

An aerial photograph of Jerusalem, Israel, taken during the golden hour of sunset. The city's dense, terracotta-roofed buildings are bathed in warm light. In the foreground, the massive stone walls of the Temple Mount are visible, featuring a large arched gateway. The Dome of the Rock is prominent in the mid-ground. The sky is a soft gradient of orange and yellow.

of falafels and following Jesus

STORIES FROM A JOURNEY
THROUGH THE HOLY LAND

Nathan Brown
with Michelle Villis and Brenton Stacey

“While rich with culture, entertaining anecdotes and fascinating history, *Of Falafels and Following Jesus* is much more than a journey through modern Jordan and Israel. We are urged to turn our backs on holy places—to be witnesses to what Jesus has done, telling His story and following His example of disciple-making, building a movement of justice and mercy.”

—*Dr Peter Roennfeldt, author, Following Jesus*

“This thoughtful and thought-provoking book will help any traveller—or armchair traveller—navigate an ancient land in modern times, reminding us to embrace its people, history, religions, and their many bewildering contradictions.”

—*Dr Lindsay Morton, Lecturer in Literature Studies, Avondale College of Higher Education*

“Pilgrimages are deeply personal and often transformative. Nathan Brown and his collaborators have shared their intimate stories of spiritual and cultural shifts as a result of visiting Israel, Jordan and Palestine. I was moved by these stories and, as I now re-read the scriptural texts, each encounter includes the smells, sounds and feelings that the authors so thoughtfully crafted.”

—*Dr Lisa Clark Diller, Professor of History, Southern Adventist University*

“Nathan Brown and his fellow travellers have delivered an interesting and inspiring account of their travels through the Holy Land. Their vivid writing style brings these places to life! A stimulating read that draws one not only deeper into the world of the Bible but also into some of the challenges we face in contemporary society.”

—*Dr Kayle de Waal, head, Avondale Seminary, and author, Mission Shift*

Copyright © 2019 by Nathan Brown, Michelle Villis and Brenton Stacey.

The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy of all facts and quotations as cited in this book.

Unless otherwise indicated, scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright © 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

For more about this book, as well as related video content, more photos and the opportunity to purchase additional copies, visit:

www.FalafelsandFollowingJesus.com

Proudly published and printed in Australia by

Signs Publishing

Warburton, Victoria.

This book was

Edited by Andy Nash

Proofread by Lindy Schneider

Cover and illustration design by Shane Winfield

Cover photo by Jacek Sopotnicki/iStockphoto

Internal photos provided by authors

Typeset in Berkeley Book 11.5/15

ISBN (print edition) 978 1 925044 88 1

ISBN (ebook edition) 978 1 925044 89 8

On the lake

It was everything you would imagine it to be: a beautiful afternoon, with a cool breeze that caressed the clear green water into small waves that rippled further into tessellated patterns reflecting and refracting the sunlight on the wooden side of the boat. The water smelled fresh. The captain had switched off the motor, and the waves gently slapped the bow as we drifted in a wide arc over the surface of the Sea of Galilee.

We could almost hear the hiss of the fishing nets as they were dropped into the clear deep water, and the calls and good-natured grumbling of the fishermen as they hauled the nets in again. We could imagine Jesus working with these fishermen, sharing in their work but also beginning to teach them about something so much bigger than fishing. We could almost hear His words—“Follow Me”—that would transform these same fisherman into people who would uniquely and truly change the world.

As we barely moved up and down with the quiet motion of the lake, we could see almost all of the low hills of Galilee to our west, with only the dramatic rise of Mount Arbel as the stand out. To the north and west rose the more dramatic ridges of the Golan Heights, and the Jordan Valley opened at the southern end of the lake. All of them were significant locations in the life and ministry of Jesus.

In the mild afternoon haze, these hills were painted in soft tones, using the palette of a thousand Bible story books. The same light danced on the water’s surface and glistened on the polished wood of the boat’s prow.

After a busy morning, our tour group was quiet, reflective and enchanted. We were each immersed in our memories of the stories of

this lake and experiences of the Jesus who seemed to so enjoy this small piece of His creation and the company of the ordinary people living along its shore. There was Magdala, home of Mary. And around the bend of the lake shore, Capernaum, home of Simon Peter. Then Bethsaida, home of Philip. And finally, the Gadarenes, home of two demoniacs who lived among the tombs. It was the same lake, the same water, the same breeze, the same light, the same hills.

It was a moment to be savoured and shared.

“Thank you,” said Peter—our group leader—quietly bringing this time of reflection to an end.

It was also a moment to be shattered.

“OK—music!” said Said, the Palestinian guide travelling with us through Israel, in his usual abrupt manner.

A moment later, a jaunty arrangement of “This Little Light of Mine” burst from speakers on board the boat, the volume a little above the level of comfortable listening. The diesel motor shuddered back into life and started chugging us back toward the shore from which we had come.

In the few minutes we had left on the boat as it meandered back to the jetty, we were treated to a lesson in Hebrew folk dancing and a mismatched assortment of cover versions of worship songs, a CD of which was available for purchase on board.

As the boat docked back at the jetty, we were each presented with a cheaply printed, poorly designed and curiously worded certificate: “This is an affirmation and a present from the Sea of Galilee where I . . . [FILL IN YOUR OWN NAME] . . . walked today at the same places where Jesus walked two thousand years ago.”

As we disembarked, we noticed the damage to some of the wood panelling on the side of the boat, revealing the wood as a façade affixed to its metal hull. And the next tour group was already making its way out along the jetty to take our place.

It was moment to cringe, perhaps to smirk.

Yet it was a moment to salvage and somehow redeem.

It was a moment on the lake.

Where this journey begins

Every journey has multiple starting points—as does this one.

One of the key starting points was the stories of Jesus that I was told by my parents from as early as I can remember. Then my teachers of children’s classes at church and Christian school teachers added their voices to re-telling these stories. Over time, with repetition and re-discovery, these stories became some of the most influential echoes in my life.

When I read *Cloudstreet* years later, I identified with the way Australian author Tim Winton described the resonance of these stories: “Those Bible stories and words weren’t the kind you forgot. It was like they happened to you all along, that they were your own memories. You didn’t always know what they meant, but you did know how they felt.”¹ Of course, the risk that comes with such familiarity is that it can be hard to hear them anew—and that these comfortable stories should also make us uncomfortable.

Which brings me to the next starting point. I had not previously had any opportunity or desire to visit the “Holy Land” and in my mind I had resisted the idea, perhaps jaded by the clichés of too many evangelists’ slide shows. But in early 2013, I was invited by my friend Andy Nash to join a trip he was leading to Israel. Andy then taught journalism and religion at Southern Adventist University, but after a life-changing and faith-affirming trip he took to Israel at a key point in his life,² he has been regularly leading groups to share in that experience of discovery and re-discovery.

It was January and Andy had a couple of places to fill in the group he was leading in May that year. He needed an answer that week.

I was hesitant about the potential for places much-loved in my

imagination—from the stories of my childhood and since—to be obscured by the “reality” of souvenir sellers, tour buses, the crush of pilgrims and the assorted gimmickry of holy tourism. I doubted whether the places would have the strength of character or atmosphere with so many overlaid centuries, traditions and contemporary distractions to offer an “authentic” or even useful experience or insight. And as my wife and I discussed it, we pondered the inevitable questions about the cost of such international travel and the safety concerns in what is portrayed as a constantly volatile and violent part of the world.

However, in the previous year, Andy and a couple of other respected friends had each independently and eagerly told me about trips they had taken to Israel and other “Bible lands” and the boost their respective trips had been to their faith, their interest in the Bible and their spiritual focus. The cumulative effect of their enthusiasm meant that I was more open to considering the opportunity when it arose.

After vacillating between enthusiasm, apathy and what else we could do with such international travel, my wife and I decided the possibilities—particularly in light of our friends’ testimonies—outweighed the risks. We booked our places as part of the tour group, worked out how far our frequent flyer points might get us and put it in our diaries.

A few months later, we found ourselves exploring Israel with 51 others, most of them from the United States. Our first major stop was four days in and around the Old City of Jerusalem—and my uncertainty and questions returned immediately.

Amid the historical and holy places, the competing church bells and calls to prayer, the seemingly endless markets, the crowds of tourists, pilgrims and worshippers, I was still wrestling with why I was there and what I hoped to gain by our decision to be part of the crowds and the craziness.

Many of the “holy” sites in Jerusalem left me feeling uncomfortable.

As C S Lewis' narrator in *Till We Have Faces* asks, "Why must holy places be dark places?" Not only were these usually the most crowded and the most contested places, they also were often enclosed in one way or another, controlling access to them and excluding those considered undesirable or not part of the privileged group. And from where I observed, the faith in the holiness of these sites—the belief that, by visiting this place or touching that stone, a pilgrim is able to access or even earn some measure of blessing—felt a lot like superstition. As we visited site after site, walking the old streets with our straggling group, my "holy place" discomfort nagged at me.

But I stumbled across something more on the morning we visited the traditional site of the Upper Room in which Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, washing their feet, offering them the bread and wine, and going from there to Gethsemane and ultimately His crucifixion. I had been doing some research and reading around John's story of the foot washing (see John 13:1–17) for a writing project the previous week,³ so as I walked into that room, I was hit with the power of that story.

I realised we were in Israel not to visit holy places but to rediscover holy stories—stories that have been handed down in ancient texts and communities of faith. As they are told and retold, these stories are accessible and adaptable to all of humanity—they are essential stories about what it means to be human—and, as they come to us, they remind us where we came from, who we are and what it means to follow Jesus in our lives today.

Visiting Israel was one way to re-engage, to re-imagine, to go deeper into those stories. We saw the places in which they happened—or might have happened. We explored the hills, the lake, the wilderness, the city and a taste of the cultures that feature in the stories. And in our group, we re-told the stories. Because of those experiences, those holy stories would be different in their re-reading

and future re-telling.

Two years later, Andy invited me to assist him in leading another trip to Israel. I recruited a number of friends and connections from Australia to join the group and co-led some of the site commentary and worships along the way.

Shortly before departing on that 2015 trip, I was contacted by Peter Roennfeldt, someone I had known only a little previously, who asked me to read a book manuscript he had been working on. Peter has been a long-time pastor, evangelist, church-planter and departmental leader in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Early in his ministry, he visited the Middle East, studied in Jerusalem, later cultivated mission across the region, and has since led dozens of tour and study groups through various parts of the “Bible lands.”

Drawing on his intimate knowledge with the places of the stories of Jesus, his manuscript detailed the method of Jesus’ disciple-making, as He invited, called, commissioned, equipped and empowered His disciples to continue His ministry in the world. It seemed to make sense to read this manuscript while visiting many of the places featured in it. As it happened, during our trip, we also crossed paths on a couple of occasions with the tour group Peter was leading at the same time. It began a valued working relationship.

We launched Peter’s manuscript as the book *Following Jesus*⁴ in early 2017—and we have since published two more books together. As his editor, I have been privileged to read his material more closely and more often than I suspect anyone else ever will. I have also been able to make some small contributions to them in the editing processes and then to share them with thousands of readers.

Working with Peter and his books has given me new perspectives on the stories of Jesus. As historian and friend Lisa Clark Diller would remind me, the stories of Jesus are not merely stories but specific history—real things that happened in real times and real places. But Peter would add that these stories are also models and

methods for what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus in our own lives, in our own times and places today.

During our trip in 2015, I talked with Andy about the idea of writing a book about the journey through Israel, with the intention of trying to share some of the experience with people who might not have the opportunity to visit these places or who might be curious about what a trip such as this might offer. For others, it would remind them of a once-in-a-lifetime trip and offer a different perspective on the stories and places they have experienced in their own ways.

Having worked with Peter and his books for the previous three years, the opportunity to travel with him in these places he knows so well was appealing. While the stories and perspectives in this book are based on my experiences and reflections, as tour leader and book author, Peter is a strong influence and I am grateful for his support of this project. I also shared this trip with a group of fellow Australians, and their voices and reflections also contributed to this book, particularly those of Michelle Villis and Brenton Stacey, who have added some of their own reflections and discoveries from their experiences of this journey. I am grateful for their specific additions to this book and for the journey we shared.

I recognise that it has been a great privilege to visit these places on three occasions in the past few years. It is not something that many people get to experience even once. It is not that a pilgrimage to a holy site promises spiritual credit. It doesn't get us closer to heaven, but it is something that countless followers of Jesus have experienced over many centuries in search of a deeper connection with Him and His story. Even many contemporary churches and denominations have sponsored pastors and students, academics and evangelists, on such study tours over the years, seeing value in such experiences.

So this is my attempt to share something of the experiences of these places and their holy stories. May it contribute to your journey of following Jesus and its many new beginnings.

And, yes, this journey also begins with a long plane trip. When you're from Australia, most journeys do.

1. Tim Winton (1991), *Cloudstreet* (Reprint edition), Scribner, 2002, page 151.
2. Read Andy Nash's story in *Paper God: Stumbling Through Failure to a Deeper Faith*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2010.
3. My writing on this story was published as a "Reader Response"—"The God Who Stoops" in Kendra Haloviak Valentine, *Signs to Life: Reading and Responding to John's Gospel*, Signs Publishing Company, 2013.
4. See Peter Roennfeldt, *Following Jesus: Disciple-making and Movement-building*, Signs Publishing Company, 2017.

DAY 1

From Amman to Decapolis

Flying into Amman, Jordan, feels like landing on some remote science-fiction desert planet. The flight from Dubai makes its way up the middle of the Persian Gulf before closely following the border between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, across the Arabian desert. The blue of the sea gives way to the sandy orange desert, all of it shrouded in a hot dusty haze, even by 9 am.

As the plane crosses into Jordanian airspace and begins its descent into Amman, the colours become more brown and we can begin to pick out spots of houses, orchards and occasional small patches of irrigated green. As we descend further, the flat and featureless ground gains more features. The undulating rocky hills are interspersed with dry water courses, but trees remain rare except for the cultivated olive groves and other occasional orchards.

Most of the members of our tour group were on this one flight. I had flown from Australia through the night—one of those long nights that somehow fits 18 hours between 6 pm and 6 am as we fly with the night about a third of the way around the world—with another three hours from Dubai to Amman.

The airport arrival processes were routine, if by “routine” we understand that everything takes longer than expected and only one member of our group has not had her luggage arrive on the same flight. Two other would-be travellers were flying from Papua New Guinea but had been delayed in Manila. So, when we met our group leader Peter and local guide Jaber in the airport forecourt, we had 29 people to begin the tour—with 28 suitcases between us.

We boarded one of the ubiquitous tour buses waiting in front of the Queen Alia International Airport and our drive into Amman was our

first look at Jordan at ground level. It was still dry and rocky, but around the increasing numbers of square, flat-roofed buildings in a variety of tones of beige—generally two to three storeys in height—there were various agricultural activities from small flocks of sheep to olive groves, rows of greenhouses growing vegetables and occasional attempts at gardens. Scattered haphazardly across open areas of land were Bedouin encampments with their tents, squatter shanties and animals, including multi-coloured sheep and goats, donkeys and sometimes camels.

The vacant land was rocky and dotted with sparse low bushes in various shades of drab green. There's a reason that shade of green is known as olive green—and olives seemed to be the dominant trees. The small cypress trees seemed insubstantial. The highway was wide but we soon noticed that there were no lane markings on any of the major roads, the traffic simply forming its own lanes as needed.

Then amid the monotonous colour scheme that we had so quickly settled into, the massive blue box and garish yellow signage of an IKEA store appeared beside the highway, and we were reminded we were on the outskirts of a capital city in the 21st-century world.

The nation of Jordan is a relatively recent creation. Like many of the nations of the Middle East, it was the result of faded empires imposing their strategic interests on the disparate tribes, people and geographies of this region. In the midst of World War I and the British Empire's confrontation with the Turks of the Ottoman Empire, Lawrence of Arabia was commissioned with the task of uniting the Bedouin tribes in the south of Jordan, particularly Aqaba and Wadi Rum, to fight the Ottomans on this front of the war. This led to the Arab uprising of 1916, for which their reward was the establishment of the nation of Jordan—with the continued supervision and support of the British and their allies—and the inauguration of the royal family that continues to rule Jordan today.

Jordan is a country of about 9.5 million people that is about 88 per cent Sunni Muslim and 10 to 12 per cent Christian. Jordanians pride

themselves on being a tolerant and stable society in contrast with many of the surrounding nations. As a somewhat neutral nation, Jordan has been able to provide a safe destination for about 3 million refugees—depending on whether one is relying on official or unofficial figures—primarily from Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Egypt. When the displacement of refugees by the Syrian civil war was at its height in 2015, the Za’atari refugee camp in the country’s north was the fourth largest “city” in Jordan.

To support this large additional population and build infrastructure in such harsh terrain, Jordanians pay high taxes. Unlike many of the neighbouring Arab countries—merely pumping oil out of the ground—Jordanians argue that they have had to work for their economic development. However, Jordan has been blessed with its own historical resources. Predominantly around the World Heritage site and “Wonder of the World” cliché of Petra, tourism makes up as much as 25 per cent of the national economy, with about 4 million tourist arrivals each year. Now we had joined that crowd.

Our first destination was the Amman Citadel, an archaeological site in the centre of the city of 3 million people. It was a good introduction to the layers of history, culture and religion that are part of many of the historical sites in this region, with evidence of human habitation and graves dated back to the third millennium BC. In Old Testament times, this was the land of the Ammonites, and this was the city of Rabbah besieged by Joab and the Israelite army, while David remained in Jerusalem (see 2 Samuel 11:1). After David’s sin with Bathsheba, it was in the attack on Rabbah that David instructed that Uriah be left alone facing the defenders of the city, meaning that he would be killed.

About 1000 years later, the city was known as Philadelphia, one of the 10 Roman cities of the Decapolis mentioned a number of times in the gospels. Nine of these cities were on the eastern side of the Jordan River, meaning they were situated in what is the nation of Jordan today.

As our guide led us over the site, we took turns ducking under the few low trees that offered some shade. The midday sun bit into our skin and the glare challenged our jet-lagged eyes.

The exposed and ruin-strewn hilltop stood out from the densely populated hillsides that surrounded it and the collection of glass-fronted towers growing on the ridge to the north. To the east a huge Jordanian flag in black, red, green and white, with its seven-pointed star, was held aloft by the midday breeze, marking the nation's parliament building. It was Sunday but a regular business day in Amman, which takes its weekend on Friday and Saturday. The quietness of the archaeological site and the tourists reading the information signs and taking photos was punctuated by traffic noise, car horns and an occasional siren from the city below.

The centrepiece on the Citadel site is the four imposing columns that mark the Roman-era Temple of Hercules. While only a single hand of the statue it housed has been found, the size of that hand suggests a statue 13 metres (42 feet) tall. The marble hand now takes pride of place in the "rock garden" in front of the site's small museum building.

By the sixth century, parts of the Roman temple has been repurposed for a Christian church with the carved stone capitals from the temple's columns seeming a little out of place in the more modest setting of the church building. And in the 8th century, this was the centre of an Islamic city, much of which was damaged in a major earthquake in 749, before being rebuilt again. Perhaps naturally, the Muslim architecture has been most restored and a wooden dome has been constructed over the entrance hall to the palace complex. However, the entrance hall is cross-shaped in design having been adapted from an earlier Byzantine Christian structure. Whatever its antecedents, it offered the best shade on the hilltop and the cooler interior that is to be found in an ancient stone building even on the hottest of days.

At the bottom of the Citadel hill is a Roman amphitheatre, harking

back again to that empire. There are 25 major intact Roman amphitheatres around the Mediterranean; 12 of these are in Jordan and we expect to visit five of them in the course of our trip, but three on the first day seemed indulgent. In Amman, the ancient amphitheatre would seat about 6000 people and now forms part of a downtown plaza, on the edge of which our bus deposited us. We were left to explore the amphitheatre and find some lunch in the streets nearby.

Through the midday warmth, traffic fumes and more cigarette smoke than we were used to, some of the members of our group found our way to a local produce market. Stalls lined the street and wound back into a number of alleyways behind, offering crates of pomegranates, dates, figs, the fruit of the prickly pear cactus—probably the “prickly pear” itself—large bunches of grapes and a wide selection of more familiar fruits. There were also mounds of vegetables, including tomatoes, eggplants, cucumbers, radishes and all kinds of green leafy vegetables. Then there were stands of nuts and spices, all displayed with a sense of artistry and abundance.

As we approached, the volume of the stall holders increased but when our freshly exchanged large note was beyond the capacity of the first stall holder to make change, with a shrug and a smile, he simply gave us the string of loquats we had wanted to purchase from him. We bought fresh flat bread, dates, nuts and bananas, and returning to the plaza, found some other members of our group sitting and eating in an area of shade. As we shared and ate portions of our purchases, we were feeling proud of our success in “foraging” in this new land and that it was good, simple food. As I peeled a large banana, I noticed the sticker on it: “Premium Bananas—Product of Ecuador”.

In the afternoon, we headed to the north of Amman to Jerash, another of the Decapolis cities and “one of the best-preserved ruins of the ancient world.” Without needing to wrestle with any strangers in the night (see Genesis 32:22–32), we crossed the River Jabbock,

which marked the northern boundary of the historical Ammonite lands. In the time of Jesus and in the closing centuries of the Roman Empire, Jerash was a major city with a population of more than 20,000. As a comparison, Jerusalem at the time of Jesus had a population of about 25,000.

Also known as Gerasa, Jerash has two more of the Roman amphitheatres we had been told about, an impressive circular plaza and main-street cardo lined by stone columns, two significant temple ruins, a city wall totalling almost 3.5 kilometres (more than 2 miles) and Hadrian's Gate, built to commemorate the emperor's visit in 130 AD. The most impressive of these Roman features were built in the second century AD and were mostly destroyed by the earthquake in 749. Like the citadel in Amman, there are also the later additions on the site, including 13 Christian churches from the fifth and sixth centuries. For example, the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damianus boasts a rare mosaic on its floor, likely preserved by the accident of being buried under the earthquake ruins and thus escaping the destruction of such images and statues under the later Islamic rulers. The mosaic floor is enclosed in the walls and viewed from above, but open to the weather. One of our group asked Jaber about the care of the mosaic and he explained that as they are composed of natural stone they will not be damaged by the elements but that if a roof was put over the church, visitors would expect to go inside to view the mosaics, risking much greater damage.

Much of ancient Jerash remains un-excavated. To the west, seemingly vacant land—with enough fallen stones strewn about to entice any would-be archaeologist—stretches up the hillside to sections of the city wall, beyond which the town resumes. To the east of the cardo, the ground falls away to a small stream and the modern town is built over much of the original site beyond that. Jaber pointed out a distant archway, visible between two modern houses, that was part of the old wall. But what is visible establishes Jerash as a major historical site and gives a glimpse of an almost-forgotten city

that would have been an important regional centre in the times of Jesus and the early church.

As we walked down the main street of the ancient city, the forest of columns looked grim in the grey heat of a cloudy late afternoon, with each column seeming to stretch skyward in an empty search for what it used to be. But the ancient paving stones were uneven and broken underfoot, meaning we could not allow our attention to be drawn too high as we walked wearily back toward our bus.

Our group met back at the entry hall, with its line-up of souvenir stalls and refreshment stands—and persistent hawkers. After the afternoon heat, the sweat expended climbing the steep amphitheatre stairs, and the fine white dust that clung to our shoes and anywhere else it reached, the water, other drinks including freshly squeezed pomegranate juice and assorted ice-creams attracted the attention of many of the members of our group.

By the time the bus dropped us at our hotel in downtown Amman, jet-lag was taking its toll, the missing suitcase remained missing despite repeated calls to the airport and the evening traffic continued to jostle past, with the neon signs of a Pizza Hut and a Popeye's across the busy street coming into their own amid the gathering dusk. And Jordan already felt a little less unfamiliar.

In many ways, Jordan is an in-between place, a relatively recent re-formulation of an ancient land that for most tellings of history is a place people simply cross or come from. More often, history seems to have happened to Jordan's neighbours, even the occasional Bible stories that mentioned places in this region. Today, apart from Petra—almost eclipsed by Petra—the rest of Jordan is largely overlooked as a focus of tourist attention.

By most measures, it was a remarkable first day, but for reasons of travel and geography, it was a somewhat jumbled introduction. Among some in the group, there was an anxiousness to get more directly to Jesus. But both history and the journeys to discover it rarely take us in straight lines. And sleep was the most necessary task

End of product sample

This product is available at:

AdventistBookCentre.com.au



Australia