

“JERICHO, BETHPHAGE, BETHANY”

All of us have experienced being away from home. We realize how hard it is to be away from home when we get sick while away from home, or if our car breaks down hundreds of miles from home.

I have had to be away from home more than most people. I was in military service for ten years. During that time there were extended periods when I was away from home. After I became a minister, I had to travel out of town for meetings. I was in the West Virginia Army National Guard for twelve years. One weekend a month I had to travel over a hundred miles to the armory and then stay overnight on a folding cot. While I was working on my doctorate, I would fly to Texas and stay three weeks once a year. Then I started having to drive to South Carolina once a month and stay for several days.

In all that traveling I experienced breaking down on the highway at least a dozen times, running out of money with no one to turn to, being sick in a strange place with no one to help. Being away from home is a draining experience physically, mentally, psychologically.

When I was young, I never could understand why our grandparents wanted to go back home in a short while. I was young and thought visiting was lots of fun. They were old and knew how much it required.

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem where He would suffer, die, and be raised again. These towns are places where Jesus stayed while He was away from His home in Galilee.

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. (Matthew 16:21 NKJV)

1.) Jericho

Jericho was situated at a natural ford in the Jordan River. When I was a boy, my Grandad took me to see the two story log house where he grew up. It was on Files' Creek. The road came up to the creek and continued on the other side. You had to ford the creek: drive down into the water, cross the creek, and go up on the other side onto the road.

Jericho is a very ancient city. There have been cities on this site for at least 8,000 years. The archeologist Kathleen Kenyon led an expedition which found the remains of twenty-three cities. Each city built on the ruins of the previous city. When the Israelites, led by Joshua, crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, Jericho was the first city they conquered – “the walls came tumbling down.”

After Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, He crossed the Jordan into Judea and ascended the Mount of Temptation near Jericho. The land is barren without food or water and there are extreme temperature changes between day and night.

On Jesus' last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, He crossed the Jordan into Judea at Jericho. Jericho is where Zaccheus lived and he was blessed by Jesus going to his house for hospitality. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, blind Bartimaeus sat by the road and cried out, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” Jesus called for him to come and healed him of his blindness.

The road from Jericho to Jerusalem ascends through narrow and rocky passes amid ravines and precipices. It is a very dangerous and difficult route, and was infested by robbers. This road was the scene of the events in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

2.) Bethphage

Bethphage means "place of figs". It was near the Mount of Olives. It was located on the tortuous road going down to Jericho. Its distinction and reason for being is that it is exactly a "Sabbath day's journey" from Jerusalem. On an ordinary day a person might be able to travel twenty miles in a day's time. The rabbis had added a number of interpretations to the Law. One of their interpretations of the commandment "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." was that you could only travel a short distance on the Sabbath. The Sabbath day's journey was a precise distance, 2000 cubits, about a mile. That is how far Bethphage was from Jerusalem traveling east toward Jericho.

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. (Acts 1:12 NKJV)

It was from Bethphage that Jesus sent two disciples into a village to get a donkey and its colt for His triumphal ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. "And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'" So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:1-9 NKJV)

It was on the Mount of Olives near Bethphage that Jesus gave His Olivet Discourse in which He gave His disciples the signs of the En

3.) Bethany

Bethany means "house of dates." It was about a mile further than Bethphage along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

If you have to be away from home, the next best thing is to have friends. Jesus had friends in Bethany. Mary and Martha lived there. Earlier in His ministry Jesus used their home to teach a group. Lazarus their brother also lived in Bethany. Jesus had another friend in Bethany, Simon the Leper.

On one occasion when Jesus was in Judea, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that Lazarus, "whom you love", was ill. By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus was dead and buried in a cave. Jesus wept. Then He commanded that they roll the stone away from the mouth of the tomb. He cried out "Lazarus, come forth." Lazarus rose from the dead. Many of the crowds at the Palm Sunday parade had come to see Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead.

When the Palm Sunday procession neared Jerusalem the crowds faded away. Jesus continued into the Temple courts. Afterward He went back to Bethany to spend the night.

In Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, a woman anointed Jesus with a whole flask of costly spikenard. Some objected because the money could have been used for the poor. Jesus said, "She has done a good work for me....She has anointed my body beforehand for burial."

After Jesus' death and resurrection, when He was ready to ascend into heaven, He led His disciples out as far as Bethany. He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Then He ascended into heaven.

