

Prayer Update From Israel (December 21, 2015)



Cloud over the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem
“Judah is a lion’s cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up!”

(Genesis 49:9a. See Torah Portion below)

1. YOM KIPPUR DECLARED AN OFFICIAL HOLIDAY AT THE UN.

Last Thursday, for the first time in its 70 year history, the United Nations approved a Jewish holy day—Yom Kippur (“The Day of Atonement”)— as one of its official “holidays.” Until now, ten holidays (including the Christian *Christmas* and *Good Friday* and the Islamic *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*) have been recognized at the UN. Considered the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, diplomatic efforts had been underway for over two years to have *Yom Kippur* added to that list. Our friend Tomas Sandell, Founding Director of the *European Coalition for Israel* (ECI), relates that the idea “*was first floated by ECI in a meeting with the Israeli government in the summer of 2013. Only a few weeks later on October 1st, then Deputy Foreign Minister Zeev Elkin presented the request to the Deputy Secretary General of the UN Jan Eliasson in conjunction with the High level week of the 68th session of the UN General Assembly.*” (1)

From that began a period of active campaigning by the Israeli Permanent Mission to the UN and ECI. In May of 2014, an open letter was released to all UN member states by Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Ron Prosor, describing the initiative and requesting their support.. Some 60 nations came to support adding *Yom Kippur* to the list of holidays; but objections by Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia, kept it from happening. A year ago, a decision was made in the UN to acknowledge in principle that *Yom Kippur* is a day holy to the Jewish people; yet Arab states continued working to delay official recognition. In the end, US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power is seen as having played a crucial role in working out a compromise procedure which effectively prevented the anti-Israel majority from blocking the resolution. Along with the acceptance of *Yom Kippur*, several other religious holidays would at the same time be granted UN recognition. The American *Presidents’ Day* would become a floating holiday, which could

be replaced by any of the religious holidays. No official meetings or votes would take place on these days, from which employees would then choose which they will take off.

Israel's Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon, who has quietly had a hand in keeping the efforts going, called it "a decisive victory" which "finally provides an official place for the Jewish religion in the world's parliament." Emphasizing that Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year for Jews, which should have been recognized by the UN years ago, Danon said that "the value of justice, anchored in Jewish tradition and thought, will finally find its place in the family of nations, and be part of the UN's history." (2) (3) And, as ECI Director for UN Affairs Gregory Lafitte observed, "This decision shows that Israel has many more friends at the UN than those who stand with Israel in critical votes. By highlighting the universal values of the Jewish holidays, we can bring nations closer to Israel as we at the same time strengthen the values of the UN charter." (4)

PLEASE PRAY:

* **Thanksgiving for the bringing about of fair representation in the UN not only of an issue relevant to Jews and to Israel (which is so often disparaged there), but one relating to the appointed times of YHVH (Leviticus 23:2, 4), who is the God of all peoples.**

* **That, as observed by Mr. Lafitte above, "By highlighting the universal values of the Jewish holidays, we can bring nations closer to Israel as we at the same time strengthen the values of the UN charter."**

* **Grace for wisdom, vision, direction, and favour (along with supply and protection) for those organizations like ECI, which God has raised up into high places of governmental influence around the world...influence to "Kingdom" values of righteousness, justice, integrity and honour of virtue.**

(1) **"Holiday miracle in New York: UN recognizes Yom Kippur as official holiday": ECI press release, 21 Dec 2015.**

(2) **"Yom Kippur declared official UN holiday": ynetnews.com, 12/18/15, 09:29**

(3) **"After diplomatic battle, UN recognizes Yom Kippur as official holiday": jpost.com, 12/18/2015**

(4) **"Holiday miracle in New York..."**

2. O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM.

*"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
For from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."*

Matthew 2:6 (Paraphrasing Micah 5:2)



Intersection of Bethlehem Road and Judah Street in Jerusalem

*The street sign on the left reads **Derekh Beit Lehem***—literally, “**Way to the House of Bread**”. It was to this house of bread—Bethlehem—that during the time of the Judges Ruth had come with Naomi, even as the grain was in harvest. From her came a son Obed, whose grandson was David the King.

A thousand years later, it was also here, in the House of Bread, this “City of David”, that the “**Bread of Life**” came into our world—“*the true bread given by the Father which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world...living bread, that one may eat of it and not die*” (John 6:32-33, 48, 50). Born to a Jewish virgin named Miriam (English: Mary), He was laid in a manger in Bethlehem.

“And there were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks...”

The first to visit this “*ruler who would shepherd his people Israel*” were shepherds watching over their flocks on a nearby hillside.



Hill just north of Bethlehem

He would be called *Yeshua*—“**Yehovah is Salvation**”—because He would save His people from their sin (Matt. 1:21).

We pray a blessings of joy and shalom over our many readers in the Nations who will this week be celebrating the birth of Yeshua—Jesus, the Bread of Life—in Bethlehem; whose coming forth into our world in that tiny hamlet brought nourishment and life from the Father for all! We are so grateful for your voices joining with the angels (and your brothers and sisters here!) in proclaiming to the returned House of Jacob...and to all the world

A Savior, which is Messiah the LORD

“O COME, LET US ADORE HIM!”

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 20-26 December are called *VaYechi*—“And He [Jacob] Lived”:

TORAH: Genesis 47:28—50:26

HAFTARAH: I Kings 2:1-12

This week's readings bring us to the end of the Book of Genesis.

They encompass the last seventeen years of Jacob's life in Egypt, his blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh, his final prophetic Word over his twelve sons, his death, the return of his body to Hebron for burial, and the life of Joseph in Egypt until his death there at the age of 110.

***Genesis 47:29.** *“Now if I have found favor in your sight, please...deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.”* We have noticed in how many ways Joseph presents a picture of the coming Savior, Yeshua. Here Jacob requests of him to “deal kindly and truly with me” and “carry me out of Egypt to lie with my fathers”. As we have mentioned before, the words “kindly” and “truly” are *chesed* and *emet*—two words we have seen and shall see together often in the Torah. John 1:16-17 tells us, *“And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the Torah was given through Moses, but lovingkindness and truth (Modern Hebrew translation: chesed v'emet) came through Yeshua the Messiah.”* As Joseph would in kindness and truth be faithful to take his father out of Egypt and to the Promised Land where his fathers were buried, so Yeshua carries those who entrust themselves to his *chesed and emet* out of the bondage of death and into the presence of His Father and the resting place of those who have gone before!

***Genesis 47:31b** (NASB). *“Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed.”* The Hebrew word for “bed” (*mita*) bears the same letters as the word for “staff” (*mateh*). The translators of the Greek *Septuagint* used in New Testament times (translated several hundred years earlier), chose the meaning “staff” here. This evidently is what is referred to in the New Covenant Scripture **Hebrews 11:21**, *“By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.”* What is clear is that Jacob had become strong in worship and in faith (notice his attributions to God in 48:3; 48:9,11, 15-16; 48:20-21), and it was this which enabled him to deliver in holy authority the prophetic utterances of chapter 49.

***Genesis 48:5.** *“And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.”* In fact, because of Reuben's sin against his father (see I Chronicles 5:1-2), his birthright was transferred to Joseph, the first-born of Rachel, and thence to his two sons. Of these two sons, already here, even before Jacob delivers his blessing, Ephraim is named first. In the future his name would at times be used as a synonym for Israel, *“For I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my First Born”* (Jeremiah 31:9).

***Genesis 48:7** (ESV). *“As for me, when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way [from Bethel] to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).* In this brief mention of Rachel's death, one senses the tenderness which Jacob still felt for her over forty years after her death (49:31 may show an affection which had also grown for Leah). As has been mentioned, this passage, along with 35:19 and I Samuel 10:2, also point towards the location of Rachel's tomb as being in the area of Benjamin (just northwest of Jerusalem) rather than southward, adjacent to Bethlehem as is held by Rabbinic tradition.

***Genesis 48:20.** *“By you Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!’”* This blessing is still spoken today by a father over his sons in many Jewish households on Friday evenings before the *Erev-Shabbat* meal.

***Genesis 48:21** (ESV). *“Then Israel said to Joseph, ‘Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers.’”* “God will be with you!” Jacob had come to know and trust in *Imannu-El*.—the “With-Us God”. God had promised this to Jacob at Bethel (*“Behold, I am with you and will guard you wherever you go...for I will not leave you...”* 28:15), where Jacob promised that if He would be “with him” and guard him, and bring him back safely, he YHVH would be his God. There were many other times within his long life when he would be reminded of God’s presence with him (Genesis 31:3; 31:42; 32:24,28; 35:13). At Beersheba, where Jacob offered sacrifices before going down to Egypt, God again spoke to him, *“I will go down with you to Egypt...”* (Genesis 46:4).

***Genesis 48:22.** *Moreover, I have given to you rather than to your brothers one mountain slope that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow.”* If the last part of these verses refers to an actual battle in which Jacob took part, it is not recorded in Scripture (Might Jacob have yielded up his weapons as a sign of peace, when purchasing the land in 33:19—a peace later violated by Simeon and Levi?). The Hebrew for this passage contains obscurities which continue to puzzle Biblical scholars into our own day. The main difficulties center around the words translated here “mountain slope”. The Hebrew words are *shekhem ehad*. *Ehad* means “one” and *shekhem* may refer to a “shoulder”, or a “shoulder or ridge of a mountain”—or to the town of Shechem (Modern-day Nablus) itself. Evidently Joseph understood it to mean a portion of land in the vicinity of Shechem, since he would over 400 years later be buried *“at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph (Joshua 24:32).* *Shekhem Echad* also forms an idiom meaning “shoulder to shoulder” or “as one man”—and the future territories of inheritance for both Ephraim and Manasseh would come together at this point. This is obviously the meaning when these two words appear again in **Zephaniah 3:9** (which some here see as prophesying the rebirth of the Hebrew language precedent to God’s restoring Israel to her land), *“For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord.*

Genesis 49: 1-27

There are great mysteries concerning much of the poetic prophecy released by Israel over his sons in Chapter 49. We shan’t presume to comment on all of these. There are difficulties in the exact meaning of the Hebrew text as we have it today, and there are mysteries regarding exactly what would be the interpretation of some of the prophetic words which Jacob speaks forth. Genesis 49:1 states that they speak of *what will befall Israel in the last days*. We believe it therefore highly possible that they may have bearing on the identity of the descendants of Jacob and their land today and in days ahead (This in spite of the fact that presently most Jews have no idea from which tribe they are descended). Over 400 years later, they would be supplemented with further prophetic words by Moses (Deuteronomy 33). Perhaps, as with words shown to Daniel (Daniel 12:9), some of these are *“words closed up and sealed till the time*

of the end.” As we read, let us pray that these words, sent forth by the Spirit will not return to God void (Isaiah 55:11), but will indeed accomplish what He pleases, and prosper that for which they were sent out!

***Genesis 49:5.** *“Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruel violence (Hebrew: **hamas**) their trade. Let my soul not enter into their secret council, their assembly my presence shun. For in their fury they slaughtered men, at their pleasure they tore down ramparts. Cursed be their fury so fierce, and their wrath so remorseless! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.”* The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:20); in the case of these two brothers, it produced senseless slaughter of many innocent men. It would also result in loss or dispersion of much of their future inheritance; Simeon’s territory would be enclosed within that of Judah, and Levi would have no separate territory at all.

***Genesis 49:10-11.** *“Judah is a lion’s whelp...The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes.”* There has historically been great mystery surrounding this passage, part of it related to what exactly is meant by the Hebrew word transliterated “Shiloh”. It appears clear, nevertheless, that it is speaking of One who is to come to whom the “scepter” truly belongs, and who will be worthy of “the obedience of the people.” There seem to be further hints in the New Testament: Matthew 21:2-7 refers to a donkey tied with its colt upon which Yeshua would enter Jerusalem; Revelation 7:14 speaks of those whose garments will have been *“washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb”*; and Revelation 19:13 foretells One called *“Faithful and True”* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and His name is also called *“The Word of God.”*

PLEASE PRAY: *for revelation in Israel that the “Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David” has come—and is coming again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords!* (Revelation 5:5; 19:16).

***Genesis 49:29-31.** *“Then [Jacob] charged them and said to them: I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite...There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah...”* Something in the way she is mentioned in this passage suggests that by the end of Leah’s life (and the many years following), she who had been hated (Genesis 29:31) had grown in Jacob’s affections, and indeed his love.

***Genesis 50:19-20.** **JOSEPH** (To his brothers after the death of their father Jacob): *“Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”*—*“For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28).



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[The Torah and Haftarah portions for next week 27 December 2015—2 January 2016: *Sh'mot*—“Names” will be: TORAH: Exodus: 1:1—6:1; HAFTARAH: Isaiah 27:6—28:13; 29:22-23]

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