

LIVING ON A PRAYER

JERUSALEM, MAY 25, 2011

I woke up today fully aware of how blessed I am to be spending my birthday in Jerusalem. The terrace of my room overlooks the Old City, a unique piece of land that finds itself every day on the front pages of newspapers all over the world. My international law practice has taken me here on a mission to assess the impact of the recent instability in the Middle East on Israel and the United States. Israel's neighbor and peace partner Egypt has just overthrown President Hosni Mubarak, who ruled the country with an iron hand for 40 years. The new political power, the Muslim Brotherhood, is sending out signals it wants out of the peace treaty with Israel. Although Mubarak oppressed his people with brutality, his government kept the borders with Israel quiet and was a long-standing ally of the United States. Rebels in Libya are now thinking the Egyptians had a good idea and have mounted an assault to overthrow its long-ruling despot, Muammar Gaddafi. This is the Middle East.

I reminisce with myself – how did I get here? I never imagined that I would be supporting the interests of the State of Israel on a worldwide stage. Raised Jewish and bar mitzvahed at 13, my spiritual life took a dramatic turn at 34. It was then that my faith came full circle when I accepted Yeshua (Jesus in Hebrew) as the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. It was a drastic life-changing decision for me in many ways. My faith became the cornerstone and foundation of my life, although my commitment found me at odds with family, friends and skeptics. It was not a popular decision but there was no turning back. It was a struggle.

Shortly thereafter, I headed to Mobile, Ala. from Atlanta, where I had been practicing law for 10 years. My newfound faith led me to explore an interesting opportunity – start up a Christian

television network, Sonlight Broadcasting Systems. Needless to say, I was walking by faith and not by sight. I had experienced a lot of interesting challenges in my career but building a faith-based television network in the “bible-belt” certainly provided unusual obstacles for a Jewish man from New York. But God found a way to bless our fledgling television ministry, which in a period of five years, grew to five full-power and five low-power stations. In 1997, it was time for a new challenge and a fresh direction. The organization sold its broadcast licenses; we changed the name to the Center for Faith and Freedom and moved our non-profit to Lakewood Ranch.

The proceeds of the sale enabled us to build a state-of-the-art production facility where we parlayed our video production expertise into Salt and Light Productions. Since opening our doors in Lakewood Ranch, we have won 25 Telly and two Emmy awards for outstanding video production. Our sole mission is to support the non-profit community and our local governments by providing documentaries that enable organizations and agencies to share their mission and vision with the community. At our heart is the desire to give a voice to the forgotten and overlooked members of society, and to sow seeds of encouragement and inspiration in those less fortunate. I cannot help but believe that our success is attributable only to the fact that our mission is driven by our faith-based commitment to Judeo-Christian principles. God has blessed what we have done, plain and simple. We are governed by the biblical principle that to whom much is given, much is required.

I still identify myself as Jewish and believe that both the Old and New Testaments are the inspired word of God. Many people that are familiar with my faith enjoy questioning and

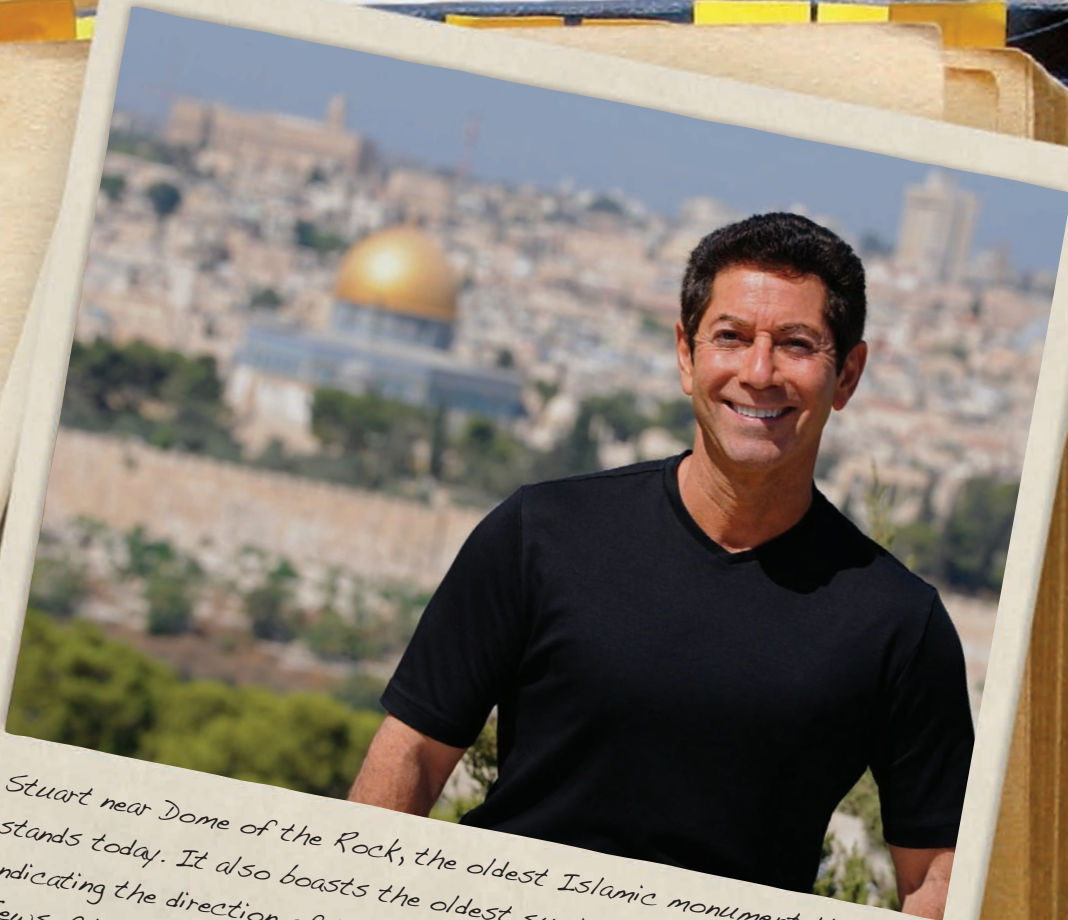


Stuart with Danny Ayalon, Israel's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs



Military weapons training





Stuart near Dome of the Rock, the oldest Islamic monument that stands today. It also boasts the oldest surviving mihrab, the niche indicating the direction of Mecca, in the world. The Dome is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The Old City of Jerusalem has long been considered the center of the world.

Dome of the Rock



debating my theology – they know I am a lawyer so perhaps that makes them want to engage me that much more. I always share that I find no inconsistencies in being Jewish and accepting Jesus as the Messiah – the early church was made up mostly of Jews, and Jesus and all of the apostles and early disciples were Jewish – very Jewish. The New Testament was a book written by Jews about Jews and primarily for the Jews. Jesus didn't start out to create a new religion and despite popular belief, he was not the first Christian. He lived and died a Jew. He was called "King of the Jews." In my mind, this is not very complicated.

I enjoy sharing my faith when asked but I never get into theological disputes no matter how much some enjoy baiting me about my beliefs. I only share the testimony that my life-changing decision has brought me peace, comfort and "spiritual prosperity." That's hard to argue with.

Despite the fact that over a couple of thousand years, Christianity is a religion followed primarily by gentiles, I have never been dissuaded in following my beliefs. The best advice I was given when I started this spiritual journey was to keep my eyes on God and not people. People disappoint but God never does. My faith is my core. It encourages, motivates and directs my footsteps – my life literally depends upon it. Where would I be without it – certainly not spending my birthday in perfect peace in Jerusalem! **LWR**



Stuart with Shimon Peres, President of Israel

BY STUART ROTH | PHOTOGRAPHY FROM HIS PERSONAL COLLECTION