

Prayer Update From Israel (March 25, 2013)



PRESIDENT OBAMA'S VISIT TO ISRAEL.

NOTE: We realize that the visit of the American President plus the beginning of Passover have necessitated a special Update of greater length than usual. We pray that as you read, the Lord will grant you added and unique insights in how best to pray His Kingdom Come...and how also you might best enter into the spirit of this Holy Week of Passover!

It has been an unusual week in Israel. On Wednesday United States President Barak Obama arrived for a 2 1/2 -day visit to the land, his first in the office of President, and his first visit abroad since beginning his second term. In retrospect, there are aspects of his visit and his message for which we are grateful, others which we found troubling. Israel went 'all out' to make the President feel as welcome as possible, lining the streets with signs about his coming (see above). To be honest, something about the message (s) on these signs made us a bit uneasy. Visits by dignitaries to Israel are usually heralded with flags of his or her nation lining our streets, the focus being our desire to express friendship with that *nation*, whose leader or representative we are hosting. Yet here, apart from the dual-flag design above the message, no English-speaker (including the President) would see any allusion to a nation at all; the flag appeared to focus solely upon an "unbreakable alliance" and a *person*— "President Obama" (the Hebrew, however, does use the words "Covenant of Nations" instead of "Unbreakable Alliance"). Might this reflect a feeling of longing for approval by this person from whom Israel has, for four years, sensed consistent *dis*-approval, perhaps even dislike? Should not celebrations of alliances focus upon the nations involved, rather than their representatives? But this time Israeli attention was being called to focused on one thing, "Obama in Israel".

"He had us at the word 'Shalom.'"

I. From the first the President appeared determined to change the negative image he released four years ago in Cairo. His speech upon arrival at Ben Gurion airport was extremely

promising. He began his speech with “*Shalom!*”, included a Hebrew phrase to declare his pleasure at being back in the land, and ended with, “I’m confident in declaring that our alliance is eternal, it is forever—*lanetzach!*” Israelis love it when visiting leaders choose to drop a few Hebrew words into their speeches (For years after President Clinton said, “*Shalom, Ha’vever!*—“Goodbye, Friend!” at the funeral of Yitzak Rabin, bumper stickers could be seen all over the country bearing those words). As Jerusalem Post analyst Herb Kainon put it, “*We so want to be accepted, so want to be understood...He had us at the word ‘Shalom.’*”

And then the President said some truly remarkable things:

I know that in stepping foot on this land, I walk with you on the historic homeland of the Jewish people. More than 3,000 years ago, the Jewish people lived here, tended the land here, prayed to God here. And after centuries of exile and persecution, unparalleled in the history of man, the founding of the Jewish State of Israel was a rebirth, a redemption unlike any in history. Today, the sons of Abraham and the daughters of Sarah are fulfilling the dream of the ages....

“Historic homeland of the Jewish people”, “Jewish people lived here (more than 3,000 years ago)”, “Jewish State of Israel”— it was surprising and touching to hear Mr. Obama saying such things; not many national leaders would be willing publically to make such statements today.

But the next morning, during a speech before Palestinian leaders in Ramallah (just north of Jerusalem), certain limitations within which those statements were meant to be understood began to become clear. The “historic homeland of the Jewish people” was *there*, but not *here*. They had “tended the land” *there*, “prayed to God” *there*—but not “here.” *Here*—“*the Palestinian people deserve an end to occupation and the daily indignities that come with it.*” By “occupation” Mr. Obama is assumed to have meant any citizens of the “Jewish State of Israel” which belongs *there*—but not here, in this very different territory where “*the United States is deeply committed to the creation of an independent and sovereign state of Palestine.*” Ironically, a little more than two miles away from where the President was speaking lies Bethel—above which the Lord and God whom Mr. Obama himself claims to worship stood at the top of a heavenly ladder and proclaimed over Jacob, “*I AM YHVH God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; The land on which you lie, I will give to you and your seed*” (Genesis 28:13). And the land specifically promised to Abraham and Sarah (mentioned by Mr. Obama in his airport speech)? It lay not between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, but between Shechem (modern-day Nablus) and Hebron—all within the bounds of the proposed Palestinian (Islamic) state.

Lastly, we would point out that in his airport speech, the President had said, “***We stand together [Israel and America] because peace must come to the Holy Land.***” But the only place in the Bible where any place in Israel is referred to as “the Holy Land” is in Zechariah 2:12, “***And the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem.***” These areas would both lie within the borders of the proposed Palestine.

Later in the day, the President returned to Jerusalem to give his main speech to the Israeli people. Before leaving the US, he had drawn criticism from Republicans in Congress for his decision against addressing the Israeli Knesset. Within Israel, former Knesset Speaker MK Reuven Rivlin expressed the concern of many here: “*Three American presidents have spoken on the Knesset stage, as well as [former Egyptian president Anwar] Sadat and leaders from Europe. President Obama should speak to the people of Israel through its elected*

representatives” (“Rivlin slams Obama for not visiting Knesset”: *The Jerusalem Post* (JPOST.com), 20 Mar 2013, 16:24 IST). Instead, the President chose to deliver his speech to the nation in a downtown auditorium before a carefully chosen audience consisting primarily of some 600 university students plus reporters. A large part of the speech consisted of a lecture on Mr. Obama’s rationale for a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians, although he did not this time, as in the past, make specific demands from Israel, nor did he mention Jerusalem. After conceding that “*of course, Israel cannot be expected to negotiate with anyone who is dedicated to its destruction*”, Mr. Obama continued, “*Neither occupation nor expulsion is the answer. Just as Israelis built a state in their homeland, Palestinians have a right to be a free people in their own land.*”

Earlier in the day Hamas operatives in Gaza made their presence known by launching five *Qassam* rockets into the Israeli border-town of Sderot. Reflecting the change in makeup of the new government, Economy and Trade minister Naphtali Bennett (who is also a member of Netanyahu’s Political-Security Cabinet) was the first senior politician to respond to the speech. Addressing the President’s call to “end the occupation”, he responded, “*Generally there is no ‘occupation’ within one’s own land...The results of our latest withdrawal [i.e. from Gaza] were felt this morning in Sderot*” (“Bennett on Obama’s speech: No occupation in our own land.”: *ynet news.com*, 21 Mar 2013; 19:49).

II. The first significant physical “accomplishment” of the President’s visit came just before he departed, when Prime Minister Netanyahu made a personal telephone call to the Prime Minister of Turkey. In 2010 a flotilla of activists led by the Turkish vessel *Mavi Marmara* sought to break Israel’s blockade of Gaza, which had been taken over by the rogue terrorist organization Hamas. After warning the ships, Israel sent commandos to commandeer them before they entered the forbidden waters. As the soldiers slid down the rope from the helicopters onto the deck, they were met by hostile militants who began beating them with pipes, sticks, and wielding knives and slings. Fighting for their lives, the Israelis were forced to drop their weapons bearing harmless “paint gun” pellets, and draw their real guns. In the fight, nine Turkish militants were killed. It was later discovered that several of the militants had planned to “fight to the death” and had left suicide films in Turkey before their ‘martyrdom’. In 2011 a United Nations enquiry determined that although there were procedures in which Israel had erred, she had nevertheless been within her rights in defending the blockade and stopping the vessels which were bent on breaking it. This report infuriated Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan (pronounced “Erdo-wan”), who withdrew diplomatic relations with Israel, demanded an official apology for her actions, vowed to bring the responsible Israeli generals to an international court as war criminals, and fueled production of a number of fictitious films shown throughout Turkey depicting Israeli soldiers brutalizing helpless Gazan Palestinian Arabs. Last month Erdogan awakened international condemnation when he equated “Zionism” with “crimes against humanity”—a statement he subsequently withdrew. Although expressing “regret” for the loss of life on the *Mavi Marmara*, Israel has persistently refused to formally “apologize”. With the worsening crisis in Syria, including the danger of chemical weapons falling into the hands of different factions, the United States has been anxious that the two countries which used to be fast friends would resolve their differences. This was evidently a strong priority for President Obama in coming to Israel at this time.

Friday, after a long conference with the President, Mr. Netanyahu finally telephoned his Turkish counterpart. The American President was reportedly on the line for the first minutes of the conversation. According to an official statement from Netanyahu’s office, “*In light of Israel’s investigation into the incident which pointed to a number of operational mistakes, the*

prime minister expressed Israel's apology to the Turkish people for any mistakes that might have led to the loss of life or injury." Prime Minister Erdogan accepted the apology, the two Prime Ministers also addressed compensation for the families of those killed and the dropping of charges against Israeli soldiers, and the two agreed to normalize relation between the two countries. Just before leaving Israel, President Obama announced that the phone call had been made, and that "The United States deeply values our close partnership with both Turkey and Israel, and we attach great importance to the restoration of positive relations between them in order to advance regional peace and security."

We are not certain about the wisdom of the Israeli "apology" to Turkey or how effective it may prove. Of course, we long for a return of the friendship which existed between the two nations for so many years. We believe there to be a redemptive blessing which has existed on this friendship from long ago, when in the early 16th Century Turkey was one of the few countries to welcome Jews into their society after they had been expelled from Spain. But Mr. Erdogan is the first strongly Islamic Prime Minister to lead Turkey since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the 1920's. He was almost certainly cognizant of the violence which would ensue aboard the *Marmara* in 2010, nor, since that time, does his zeal on behalf of the militant Islamists in Gaza appear to have in any way lessened. There are spiritual factors in the enmity which has arisen. Recovery of what has been lost will certainly involve spiritual battle on behalf of God's purposes for both countries.

In the end, it was good to see President Obama's courtesy to our Prime Minister and to hear his words of encouragement, support and admiration on behalf of Israel. He called his visit "*an opportunity to reaffirm the unbreakable bonds between our nations.*" He proclaimed to Israel that "You are not alone!" as he reaffirmed America's commitment to preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, and said that the United States would not tolerate the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government. We believe him to be sincere in his desire for hope and a future for Israelis and for Palestinians. He is the leader and spokesperson for a great nation which we deeply admire and whose friendship is a mighty strength to us. So how do we sort out the good from the bad? that for which to give thanks from that which must fall to the floor? that which we know to be in error and which must be taken before our Lord for His counsel?

III. SPIRIT AND WIND, DUST AND DARKNESS, CLARITY AND LIGHT

"As for mortal man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him and His righteousness to children's children..." (Psalm 103: 15-17).

"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes" (Psalm 118:8-9).

Something very strange attended President Obama's last afternoon in Israel. He was supposed to fly by helicopter to Bethlehem to view the traditional birthplace of Jesus with the Palestinian leader Abbas, followed by a flight back, and then to the airport for a lavish departure ceremony. But late in the morning a high wind began sweeping through Israel, a wind filled with dust. Such dust-storms come often in the Middle East, especially around the changing of the seasons. Called *hamsin*, such a wind may bring in huge volumes of dust from deserts far away in Africa. They generally arrive and sit for two days or so—then move on. This one

roared into Jerusalem just before the President's scheduled trip to Bethlehem. In less than thirty minutes the Mount of Olives, less than ¼ mile distance from the writer's balcony, was indiscernible. We've since spoken with a friend in other part of Jerusalem who had difficulty seeing their hand in front of his face! It was decided that the helicopter flight would be too dangerous in such conditions, so the President went by motorcade, throwing off the schedule. The dust intensified—the large closing ceremony had to be cancelled, replaced by a short one near the airplane. Then the President was gone—and within the hour the dust simply blew away! This writer has lived in Israel for more than 17 years, and never seen a *hamsin* come, sit, then blow away in the space of three hours. Saturday, the skies which should have been red, were blue and filled with clouds.

In Hebrew, the word for “wind” and that for “spirit” are the same—*ruach*. Sometimes wind can signify a “winnowing” of that which is good from chaff. Sometimes it signifies spiritual warfare and angelic activity (Psalm 35:5—in fact, Psalm 104.4 pointedly says that “*He makes His angels winds*”). We do not know all the significance of that strange storm, but we know its appearance at such a time to have been no mere happenstance.

PLEASE PRAY:

***That the Spirit of God, Holy Wind of Truth will “clear the air”—driving away confusion or deception which may have sought occasion through the President's recent visit.**

***That what was good and true in the President's warm and friendly manner towards Israel and our Prime Minister would remain and be strengthened.**

***That President Obama will attend to the voice of the Holy Spirit in seeking divine counsel regarding his decisions related to Israel.**

***That the relation between Israel and the United States will be blessed and strengthened.**

***That Prime Minister Netanyahu, exhausted after six weeks of attempting to form a coalition, and then an unbelievably intense and draining week entertaining the American President, will be restored and granted a renewed spirit to move forward in leading his new government. Pray that he will personally seek the sustaining strength of God.**

***That the tiny but growing presence of Believers in Turkey will be encouraged and begin strongly to multiply. That the growing houses of prayer there will experience the power and revelation of the Holy Spirit!**

***That friendship between Turkey and Israel will be restored. That Prime Minister Erdogan will have an encounter with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—who is the God over all the Earth. That he will desist from dragging his country into a position of being under a curse for cursing Israel**



MONDAY EVENING BEGINS PASSOVER AND THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD.

“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed, Messiah, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (I Corinthians 5:7-8).

Monday at sundown Jews around the world will be gathered round tables in obedience to the command in Exodus 12:14, *“So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.”* They will have cleaned leaven from their homes (12:19) and will begin a week of eating only unleavened bread. The word *Pesach* (Passover) comes from the Hebrew verb *lifso'ach* which means “to skip”. Literally, when the scourge went through Egypt, those with blood on their doorposts were ‘skipped’ the judgment which came upon the rest of Egypt. The meal is celebrated at a *seder* table. Seder means “order”. In modern Hebrew, *b'seder*—‘o.k.’ is literally, ‘in order’. So at the seder table is an “ordered” account, both through reading and having a meal, of what God did on that occasion. During the course of the meal, most families are guided by a book called a *Haggadah*. This word actually means “the telling” and is taken from Exodus 13:8, *“And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt’”* (Exodus 13:8). Although the book contains remarks and theories by revered rabbis here and there, it is primarily a straightforward account of God’s deliverance of His people Israel from bondage in Egypt, interspersed with wonderful psalms, and other Biblical passages—many of which reference God’s salvation (*Yeshu'ah*) and coming Messiah.

At the heart of this “telling” as it has come down to our day is an addition called *Afikomen*. It comes from a Greek word, meaning literally “that which comes after” or even, “the one who came”. At the beginning of the seder three pieces of matzo are placed into a three-fold pocket—but the piece going into the middle compartment is first

broken. Part of this broken piece of unleavened bread is placed in the middle pocket; the other piece, the *Afikomen*, is hidden away. At the end of the seder children will seek the *Afikomen*...and the one who finds it will be given a redemption-price reward. Then all the participants eat a portion of the *Afikomen* for dessert. Modern-day matzo is unleavened, pierced and striped from the heat in baking. According to the Mishna, the *Afikomen* is a substitute for the “Korban Pesach”—the Passover Sacrifice, which was the last thing eaten at seders during the First and Second Temple periods. Yet there is a veil over the hearts of most of our people, and there is much deep truth in the traditions which they still do not see.

PLEASE PRAY:

***For Light to shine over seder tables in Israel and around the world, to reveal the Truth of the “Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world”—who was bruised and pierced, cut off from mankind and hidden in the earth—the Lamb of God who atones for and takes away the sin of humankind—Who may be found by all who seek, and whose finding brings Life, and Nourishment and Joy!**

***For God’s protection over Israel during this holy week when children are out of school and many families are out and about enjoying the holidays.**

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.

DURING THE WEEK OF PASSOVER, THERE ARE READINGS EACH DAY IN THE SYNAGOGUES. WE HAVE PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING LIST FOR THE USE OF THOSE WHO DURING THE COURSE OF THE WEEK MAY WISH TO READ FROM SOME OR ALL OF THESE PASSAGES.

**Day 1 (Tuesday 26 March): Exodus 12:21-51; Numbers 28:16-25
Joshua 3:5-7; 5:2—6:1: 6:27**

**Day 2 (Wednesday 27 March): Leviticus 22:26—23:44; Numbers 28:16-25
II Kings 23: 1-9; 21-25**

FIRST FRUITS

This Wednesday, the day after the *Passover Sabbath*--is the day on which most of present-day Judaism considers the *Ceremony of First Fruits* would have been performed (Leviticus

23:9-14). It is also the first day in the “Counting of the Omer” to *Shavuot*—the Feast of Weeks/Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15).

Day 3 (Thursday 28 March): Exodus 13:1-16; Numbers 28:19-25

Day 4 (Friday 29 March): Exodus 22:24—23:19; Numbers 28:19-25

Day 5 (*Shabbat Chol haMoed*): Torah Portion: Exodus 33:12—34:26;

Numbers 28:19-25

Haftarah: Ezekiel 36:37—37:14

Day 6 (Sunday 31 March): Exodus 9:1-14; Numbers 28:19-25

**Day 7 (Monday 1 April): Exodus 13:17—15:26; Numbers 28:19-25
II Samuel 22:1-51**

Day 8 (Tuesday 2 April—ONLY CELEBRATED OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL):

Deuteronomy 15:19—16:17; Numbers 28:19-25

Isaiah 10:32—12:6

Shir haShirim—“Song of Songs”

It is customary in many places that the SONG OF SONGS (Song of Solomon) be read during the Passover season, sometimes in the synagogue, sometimes in homes after the Seder meal or preceding the beginning of Shabbat.

***PESACH S'ME'AH!!*—A Joyous Passover Blessings to each of You!!**



***Martin & Norma Sarvis
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