



Divine Destinations

An Interview with Steven Kapp Perry

Steven Kapp Perry is an award-winning songwriter, playwright, and podcast host from Provo, UT. For years, he led tours in Israel, a place which many faiths call the Holy Land. More recently, as part of a documentary series with the *In Good Faith* podcast, Steve traveled to Turkey and interviewed members of various religions. After two years of working with Steve at BYUradio, I decided to interview him about these experiences.

Israel

Q: How did you get started in leading tours through Israel? How long did you do that?

A: It was actually through writing plays and musicals. I had written a one-woman show for Joanne, my wife, to perform in various places like Kirtland, Ohio. One of the tour companies saw that I got along well with people and knew the history, so they asked me about becoming a guide. So I've probably done 20 tours in the United States for Latter-day Saint Church history. At one point, they said, "We have someone retiring who takes our Israel tours. How would you feel about learning that?" I was very excited; I'd always wanted to lead tours abroad. I love to travel. I love

languages and different foods. I've taken, I think, 17 tours over about 10 years.

Q: Did you have a favorite location or landmark that you always brought visitors to?

A: Well, yes. One that is most meaningful to people is the Garden Tomb. Surprisingly, no one's very excited about the Jordan River. But when you go there and you start telling the stories, people are surprised that it ends up being a really moving place—especially when you see people from all over the world coming to get baptized or recommit. You'll have a group from Peru, all playing their native instruments and singing. And then there will be a group from Africa, and they're singing spirituals. It's just so amazing.

Going to Nazareth is also one of my favorites. You can kind of see how small the area was where they would have lived. There were maybe 15 families, so between two hundred and four hundred people at that time. It was just nowhere. People are always really surprised by that.



Q: Was there anything you learned that changed the way you look at this part of the world?

A: So much of what we think about Israel and the Holy Land, we get from European painters who were never really there. And so, in paintings of the Nativity, we have a wooden manger. Wood is so valuable there, and so rare that they would not have used it as a manger. Actual mangers are just carved-out blocks of stone. So many preconceptions are turned around on these trips, which, to me, is really exciting. Some people also like that. Other people are like, "Oh, but I love my paintings." You can enjoy your paintings—just know they're not real.

Turkey

Q: When you were brainstorming countries and cultures to visit with the *In Good Faith* podcast, why did you pick Turkey?

A: Turkey is pretty close to Israel. That whole area is so interesting because everybody went through Turkey on the way to conquer someone else—the Egyptians went north, the Assyrians came west, the Babylonians and the Romans passed through present-day Turkey. So, for me, Turkey had a fascinating historical component: early polytheism (even before recorded history), Greek influence, Romans, Byzantines, and Ottomans. Even from the very beginning, there have been communities of Jewish people there as well. Having that many layers of religious history to share made Turkey an obvious choice for

In Good Faith to interview people of different faiths.

Q: Are people surprised to learn that there are Latter-day Saint or Jewish adherents in Turkey?

A: Most people aren't aware of that history at all. People predominantly know Turkey as a Muslim country. Turkey is 98 percent Muslim, but, thousands of years ago, it was 98 percent Christian. Americans don't usually know our history as well as we should—I include myself in that statement, but I'm trying to fix that.



Q: Where would you recommend people visit while in Turkey?

A: If you can only go to one place in Turkey, go to Istanbul. It is one of the most amazing cities in the whole world. The Bosphorus Strait runs between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. You can see Europe on one side of the Strait, Asia on the other, and the big city of Istanbul built all around. It's just the most amazing place.

If you have time to do a little more, I would go to Cappadocia, because then you can see the amazing cities that were carved into caves and cliffs.



There are whole cities underground where Christians would hide and worship peacefully. I was also able to visit Ephesus. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul was there multiple times. The ruins in Ephesus are amazing.

Final Thoughts

Q: What do you think people can learn from traveling abroad?

A: I think Mark Twain said that travel is fatal to prejudice, and I would say that's not completely true, but mostly true. I have loved getting to see how people do things in other countries. I've learned to have increased respect for other people's cultures, languages, and ways of doing things; just

because it's different doesn't mean it's wrong. We aren't necessarily the best at everything.

— Lia King

For more of Steve's experiences traveling and interviewing adherents of various religious traditions, check out his podcast, "In Good Faith," on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and YouTube.



In Good Faith senior producer Heather Bigley [left] and Steven Kapp Perry [right] with a family in Turkey. Images of Steve used with permission from BYUradio.

