



Israel Initiative - Program and Protocols

The *Israel Initiative* Defined and Described

1. Substance of the *Initiative*

A 3-unit course has been introduced into the seminary curriculum which includes first of all intensive Preparatory Coursework (lectures, reading & written assignments, exams) and, building upon that Coursework, a 13-day trip in total (10 study days) in Israel. The course, including both the Preparatory Coursework and the Study Trip, will be provided to qualified STS students basically for the cost of tuition.

In addition, the seminary recognizes the value of a study trip to non-student travelers such as student spouses, STS alumni and certain ministry partners, and would like to provide such individuals the opportunity to participate in the Study Trip at their own expense. Non-student travelers should understand that the primary emphasis of the *Initiative* is to provide sound instruction to STS students; therefore decisions regarding participation on the trip will be made to support that goal.

2. The Definition Specified

It is imperative that students and travelers understand what the commitment of STS *is* in this regard, and what it is *not*!

- a. Positively, Shepherds Seminary is committed to trust God and to struggle carefully in the effort to provide STS students with a genuine and *affordable* study trip to Israel as part of their studies at the seminary. That commitment is born of the persuasion that any serious student of Scripture, but especially one who is pursuing a calling to preach and teach those Scriptures, is greatly advantaged by a careful study trip to the land of Israel.

In order to feasibly make the trip financially possible for virtually all of our students, the seminary has had to find donors who are capable of underwriting the entire land cost of the trip, and who believe in the value of the experience as part of the training of those who will handle the Scriptures. This is why we are careful to refer to the effort as an “initiative”; STS is sufficiently convinced of the worth of such a Study Trip that we have taken the initiative and have waited upon God and worked hard to provide the funds. God has blessed those efforts. STS Study Trips have been successfully carried out every year since 2012. But the funding of the *Initiative* is no mean effort, and we have no right to presume upon the future. Therefore...

- b. Negatively, the *Initiative* must not be taken as a contractual obligation on the part of the seminary to provide a study trip to Israel. It is simply and only a commitment to work to make that happen. Further, eligibility for the Study Trip will be qualified in several ways, and the student must not assume that he will be included. Finally, funds are limited, and thus students who do apply in a given year will be prioritized according to a number of factors (iterated below), some more objective than others. In that regard, STS will expect any student who does make application to do so with the animating recognition that the Study Trip is not his to expect or claim, that funds – and thus the availability of the trip to those needing those funds – are limited, and that some hard decisions may have to be made relative to who is accepted into the Class & Study Trip in a given year.
- c. In order to be faithful stewards of the funds being raised toward the stated seminary goal of training STS students, non-student travelers are responsible for covering the entire cost of the trip. This includes arranging and paying for individual airfare and providing the seminary with payment for the “land costs” associated with the trip. Please contact the seminary for specific information on cost and payment options.

3. Some fine points of specification:

- a. The commitment is to provide the Study Trip for STS students *who will graduate from the institution with an accredited degree or institutional diploma*. The seminary recognizes that plans sometimes change and intentions are sometimes frustrated. But we will ask each student registering for the Study Trip to stipulate that he/she fully intends to graduate from the seminary, that she/he is making steady and deliberate progress toward that goal, and

that participation in the Study Trip will not in any foreseeable way interfere with that progress. To this end, students will be eligible for the Study Trip *only after having completed twelve (12) units of credit at STS.*

- b. The **Initiative** is born of the realization that a genuine Study Trip would be invaluable as part of a seminary education, but that such a trip lies beyond the financial means of most seminary students. That is the rationale upon which donors have been approached, and the reason for which the donations have been made. We believe God is in the effort, and those donors are eager to help STS students avail themselves of this experience. If, on the other hand, any interested student is financially able to cover the land costs of the trip, or even to defray those costs in part (either with his own funds or with funds available to him), we would beseech him to do that. Again, the **Initiative** is not funded from some bottomless reserve; the trip of each supported student must be covered by donors convinced of the value of the effort. It would be unconscionable for a student to avail himself of those funds if, in fact, he was able to cover the cost from his own funds with no strain or difficulty. But having said that, know that the seminary is working with the assumption that students cannot afford a trip such as this. That will be our default understanding unless you inform us otherwise.
- c. At any rate, STS calls upon any participating student – and especially those whose costs are covered by donated funds – to regard the opportunity with a profound sense of stewardship, realizing that someone has in fact given generously and sacrificially to make the Study Trip possible, that those benefactors who have donated to make the **Initiative** a reality did so without any knowledge as to who the beneficiaries of that selfless generosity would be. Certainly, the only morally appropriate response to all of that is for the student thus enabled to embrace the opportunity with a heart-filled with gratitude and with a mind fully determined to work and pray so as to get everything possible out of the experience, to the end that the investment made by those donors would pay rich dividends throughout the years of ministry for which that student is preparing himself.
- d. The intent of the **Initiative** is that STS will cover the land cost of a study trip to Israel. IMPORTANT: if the student needs the 3 units of academic credit available for the Study Trip, that cost must be covered by the student at the tuition rate he/she normally pays. On the other hand, not all students need the units for graduation; in that case, there will be no tuition cost demanded of that student.
- e. Regarding the flights to and from Israel – arrangements and costs:
 - 1) Each student will be responsible to make his/her flight arrangements. STS will *not* arrange air flights for the trip. There is but one international airport in Israel, so it's hard to get this wrong. The group will assemble on a given date (a Sunday evening) in Tel Aviv to begin the Study Tour; the student's responsibility is to arrange to fly into Ben Gurion Airport in time to gather with the group on the appropriate Sunday evening. Furthermore, it is important to schedule the return departure late on the last day of the trip. All of this will be explained more carefully in the instructions for individual Study Trips. But the student must know that he/she will be responsible to make those air arrangements.
 - 2) Further, the *cost* of airfare is the responsibility of the individual student. During the earlier years of the Israel Initiative, the seminary was able to provide a partial credit for the cost of the flights, but with the increasing student numbers it became infeasible to do that.
 - 3) On the other hand, STS will work with students to help them raise the money for their airfare from family and friends. The details of that effort are as follows:
 - a) The seminary will establish a "Study Trip Air Account" for each student who is interested in working at this.
 - b) The student will be responsible to contact family & friends to request donations be made to the account. STS will provide guidelines and templates for request letters/e-mails.
 - c) The donation checks should be written to "Shepherds Seminary," and the specific student should be indicated on the check memo line in this way: "Air Account for John Doe."
 - d) Donations made to those accounts will be tax-deductible, but the donor and the student must understand that those monies can only be used to cover the air expense of the student. If for any reason the student is unable to go on the Study Trip, the funds donated will remain in the Israel Initiative account. In sum, in order to be tax-deductible, the money must be donated to Shepherds

Seminary with the understanding that it will be used for the specified purpose of helping with the air expense of the specified student, *if possible*. If that is not possible, the funds will be used for the Israel Initiative as the seminary sees best.

- e) All of the money donated to a specific student will be used to reimburse his air expense, *up to the receipted amount of those expenses*. If the student raises only part of the cost, he/she is responsible to cover the balance. If he raises more than the cost, the surplus will be used for other Israel Initiative expenses.
- 4) Finally, there are minimal land costs which are *not* covered by STS, and thus the student must plan on covering these. The rationale for not covering these costs is logistics: it is simply not workable to cover these costs given the dynamics and demands of the study trip. The two categories of costs which the student traveler will be responsible to cover are:
- a) Transportation between hotels and airport at beginning and the end of trip. Average cost for this expense is \$40-\$60 in total.
 - b) Lunches: The cost will average about \$15/day; there will be ways to economize, but the traveler is well-advised to plan to spend about that much each day on lunch.

Expectations of those participating in The *Israel Initiative*

1. All student travelers are expected to fulfill the academic requirements of the class/trip before the trip, whether or not he/she signs up for the three units of academic credit. Students who need the academic units must enroll in the 3-credit History and Geography of Israel course (BE513). The course is composed of both a Preparatory Coursework component and the 13-day Study Trip to the land of Israel. Again, the tuition cost for the course is to be paid by the student traveler.

Non-student travelers are expected to fulfill all reading and learning requirements of the stateside course *prior* to departure to Israel in order to be part of the Study Trip. Most of those requirements will be delivered by means of recorded lectures and online quizzes and assignments; the class will physically meet only once, largely to discuss the dynamics of the requirements and logistics related to the trip itself. Non-student travelers are encouraged to attend that one class session, and they are expected to read the assigned text (*Satellite Bible Atlas*) and to watch the preparatory videos.

- a. CATALOG DESCRIPTION of the Course:

BE 513 History and Geography of Israel

A thorough study of the land of Israel in the days of the Bible. Emphasis will be upon geography, topography, geology, climate and agricultural cycles, as well as issues relating to the archeology of the land and a brief survey of the history of the modern state of Israel. Intensive Preparatory Coursework will anticipate the study trip to the modern land of Israel. The purpose of the Preparatory Coursework is first of all to enable the student to rightly assess the land as the stage on which the drama of Scripture was played out and secondly to equip the student to get as much as possible out of the Study Trip to follow. Units: 3

- b. NOTES regarding the Preparatory Coursework requirement:

- 1) The concentrated Preparatory Coursework is strategic on several counts:
 - a) Absent the Preparatory Coursework, all of the necessary instruction and lectures would have to be included during the time in Israel – in which case the schedule becomes so taxing that the student is unable to absorb the material as effectively as one would hope.
 - b) It is very difficult to absorb the measure of data which is compressed into a trip of just 13 total days/10 full study days, given the sheer volume of the material. The best help for that is for the student to already have familiarized himself with much of that information, especially the defining dynamics of the land in relation to the narrative of Scripture.
 - c) Because we will not need the time for those lectures in Israel, we can save several days in the land, thus reducing the cost of the experience significantly. That is, we can cover in 10 days the same ground that

most seminary trips cover in 14-15 days, simply because we do not need to set aside the times for lectures, exams, etc. in the land.

- 2) Regarding the dynamics and logistics of the Preparatory Coursework component:
 - a) The Preparatory Coursework is to be completed during the fall semester before the Study Trip – indeed, well before the Study Trip so that the student will have some time to absorb and contemplate the material in anticipation of that trip.
 - b) The Preparatory Coursework will be accessed primarily via internet. It includes basic standard elements: recorded lectures, response quizzes, reading assignments, research assignments, and exams. Nearly all of this work must be completed and submitted *before* the Study Trip itself. The only exception: some of the requirements are to be completed on-line during the trip. For that reason, it is important that each student travel with some device which will enable him/her to access the internet and complete those assignments daily along the way. Information on assignment and required texts will be available through the Populi system.
 - c) There will be one *classroom* session several weeks before the Study Trip itself (TBA). That one gathering class will be rostered at a time when most student travelers are able to attend – almost certainly on a Saturday morning about 8:30 - noon. Those unable to attend physically are strongly encouraged to join the class via livestreaming internet access (using the Zoom software). The focus of that one session will be twofold: to emphasize the stewardship element of the STS Israel Initiative, and to consider logistical and administrative details, travel questions and suggestions, individual flight arrangements, and so on.

c. NOTES regarding the Study Trip to Israel:

- 1) The length – 10 full study days in the land (i.e., get up in the morning / go to bed at night in the land)
- 2) Itinerary will include a standard schedule of stops and onsite lectures, supplemented by special sites, lectures, and events.
- 3) The Study Trip will be in late November or early December, immediately after exam week of the STS fall semester. (See Travel Itinerary for specific dates.)
- 4) The trip will be much more physically demanding than most trips to Israel. You must be able to endure (yea verily, enjoy) long days of physically demanding effort, including walking 8-9 miles a day, often over rough and steep terrain.

2. The application procedure and protocols

- a. The following steps are necessary to make application for the Course and the Study Trip. Notice that all those who are interested in participating in the Study Trip (students and non-student travelers) must complete all of these steps.
 - 1) STEP #1: Read thoroughly the document in your hands: “*Israel Initiative*: Program and Protocols.”
 - 2) STEP #2: Fill out the appropriate application carefully and completely; both student and non-student applications can be found on the STS website (shepherds.edu).
 - a) Applications (student and non-student) will be solicited through the summer before the trip; the application deadline will be late summer.
 - b) The issue at stake is twofold: space and funds. Both will always be limited. Thus, in any given year decisions may have to be made as to who will be accepted for the trip – whether because the seminary does not have sufficient funds to cover all the students applying for that year, or because the bus is full.
 - c) Caveat regarding limitations of space: if in any given year the number of travelers is manageable (i.e., the trip is not full) after all applications have been received and accepted, late applications – either student or non-student – will be gladly received.

- 3) STEP #3: Schedule an appointment with a STS faculty member to discuss the *possibility* of being included in the upcoming Class and Study Trip. Contact Ann Clampett (aclampett@shepherds.edu) at the seminary office to arrange for an appointment.
2. As discussed above, it is possible that in any given year not all those who submit an application will be accepted for the trip. This could be a sensitive issue, and thus some further clarification in that regard:
 - a. Again, only those who are accepted for the Study Trip will be allowed to enroll in the class which includes the Preparatory Coursework, and only those who complete that Coursework will be eligible for the Study Trip. As above, a primary function of that class will be to prepare the group who will travel together in Israel in December; indeed, as we travel in Israel, we will assume the understanding gleaned from taking the Preparatory Coursework.
 - b. There are two categories of non-student travelers invited to participate in the *Israel Initiative*: MINISTRY PARTNERS (those in vocational ministry, invited personally by STS personnel to come at the much reduced land cost [airfare entirely their responsibility]); and DONOR PARTNERS (invited personally to come at a standard market-price, knowing that they will pay for *their* trip *and* entirely cover the land cost of one of the students). As eager as STS is to have all applicants travel with us, if priorities have to be assigned, Donor Partners will be favored, simply because they play an important and generous role in financing the *Israel Initiative*.
 - c. The most important priority factors to be appealed to in making the decision as to what students are accepted into the class and Study Trip:
 - 1) Academic Standing – has the student proved his capacity to do seminary-level work?
 - 2) Commitment to obtaining an accredited degree– demonstrated by verbal affirmation and by meaningful progress toward that goal.
 - 3) Academic progress – students are eligible for the trip only after completing twelve (12) units of study at STS; give that, the further along in his/her seminary work, the higher priority a student will be given.
 - 4) Personal factors – issues related to work, family, health and so on will be taken into consideration when appropriate; these factors may be positive or negative.
 - 5) Prior trips to Israel – if the student has been to Israel in the past, we will ask that student to make the case in favor of the seminary underwriting another trip. But know that given the unusual dynamics of the STS trip, as well as the value of such a trip for those who are training to handle the Scriptures, this will probably not be a hard case to make.