say we are from two different worlds that hardly meet, let alone learn from one another or work together.”

Seven extraordinary days

They met six years ago, when Ruth enrolled in Gil’s *ulpan* (Hebrew language school). Today, the two host *No Ordinary Week in Jerusalem*, or in short, **NOW in Jerusalem**, an extraordinary week for Christians who want something more than the traditional tourist experience.

It takes participants on a seven-day journey of Christians walking alongside an Orthodox Jew in conversation, worship and sight-seeing to discover the heart of God for the land and people of His promise.

“*NOW in Jerusalem*,” Ruth says, “is not just about history. We discover the roots of our faith, connect with the people of this land, witness their love for God knitted into the fabric of day-to-day life and understand His call on His people, Israel.”

Gil nods. “As Orthodox Jews we are praying for the coming of Messiah, while I know that Christians believe He has already come and will be returning. Truly this kind of connection, of Christians and an Orthodox Jew walking together in humility, could only be happening in the days of Messiah.”

A Christian and a Jew in conversation

“On every day of *NOW in Jerusalem* we focus on a theme from which everything flows,” Gil explains. “Conversation is a key element. So is worship. We meet in a relaxed, informal setting; no teaching or preaching. After worship, Ruth and I – a Christian and a Jew – begin our conversation. Prompted by Ruth’s questions, I simply share my heart, my experiences as a husband and father, living with my family as Orthodox Jews in our ancient homeland.”

Soon enough, the rest of the group is drawn into the conversation, asking the questions on their minds and sharing their comments. That is how everyone in the group becomes part of the discussion – a dialogue between Christians and a Jew. “In Hebrew we have an expression that speaks about bringing a stranger into the Tabernacle,” he adds. *NOW in Jerusalem* is about you, that stranger, coming into the Tabernacle.”

Stepping out

On each day there is a group outing, mostly in and around Jerusalem. But for one full day out the extraordinary seven, Gil and Ruth, guitar and violin in hand, take the group into Samaria, to explore and worship in the heartland of the Bible.

“On this day, as on every day, the group has the opportunity to meet and bond with Israelis,” Ruth says. In Samaria, we meet a local rabbi and his wife, who describe to us the joys and challenges of living out the fulfilment of prophecy.”

“Back at the hotel, our evenings together are like a debriefing session,” Gil admits, smiling. “Everybody is eager to discuss their experiences, to talk about the things that made an impact on them and the revelations that changed hearts and minds forever.”

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Unity through worship

Ask Ruth what she believes sets **NOW in Jerusalem** apart and she is quick to answer: the worship. “Worshipping together as Jew and Christian is simply indescribable. Something happens in the spirit realm, something real and unique floods that place.”

A *NOW in Jerusalem* participant describes the experience as follows: “Worship of the one God we both love became the vehicle that broke down the walls of separation between us.”

On the seventh day

Each day is special, filled with its own kind of extraordinary. But for Gil, the highlight is Shabbat. “As a group, we experience “keeping Shabbat” together. My wife and children as well as friends of ours and their children join us for this special time. We have a Shabbat meal together on Friday, and my wife and her friend share about the delight that Shabbat holds for them as Orthodox Jewish women. After a late breakfast on Saturday, the group is invited to spend the day with our families, relaxing, playing, talking and simply enjoying the Shabbat rest.

Encountering the heart of God

“Our participants come from the four corners of the world. For some, it is their first time in Israel; for others it is their fourth or fifth visit,” Gil states. “Yet without fail, they tell me, ‘I have been to this place before, but this is something different. It is like I am experiencing it for the first time.’”

“I believe that this is because many tours focus on the history of a site,” he continues. “But there is something more important than what *was*. Should we rather not try to understand what God is doing *NOW*, to seek His heart in each place – and partner with Him?”

The testimonies of those who have spent these seven extraordinary days with Gil and Ruth speak for themselves. “This week connected my heart to Israel relationally. I felt the heart of the Father for His people first hand, in the land, with them,” writes one.

Orchestrated by God

This type of relationship, Gil believes, is only possible if the hand of God orchestrates it. “Why else would Christians fly halfway around the world to a tiny country in the Middle East, to listen to someone they have never met before and, in turn, share their hearts with him? It would not happen. Unless there is something, or Someone, drawing them. Surely, these are the days of the Messiah.”

Join the next *NOW in Jerusalem*

Gil and Ruth will host their fourth **NOW in Jerusalem** in October/November 2016. For more information or registration, visit <http://www.ruthfazal.com/no-ordinary-week-in-jerusalem>

