

Prayer Update From Israel (January 2, 2017)



1. THE RETURN OF JACOB'S FLOCK.

“For this is what Adonai YHVH says, ‘I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land...’ (Ezekiel 34: 11-13)

“He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young” (Isaiah 40:11).

“Go...to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” (Matthew 10:6).

“For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (I Peter 2:25).

Genesis 30 in the Hebrew Bible records how Jacob, during the latter years of a sojourn under his father-in-law Laban in Haran, carried out a most unusual breeding program among his master’s flocks. By agreement, Jacob would receive as wages the sheep and goats which were “streaked, speckled and gray-spotted” in their markings. But the breeding resulted in the sheep and goats allotted to Jacob multiplying exceedingly, while Laban’s flocks diminished. Genesis 31:4-13 strongly implies that this happened not as a result of the “old Jacob’s” deceptive scheming. Rather, it was a miraculous occurrence brought about through his obedience to instructions given him by the Angel of God in a dream. In the end, God blessed Jacob with massive flocks of a new breed which were indeed all “streaked, speckled and gray-spotted” in their markings.

In a strange, remarkable story, a remnant of what appears to be this same kind of sheep, a breed now long extinct in the Middle East, has been genetically identified in the nations, has

been given the name “Jacob Sheep”—and during the past two months, has after 4000 years been re-introduced into the land of Israel!

It all came about through the vision and labors of a Jewish (now Israeli) couple Gil and Jenna Lewinsky, who, after having acquired a few of the sheep from a heritage farm, began some years ago raising them at their home near Vancouver, British Columbia. Along with their shepherding, awakened a dream—that they might one day be able actually to reintroduce this ancient breed into the land of their forefathers, in which the sheep had themselves once found pasture! According to the Lewinsky’s, the “Jacob sheep” has been traced back by genetic markings to the Middle East in the region of Syria, from where, several thousand years ago, the breed is thought to have been transferred to North Africa. From Africa, Moorish invaders carried the sheep to Spain, from which they were later introduced into England. Eventually, some were brought to North America. A reasonable speculation is that the initial journey to North Africa came about when the children of Jacob, who had brought the sheep to Canaan from Haran, travelled with all their herds to Egypt (as recounted in this week’s Torah Portion!): “*And Joseph went and told Pharaoh, and said, “My father and my brothers, their flocks and their herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; and indeed they are in the land of Goshen”* (Genesis 47:1). In Goshen, the breed became incorporated into North African flocks. 400 years later, when the Children of Israel departed Egypt in the Exodus, this particular breed doesn’t appear to have been among the flocks which returned with them to Canaan. (“Biblical sheep in Israel for first time in millennia”: *The Times of Israel*, 6 December 2016).

This strange and unique breed bears both sheep and goat characteristics. (Interestingly, both sheep and goats are mentioned as having been involved in the supernaturally-assisted breeding described in Genesis.) Besides their distinctive coloration, the Jacob sheep often grow not only two, but four or even six horns! The Lewinsky’s plan was to get a flock of Jacob sheep into Israel, where they would be kept on rental property until acquisition of a permanent place in which to shepherd them. However, from the beginning, the realization of that vision has met with difficulties. Canada wasn’t on a list of countries approved for exporting livestock to Israel, and the Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry refused to grant approval for allowing them into the country. In the end, it took three years, including a visit to the farm from Israel’s ambassador to Canada, whose influence assisted in persuading the Agriculture Ministry to make a special exception. Meanwhile, the homecoming of the Jacob sheep had begun to capture attention around the world. A website www.jacobsheep.com gave information and sought to raise awareness and financial support. Stories appeared in *Israel HaYom*, *The Israel Times* and such main-stream media as *New York Times*, *Modern Farmer*. Israelis jumped in to help—some volunteering to help build accommodations where the sheep will be protected from theft and wolves until the quarantine process is over. When approval from the Agriculture Ministry finally arrived, other “red tape” impediments arose, making it uncertain until the last minute when the transferal would begin. Then the plans for airlifting the flock to Israel became fouled. Israel’s El Al airlines, which reportedly had agreed last summer to subsidize 90% of the cost, could not now be utilized because the pilots were on strike. The Lewinsky’s were forced, at enormous cost, to make use of other airlines.

Finally, on November 30th, after three long years, the first of 119 heritage “Jacob” sheep began arriving by air in Israel! A joyous Gil Lewinsky saw their arrival as accompanied by a special “sign”—

“It was spectacular; the [first group] arrived exactly as rain started to fall. It was quite a relief; It’s been so hot and dry in Israel, and with all of these fires, and then suddenly we’re having a rainfall and the sheep are here. It is so surreal to know they’re actually here, though we still have to get through the quarantine. We are bringing part of Jewish history back to the homeland, and it’s great to be part of that.” (Ibid.).

We also see as significant the return of the “Jacob sheep” to the land at this time—a “sign” drawing our attention in a prophetic way to what God is doing, after thousands of years, in bringing the (human) flock of Jacob home. We are referring to a people who (as with these sheep) have for over 4000 years (2000 of them scattered among the nations) maintained miraculously a genetic distinction extending back to Fathers, who were (again, like the sheep) supernaturally set apart as a special race and people.

Consider the following verses from the prophet Ezekiel, related to the “Good Shepherd” YHVH, and his sheep Israel.

(Chapter 34 NIV)

11. “For this is what the Sovereign LORD [Adonai YHVH] says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. 12. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. 13. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. 14. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15. I myself will lead my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. 16. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.”

25. “I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of savage beasts so that they may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forests in safety.” 26. “I will make them and the places surrounding my hill a blessing. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing.”

29. “I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. 30. Then they will know that I, YHVH their God, am with them and that they, the Israelites, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. 31. You are My sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD.” (Ezekiel 34:29-31)

Notice:

* (vs 13) The Sovereign LORD will search for them among the nations where they have been scattered, and bring them back into *their own land*.

* (vss 13-14) After bringing them back, He will pasture them *“on the mountains of Israel”* (three times). Remember, in Scripture, “mountains of Israel” refers to the area of Judea and Samaria, commonly referred to today as the West Bank.

* (vs 13b) *“...and in all the settlements in the land.”* (vs 13b)

* (vs 25) *“rid the land of savage beasts so that they may live...in safety.”* In the story above, the enclosures are built to protect the new sheep from wolves.

* (vs 26) *“I will send down showers in season; there shall be showers of blessing.”* The arrival of the sheep in Israel coincided with the arrival of the “Former Rains” which had been withheld.

* (vs 2) *“I will make them and the places surrounding my hill a blessing.”* “My hill” is the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, a place of relationship to Israel in recent UN votes. It is the center of contention for the nations, and will remain so until the Chief Shepherd, the Prince of Peace sits on His throne there! It is **He** (not the presence of “three mono-theistic religions”) who will make the hill and its surroundings a blessing!

PLEASE PRAY:

*** That God’s plans for the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” as foretold in the above Scripture passages, will come to fruition. That the obstacles to *Aliyah* (as exemplified in difficulties of bringing home the Jacob sheep) will be overcome; that He will find and bring His sheep home.**

***That in the Land, they will come into a knowing and loving relationship with the true “Shepherd and overseer of their souls”; that they will be established and settled in their land.**

*** That blessings attend the Lewinsky family and their “flock”. That God grant to them deeper revelation regarding the significance of this holy and prophetically-charged venture of which they have played so significant a part.**



THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION:

From ancient times there has been a weekly portion (Parashah) from the first five books of Moses (The Torah) and an ending (Haftarah) from the Prophets read on the Sabbath in synagogues around the world. This portion is given a Hebrew name drawn from the opening words of the Torah passage. An illustration of this practice appears to have been recorded in Luke 4:16 where Yeshua (Jesus) arrived in the synagogue in Nazareth and was asked to read the portion (Isaiah 61) from the Prophets. We have found that in perusing these weekly readings, not only are we provided opportunity to identify in the context of God's Word with millions of Jewish people around the world, but very often the Holy Spirit will illumine specific passages pertinent that week in our intercession for the Land and people of Israel. All texts are those of English translations of the Scriptures.

The readings for this week 1-7 January 2017 are called *VaYiggash*— “And He [Judah] Drew Near”:

TORAH: Genesis 44:18—47:27

HAFTARAH: Ezekiel 37:15-28

***Genesis 44:18; 46:28.** “*Then he [Judah] drew near to him [Joseph]...*” There is no question that the story of Joseph and his brothers provides a prophetic picture of Yeshua/Jesus and His “own” (i.e. the Hebrew people) who rejected Him—but to whom He will one day be revealed as “risen from the dead” to provide salvation. He continues to love them with an everlasting love and to “draw” them with loving kindness (Jeremiah 31:3). In His grace, many are already “drawing near” to God, confessing their sin and inadequacy as did the brothers. At the close of last week’s Portion Judah confessed: “**What shall we say to my Lord? What shall we speak? How can we make ourselves righteous? God has brought out the iniquity of your servants!**”. As they do so, Yeshua, like Joseph, miraculously reveals Himself to them! (Zechariah 2:9, 11) And this picture of His kindness, His salvation for Israel is itself a portrait of the same love and righteousness He offers on behalf of all humankind!

PLEASE PRAY: for more and more in Israel to be led in God's kindness to repentance and to respond to His call to "draw near."

***Genesis 44:20, 30-34.** *"We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, who is young; his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.'... 'Now, therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, it will happen, when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die. So your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave.'"*

Twenty-two years earlier, the jealousy and hatred in their hearts towards Joseph had calloused the hearts of the brothers towards their father's feelings to the extent that they greatly dishonored Jacob when they abused the son he loved. "It is the Lord's mercies which lead us to repentance." We see now how a genuine respectful, familial tenderness has at last been awakened towards the feelings of their Father. Malachi 4:5-6 tells of a day when God's prophetic word will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, before the coming of the "great and dreadful day of the LORD."

***Genesis 46:28.** *"Then he (Jacob) sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out before him the way to Goshen. And they came to the land of Goshen."* Beginning in Chapter 43 and more strongly emphasized here, the mantle of leadership shifts from Reuben to Judah. From here on, a special precedence will be given to this tribe— **"Judah goes first"**! From Jacob's blessing regarding a scepter of royalty (Gen. 49:8); to leadership of the armies marching towards Canaan (Numbers 10:14); to the securing of the land in the time of the Judges (Judges 1:2), to the Kingship of David; to the birth of the Messiah in the City of David; to Zechariah's prophecy of the Last Days when *"The LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem"* but *"will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater than that of Judah"* (Zechariah 2:12; 12:7)—God has chosen that this tribe shall lead (See also I Chronicles 5:2).

There is much of significance which may be drawn from this...but perhaps the most immediate point would be related to the name itself, **Yehudah** (Judah), given by Leah at his birth (Genesis 29:35). The word means *"Thankful praise expressed by the raising of the hands"*.

PLEASE PRAY: for a fresh awakening of thanksgiving and praise amongst the Body in Israel, with an awareness that this must come first (II Chron. 20:21-22). It is such thankful praise which will lead Israel into victories and into the true place of her inheritance in Messiah. Pray that the Lord will indeed *"take possession of praise"* in the Holy Land (Zechariah 2:12), that it will be released to His glory in Spirit and in Truth.

***Ezekiel 37:21-23.** *"Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with*

their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will purify them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God.”

PLEASE PRAY: that the Spirit who ‘convicts of sin and righteousness and judgment’ would be poured out on Israel in increasing measure, bringing her to a place where God can reveal the Purification which has been prepared for her—so that Israel may indeed dwell in his land of covenant forever (vs. 25).

***Ezekiel 37:21-22.** *“I will...bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again”* (Emphases ours).

It is plain that God still sees the Land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’s seed forever as being “their own land.” As mentioned in the leading story above, the “mountains of Israel” refers to that same area currently labelled the “West Bank” and slated by much of the world to be split off, forming “two nations side by side” each with its own leader. From these two verses, it is clear that such a “two–state” solution made up of two nations and with two different leaders is not, nor will ever be God’s plan. Only He can bring divided Israel back and make them *one nation* in this same section of His land in which the promises in Shechem, Bethel and Hebron were made. Hence, the huge warfare already raging and which will continue until Israel comes into relation with her God, the final battle is won, and God’s Kingdom is established there (Ezekiel 38-39).

PLEASE PRAY: That God’s kingdom come in the returning Children of Israel and in the Mountains of Israel—Judea, Jerusalem and Samaria. Pray for a renewed sense of stewardship of Jews in Israel regarding all which God says is “their own land”—and an awareness of Who must be trusted to bring it to pass if it is never to be divided into two kingdoms again.

***Ezekiel 37:24-25.** *“David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd...My servant David shall be their prince forever.”* In Hebrew tradition (and today among many Messianic believers in the land), it is assumed that this passage refers to a resurrected David, the “shepherd king” son of Jesse. It is of interest that the “Prince” who begins to be mentioned in Ezekiel 45:7 and who ministers in the midst of the mysterious Temple described there is designated with the same Hebrew word *nasi* as the word for “prince” here. David’s often stated desire was that he might “dwell in the house of the YHVH forever.”).

PLEASE PRAY: That God’s government come into place in this land. Both in the near and in the distant future, may *His Kingdom Come!*



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[The readings for next week (8-14 January 2017) are called *VaYechi*— “And He [Jacob] Lived”. TORAH: Genesis 47:28—50:26; HAFTARAH: I Kings 2:1-12]

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