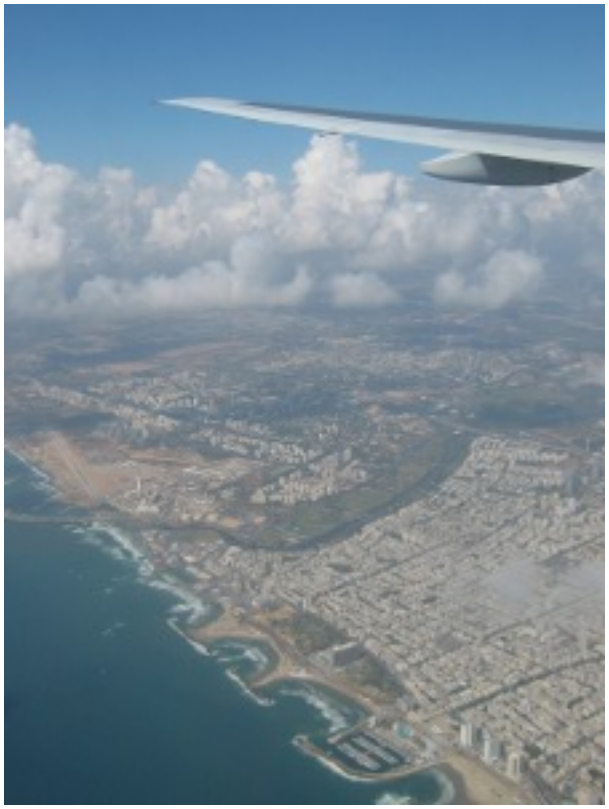
Day 1



Arrived in Heathrow this afternoon around 3.30pm. So far everything has went very well on the journey. Have been with Ronnie, his wife and Martin and Ruth Wensley from Belfast International. Hotel Travelodge is very basic, but we are staying here for only one night, so it is not too bad. Meeting up for dinner later. Early start tomorrow. Have brought some Hebrew Bibles in case I get to speak to anyone. Meal tonight was nice. Went for a walk down the road with martin and Ruth. Amazed by the number of foreigners living here. Our hotel was right in the flight path, so every couple of minutes there would be a great whooshing sound and a plane would swoop over our building. It was an amazing sight. But managed to get a good sleep despite the noise. Got the bus this morning at around 6 o'clock for Heathrow. The bus driver managed to squeeze everybody in our group onto the bus plus a few others. At least fifty people including suitcases. Was a tight squeeze, but we survived. The flight was scheduled for lunchtime, and after the long walk through the terminal, we boarded the plane. The flight took around 4 hours, and was very smooth. We touched down in Tel Aviv at 3:30pm and got the bus to our hotel. Ronnie told us that Ben Gurion was built on the plain of Ono where Nehemiah once lived, who helped to rebuild the city of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. We passed Abu Gosh, on the outskirts of Jerusalem, where the lord told Jeremiah to bury the deeds to the plot of ground he asked him to buy, as a sign that the Jewish people would one day return to their ancient homeland. The hotel we are staying in is the Inbal hotel in Jerusalem. It seems to be very nice. I am rooming with a man from Bulgaria called Stanislav. He his a minister in his own country. At 7 o'clock we are to go down and have our dinner. Meal was very nice. I had the schnitzel, beef, salted beef, onions, carrots, and chocolate cake for desert. I tried speaking a little Hebrew to some of the staff, but a few of them didn't really seem too impressed. Ronnie said later that the men were Arab workers. I should have known, as Jews would not be working on Shabbat.

Day 2



Today is what is referred to as Nackba day, or the 'great catastrophe', which is marked by the Arabs following the Israeli day of independence. There were a lot of police around Jerusalem today, and most of the roads were closed at around 12 o'clock to prevent trouble. Still, we managed to visit the Western Wall in the morning. We were not able to get on the the Temple Mount itself today, but were able to see the stones that were thrown down by the Romans when the Temple was destroyed in 70AD. We were also shown a virtual model of the Temple of Herod's time by a Jewish guide, who despite not being a believer, seemed to know much about the New Testament and the return of the Messiah. She knew Jesus' Jewish name, Yeshua, and she said that she had an open mind concerning the identity of the Messiah. Pray for her. We then headed up to the Ramat Rachel for lunch. In the afternoon we went to visit Hezekiah's tunnel, which was constructed by the king during the siege of Jerusalem. It was also the tunnel used by David to conquer the Jebusite fortress which stood on top of the mountain, close to where the Temple would later be built. After we came out of the tunnel, we saw the remains of the pool of Siloam, where the blind man was healed. After this we witnessed some Palestinian youths rioting in Silwan, which is the Arab name for Siloam. They were throwing stones at the police jeep. Thankfully the police were able to move them on. We also heard loud explosions and gunshots earlier in the day. After dinner we crossed over to Bethlehem. It was a bit nerve racking after today's events, but everything seemed to go well. We went to visit the shepherds' fields. Bethlehem is quite hilly and we passed by three towns before we arrived at our destination. It appears quite run-down compared to the Israeli side of the border. We lit candles and sang Christmas carols in the shepherds' cave, where they would have sheltered their flocks. The Palestinian guide then took us to a shop to buy olive wood products. Unfortunately much of the merchandise was orthodox or catholic orientated, so there wasn't much we were comfortable with buying. But we did purchase a few gifts, and were glad when we were back safe in our hotel.

Day 3









