

Prayer Update From Israel (February 15, 2011)



“Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Be on your guard before him and obey his voice, to not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him.” (Exodus 23:20—within this week’s Torah Portion)

1. WHEN THE FORTUNE OF THE ALAWITES TURNS

Although the military forces loyal to Syrian President Assad continue a bloody crackdown on dissidents to his regime (there are estimates that at least 6000 have been killed), and Assad continues to receive gestures of support from Russia and Iran, most analysts here believe that it is but a matter of time before he is driven from power. Israel’s Defense Minister Barak has been quoted that in his opinion, “He won’t see the end of the year. I don’t think he will even see the middle of this year.” Given the nature of the present upheaval, it is of course extremely uncertain how things will go when he is gone. But one strong possibility is that if the minority Alawite sect, which presently controls the military (Assad is himself an Alawite) is soundly defeated, and the majority Sunnis gain a centralized control, large masses of Alawites may find themselves desperately seeking to break out of their present borders. Early last month Israel’s Chief of Staff Benny Gantz announced that Israel is preparing for a possible flood of Alawite Syrian refugees when the Assad regime falls, is in fact “preparing to take in Alawite refugees on the Golan Heights.” This week MK Avi Dichter warned of a possible mass execution of Alawites if the Sunnis assume power, and that Israel must prepare for an influx of refugees.

This is one of those strange scenarios which could only happen in the Middle East, perhaps only with Israel. Israel took the Heights from Syria in 1967. Her nearest and most deadly enemy since that time has been that same Alawite-led nation. There are presently around 40,000 Jews

living in the Golan Heights, and almost that many Druze (who abide under Israeli sovereignty). Yet now, Israel may find herself being required to consider granting succor to those who, until now, been among her fiercest enemies.

Alawites make up between 12 and 15% (around 3.5 million) of the Syrian population. They live throughout the nation, but are most densely situated in the northwest. They are descended from an esoteric Islamic sect formed in 9th Century Iraq which believes that Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad was divine. They are usually considered an off-shoot of the Shi'ite stream which also reveres Ali, but does not equate him with deity, and therefore sees the Alawites as apostate. Their theology has taken in many influences over the centuries, including Neoplatonic, Gnostic, Christian, Muslim, and Zoroastrian elements. Among their beliefs is that at death souls of wicked men go into unclean animals, while the righteous enter human bodies more perfect than the last. In Syria the sect was itself often discriminated against by the Sunni majority until France began administering Syria after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and incorporated Alawites into their military to bring balance against the often hostile Sunnis. During the French Mandate, there was even a short-lived Alawite "state" situated on the coast just north of Lebanon. Eventually the Alawites in Syria came to adapt their publically declared beliefs so as to be accepted as genuinely Muslim by those around them. Today they are officially accepted as such in Syria, but major sectarian differences continue to simmer beneath the surface ("Syria's Ruling Alawite Sect" by Robert Mackey: *The New York Times*, 14 June 2011, 5:16 p.m.).

Syria became independent in 1946. After a number of coups, the Ba'ath Party came to power in 1963, and Hafez al-Assad, an Alawite gained power in 1970, surrounding himself with members of the sect. His son Bashar al-Assad replaced him at his death in 2000. Government under the Assads has been authoritarian and essentially secular. Thus, although there has been no toleration of political dissent, there has been toleration of religious minorities.

So one scenario sees the Sunnis gaining power and a great exodus of Alawites. Given the abundance of both ethnic and sectarian groups and tribes in Syria, it might not be that simple. There are in fact reports of Alawites abandoning Assad and going over to the opposition ahead of a last stand-off. If this happens quickly on a large scale, things could go quite differently. One different scenario suggested this week sees Syria breaking up into a number of loosely connected divisions or cantons: "*Syria, just like Iraq, may split into autonomous, hostile regions that are barely connected. The possibilities being mentioned are a Kurdish canton in the country's northeast, an Alawite canton in the northwest, and autonomous Druze region, and the rest being divided among Sunni tribes.*" ("Is Syria the next Iraq?" Opinion by Ron Ben-Yishai: *ynetnews.com*: 10 Feb 2012, 15:00).

PLEASE PRAY:

***For God's mercies over Syria—that He who removes kings and raises up kings will bring about His purposes for this next season. That powers of violence and hatred will not be allowed to triumph over God's redemptive purposes for this region.**

***For Believers in Syria to be prepared in the truth and courage and unity of the Spirit for what is to come. For their lights to shine brightly in the darkness.**

***For a visitation of God's merciful revelation on the Alawite people in Syria.**

***For great wisdom on the part of Israel as to how to handle the situation were a flux of Alawites to pour across our borders seeking asylum.**

2. MESSIANIC OFFENSE ON THE INTERNET

This week an Israeli newspaper ran a story on a ceremony which took place recently in an American mega-church in which a man referred to as a Messianic Rabbi and claiming joint American/Israeli citizenship wrapped what he said was a 312-year-old Torah Scroll retrieved from Auschwitz around the pastor, whom, after his emergence from the scroll, he proclaimed a “King.” The pastor was then seated with the Torah in his arms, raised onto the shoulders of four men and paraded around the platform, after which a woman sang the Aaronic blessing over him. The rabbi made a number of highly subjective explanatory comments as he unwrapped the Torah Scroll; some of these were very questionable in their accuracy; at least one would be shockingly offensive to most observant Jews traditional or Messianic anywhere. The ceremony was filmed and released onto the internet. It has raised a storm of disapproval from offended Jewish sources, including representatives of the Anti-Defamation League. It is seen as desecration of a holy Torah Scroll, in addition to making use in a demeaning way of an artifact associated with the Holocaust. The pastor has since apologized for offending the Jewish community, and the rabbi (whose legitimacy and behavior have been strongly denounced by leaders in the Messianic community in America) has stated that he was misunderstood. But damage has been done. In Israel, where Messianic Judaism is finally gaining recognition in the public arena as a belief system adhered to by a legitimate and growing sector of ethnic Israelis, publicity of this sort may be misleading and used to bring reproach to its name. The Israeli paper which ran the article included a file-picture of a Messianic congregation in Jerusalem alongside, so much as to say, “This is an example of what Messianic Jews everywhere, including within Israel, practice and embrace.”

Yet, the Lord is merciful, and despite our mistakes and missteps, we see his hand! The same newspaper did in fact print an article to the effect that this particular rabbis’ actions did not represent all Messianic Jews; it also reprinted a very positive interview with a Messianic pastor from Jerusalem and other Jewish believers regarding their Faith. We would say also, regarding the congregation in which the questionable events took place, we see their obvious love and respect for things related to the Jewish roots of their faith and their love for Israel as being a very good and encouraging thing. Indeed, it is a blessing which God is returning to His church in the Nations today. May it be done in spirit and in truth—administered in wisdom, sensitivity and the discretion of the Holy Spirit. And may that wisdom and discretion extend to the knowledge of what is best kept in the privacy of a local congregation...and what is appropriate for being released to the world over the internet.

PLEASE PRAY:

***That what the enemy would like to make use of for evil in the incident described above, God would turn to good.**

***For guidance in the Body of Messiah around the world as it returns to an understanding and value of its Jewish roots. That there be discernment, that there be truth and not romance, that there be edification. “Guide them in your truth and teach them, for You are God their Saviour and in you they hope all day long” (Psalm 25:5).**

***For wisdom, humility, reverence and the Fear of the Lord on those Messianic leaders through whom the Lord would release to the Gentile church understanding and edification with regards to Jewish expressions of the Faith.**

***That there be wisdom and humility as to what is meant for the privacy of a local congregation, and what is appropriate for broadcasting to the world at large.**

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 are called *Mishpatim*—“Judgments” (“And these are the judgments which you shall set before them”):

TORAH: Exodus 21:1—24:18

HAFTARAH: Jeremiah 34:8-22; 33:25-26

Last week’s Portion began with the appointments of judges in Israel; the first three chapters of this week’s readings provide these judges with guidelines for the working out of righteous judgments (*mishpatim*) in Israel’s governance. They include laws and ordinances, with instructions for situations related to various moral issues and offenses. These might be seen as subheadings to the Ten Commandments of Chapter 20 (Instructions for the Priesthood related to its intercession between the people and heaven will come later in Exodus and in the whole of Leviticus.). Chapter 23 also contains sections regarding God’s rest (Sabbaths), both for man, his animals, and for the land they will be living in. There are instructions regarding the three pilgrim feasts, which will be observed once the land is conquered. And there are revelations and instructions

pertaining to that conquest itself, including the extent of the land's future boundaries. In a remarkable passage in Chapter 24, YHVH calls Moses, Aaron and his two sons, and 70 elders of the people to a special personal meeting with Himself. At the last, His Glory rests on Mount Sinai and Moses goes up into the cloud to be with God for forty days and forty nights. To the eyes of the Israelites, the glory of the LORD is "as a consuming fire on the mountain top."

***Exodus 22:21; 23:9.** *"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him....since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt."* The word "stranger" is Hebrew *ger*, a "sojourner, temporary dweller, new-comer with no inherited rights" (Brown-Driver-Briggs 1616). In our present day, Christians from the nations whom God sends for seasons to "sojourn" alongside the Children of the inheritance are their strongest and most faithful friends. Yet the enemy seeks to position his agents in such places as the *Ministry of the Interior* and Airport Security which often demean and dishonor this friendship, going to lengths to keep Gentile believers from entering Israel, and those who have spent time in the land from returning. Of course, Israel, like every other country, must have laws and policies regarding her borders and limitations regarding residency for non-citizens; these should be respected as other laws. Yet in recent years, the harassment of Believers seeking to stay for longer periods than an initial 'three months' has risen dramatically. **PLEASE PRAY: that Israel's government will implement and enforce righteous laws regarding sojourners in Israel. Pray for protection and a 'place' for all those believers whom the Lord would send to dwell in the Land—that they will be allowed to stay the full length of time which He ordains for them. Pray for patience and courage on behalf of these visitors...but also a respect for the laws of the land.**

***Exodus 22:28.** *"You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people."* We find it instructive that the Hebrew words for "revile" and "curse" are the same two words used regarding the seed of Abraham in Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you, and those who revile you, I will curse." "Cursing" is a solemn prerogative of the Most High. **PLEASE PRAY: for grace amongst believers in Israel to bless our leaders with intercession on their behalf—that, while not being blind to their faults, we will not curse them by reviling them with our words, either by mouth or on the internet. It is God who raises up authorities...it is to Him that we are to call if they misbehave.**

***Exodus 23:20.** *"Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Be on your guard before him and obey his voice, to not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him."* Although the Hebrew word for "angel" can also mean "messenger" and some commentators equate this angel with Moses himself, it is certain that a supernatural being is meant here. It is this being who will "bring them in" to the land (something which Moses will, alas, not ultimately be allowed to take part in). In this passage, God also mentions sending His "terror" ahead of Israel, along with "Hornets" (vss 27, 28). The battle would be won "little by little" until Israel would "become fruitful and take possession of the Land" (vs. 30); and the LORD would 'fix' her boundaries (vs 31). **PLEASE PRAY: that Israel become again aware of the supernatural element which is required in her warfare; for believers to receive revelation in how best to "be on their guard" for the voice of angels (Vs. 23:20**

above and Hebrews 1:14) who are ministering on their behalf. Pray for patience regarding the battle, in which at times victory must be accomplished “little by little” (Vs 30); and an awareness that “fruitfulness” must precede taking full “possession of the Land” (Vs 30). Pray that God will “fix” Israel’s borders in His time according to His Word (Vs 31).

***Exodus 23:25-26.** *“So you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.”* Pray for believers to grasp these promises in faith in our own day.

***Exodus 24:9-11.** *“Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself, yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.”* Twice in this passage we are told that these leaders of Israel “saw God”. Since “no one has seen God at any time”, but “He who has seen the Son has seen the Father”—we believe that this can only have been an encounter with the pre-incarnate Yeshua. There are two different Hebrew words used here for ‘saw’. The first (root: *ra’ah*) most generally means simply “to see”. The second (root: *ha’zah*) has more to do with “gazing upon”...in fact, it is often used in both Biblical and Modern Hebrew in a prophetic sense. It is this word which is used in Psalm 27:4, where the poet’s greatest longing is to dwell in the LORD’s house so as to “gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in His temple.” **PLEASE PRAY: for leaders of present-day Israel to be granted to “see” the God of their father Israel/Jacob, and to have (and to take) opportunity to “gaze” at the beauty of His risen Son. Pray for an opening of the eyes of leaders in the Body of Messiah in Israel to “see” prophetically. In ancient Israel, these included worship leaders such as Heman (I Chron 25:5), Asaph (II Chron 29:30) and Jeduthan (II Chron 35:15) who were referred to as “seers” and whose descendants ‘prophesied’ on their instruments (I Chron 25:1).**

***Exodus 24:17.** *“The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel.”*

PLEASE PRAY: Hebrews 12:28-29 into our lives as believers here in Israel—even as we would pray the same for you: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”



Martin & Norma Sarvis
Jerusalem

[The Torah and Haftarah portions for next week 19-25 Feb is called *T'ruma* (“that they take me a donation from every man”) and will include, TORAH: Exodus 25:1—27:19; HAFTARAH: I Kings 5:12-6:13.]

You may give to our work in Israel by donating online (click [HERE](#)) or by calling *1-888-965-1099* or *1-940-382-7231*.