

# My Experience at Shepherds 360

By PAUL J. SCHARF

For the third October in a row, it was my privilege to attend the Shepherds 360 Church Leaders Conference in Cary, N.C., and to help oversee an exhibit there for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.

I had heard of this conference previously, but I was specifically encouraged to attend by Dr. Tim Sigler, who had become the new provost and dean at Shepherds Theological Seminary. He and I were once fellow students at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary. STS is housed in The Shepherd's Church, and the school has hosted the conference each year since 2014.

From the first time I attended, I have felt like this conference was sort of a homecoming event—even though my three visits there are the only three times I have been in North Carolina! I immediately saw several people that I knew—whether it was through The Friends of Israel, IFCA International or other connections that I already had. In the years that followed, I have become very comfortable at the conference, and have made new friends and important ministry connections, as well.

This year I was joined by Cameron Joyner, an FOI church and field ministries representative from Georgia, and I was able to spend much time with him, as well. For the second year in a row, I also had the opportunity to present a workshop at the conference. I count this as a truly great honor, and one which I have thoroughly enjoyed.<sup>1</sup>

If I had to describe Shepherds 360 in two words, it would be *sensory overload*—and it seems that is the intended effect. By the standard of other conferences that I attend, this one easily includes four days' worth of material, condensed into three. And both the Monday and Wednesday are actually shorter days—so Tuesday is very full.

The speakers for the general sessions are normally nationally known figures who are experts on the topics they are called to address—even though some of them would not share all of the convictions that define the host church and seminary. Regulars include host pastor Dr. Stephen Davey, Dr. Erwin Lutzer and Attorney David Gibbs III (all of which serve as faculty in the STS doctor of ministry program) and Dr. Albert Mohler.

The conference provides a very generous slate of workshops on many fascinating subjects, by highly qualified presenters—forcing attendees to make difficult choices and plan ahead. I also find it noteworthy that the seminary does not merely use these as opportunities to advertise the school, but graciously allows many others (like myself) to contribute. In fact, there were several other colleges and seminaries directly represented this year, whether in speaking roles or by exhibits.

Organizers truly produce a first-class event, and always go out of their way to make sure that everyone is comfortable and well-cared for. These are all reasons that the conference has garnered national attention, and attracted more than 840 attendees this year.

If I had the ability to make any changes, I might extend the conference to a fourth day. I would also cut the number of keynote presentations and allow more time to spread out the workshops. The keynotes are all very well done, but sometimes I find that I just have to take the hour off and watch it in the lobby by video, as I catch up on some work—or continue a significant conversation that I have begun with someone off the cuff. As I said—*sensory overload!*

This year, I added my own fourth day, if you will, by going early and attending The Shepherd's Church on the Sunday before the conference. There were two hours, each presented twice that day. The Adult Bible Fellowships all met together in the chapel to hear a panel discussion on "The Bible and Future Events," led by Dr. Sigler and including Dr. Larry Pettegrew, Dr. Michael Vlach and Dr. Mark Bailey, chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary—and also a general session speaker this year, and faculty for the STS D.Min. program. (The same panel also presented another discussion as a workshop during the conference.)

Dr. Lutzer preached the morning sermon, speaking about preparing for the onset of persecution. As I went through the morning, I thought to myself how astounding it is that those who attend this local church are able to participate in these kinds of world-class events on a regular basis.

For those looking at seminaries, I would definitely recommend that they seriously consider STS. The combination of an incredibly strong resident faculty with nationally recognized adjunct professors—all teaching in an intimate academic environment inside of a local church—is extremely attractive. Seminary programs include the opportunity to study in Israel, and the school remains staunchly committed to dispensational theology and the importance of Israel.

I can't wait to go back next October—and I hope to see you there!

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<sup>1</sup> In 2020, my workshop was titled, "The Geneva Bible: The Source of America's Love for Israel." In 2021, I built on that presentation and extended the title with these words: "How Did It Become Pro-Israel?"