

Prayer Update From Israel (April 3, 2013)



“When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring an omer (Biblical measure of grain; KJV: “sheaf”) of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the omer before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it” (Leviticus 23:10b-11).

“And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath. From the day that you brought the omer of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD” (Leviticus 23:15-16).

The Counting of the Omer

On the day following the sabbath observed on the first day of Passover, * a special “firstfruits” offering measuring an *omer* was taken from the earliest ripening grain and presented as a wave-offering before the LORD. Then the people were allowed to partake for themselves of the new-year’s harvest of barley followed by the wheat (It was upon this “third day” that Yeshua the Messiah, “risen from the dead”, would present *Himself* to the Father, “*the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*”—I Corinthians 15:20). And on this day of offering the “omer”, Israel was commanded to begin counting the 49 days, which would lead to *Shavuot* (or *Pentecost*), the festival at the fullness of the spring harvest. All of this is related to grain, and the bread by which man is sustained and for which he depends upon God. In fact, after entering into the Promised Land, it was on this *Firstfruits* day after Passover (Joshua 5:12), that the manna ceased and Israel began to subsist solely upon the produce of the Land. We must depend upon Him, our Father in Heaven for our “daily bread” (Matthew 6:11)—and it is He who provided the “*bread of God ...who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world*” (John 6:32-33)—Yeshua, the “Living Bread” born in *Bet-Leham*—the “House of Bread”!

*The rabbinic tradition dates the counting of the omer from the “shabbat” (or shabaton) observed the first day of Passover. The Karaite and some other streams of Judaism begin the count the day following the first weekly Sabbath (Saturday) after Passover.

(And one locust in Jerusalem: a warning)

The writers live in Jerusalem on the edge of a valley across from Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives. Last Wednesday, the day of *Firstfruits*, I had just entered the garage and opened the back of my car when something sailed over my shoulder and lit on the back of the front passenger seat. It was an almost four-inch long locust. I don’t remember ever seeing a locust in Jerusalem, certainly not one this size. That was a week ago (Wednesday) and I haven’t seen another in Jerusalem since—it must have blown in, separated from the swarms about which we’ve written which have infested Egypt during the past month, and which have also been crossing our own borders to the south and southwest. As a matter of fact, that same day JTA news service reported:

Israel was battling a new swarm of locusts that crossed the border from Egypt. Crop-dusting planes on Monday dropped pesticides on the locusts, which are yellow and preparing to lay eggs. The yellow locusts eat much less than the swarms that have been entering Israel over the last three weeks, but the hatched eggs would pose a significant risk to Israeli crops since locust larvae will eat any green plant (“Israel battling new swarm of locusts”: *JTA: The global News Service of the Jewish people*, March 27, 2013)

Far to the south, the island of Madagascar was also in the headlines that day—“Madagascar hit by ‘severe’ plague of locusts” (BBC)—“Madagascar Locust Plague Threatens Starvation as Crops Devoured” (Intl Business Times).

And *one locust in Jerusalem?* Most Israelis are probably still considering the locusts a diversion on the outskirts of the news concerning a nuisance which Israel’s technological and scientific experts will doubtless soon take care of. But we are not so sure. What might God be saying? He certainly has made use of these creatures in ancient times to get people’s attention. In the Book of Proverbs they are one of “*four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise—the locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks*” (30:24, 27). They “have no king”—but the Lord of the Universe could bring his Wind to call them into the land of Egypt as a testimony against the gods in which that people were vainly trusting (Exodus 10:13). And later, in the day of the prophet Joel, within the Promised Land itself He would use a terrible swarm of locusts as a call to His people to awaken, sound an alarm and repent before the human armies, of which these locusts were a forerunner, descended upon them.

An often-quoted Scripture in western Churches is II Chronicles 7:14:

“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

We are certainly not opposed to believers in the nations applying this to themselves; in God's good grace, they also have become "His people". *But what was its original context?* Solomon had just completed building the Temple in Jerusalem, had dedicated it to the LORD, had prayed for His Presence to be manifest there—so that when "*His people Israel*" (II Chron. 6:24) found themselves in difficult straits, wherever they might be, and turned their hearts and prayed towards that Presence, they would be heard. Then the Fire of the Lord had fallen, and the Glory of YHVH had indeed filled the Temple. And late one night the LORD appeared to Solomon and spoke the words recorded in II Chronicles 7:14. But verse 13, the *first* part of the sentence omitted above, was this: "***When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if my people who are called by my name...***"

God loves His people Israel. He wants to bless our grain and new wine. But He also desires that we (the first to be "*called by His Name*") will *humble ourselves*; will *pray and seek His face*; will *turn from our wicked ways*. If not, He will do what is necessary to get our attention (including that of the elders in Jerusalem). We pray that something as severe as a "plague" would not become necessity—but it would be presumptuous and foolish to assume that we are somehow automatically exempt from that (Malachi 4:6).

PLEASE PRAY:

*** Israel will take warning from the locusts coming upon our neighbors and beginning to invade our own land—that we will turn to the God of spirits and winds, who controls them.**

***That the Body of Messiah in Israel will "hear what the Spirit is saying to the congregations" –would in fact "be filled with the Spirit" and move about as loving bearers of God's word of light, truth, and hope in the land.**

***That God's mercies would be manifest in the lands in this part of the world which are presently undergoing devastation by locusts. That Israel would have compassion regarding her neighbors who are suffering. That the life and hope of the One True God will be revealed in those nations.**

***That God's Kingdom would come in this Land—that whatever is necessary to bring us to *humble ourselves, to pray and seek His face, and to turn from our wicked ways* will take place—but that in His wrath He remember mercy. And that His remnant in the Land will be bearers of that mercy.**

2. NATURAL GAS BEGINS TO FLOW

Last Saturday, four years after the discovery of vast fields of natural gas off Israel's northwestern coast, gas from the Tamar field began flowing southwards to a facility in Ashdod hundreds of kilometers away. From there it will be processed and soon flow into the Israeli market where it will first be used primarily for generating electricity. Later, after the even larger Leviathan field

becomes fully operable in 2016, it is thought that Israel may attain an energy independence which will extend at least until 2035. This, apart from an expected enormous economic boon derived from sales to other nations.

PLEASE PRAY:

***That Israel will be granted knowledge, wisdom and prudence in harvesting and managing the resources which God is releasing to her at this time—resources for which she has, until now, always been required to depend upon other nations.**

***That God protect these resources—and guide Israel in how best they are to be guarded from her enemies. That, as Asher “*dips his foot in oil*”, his sandals will be “*iron and bronze*”—and “*as his days, so shall his strength be*” (Deuteronomy 33:24).**

***That there will be a spirit of gratefulness and humility manifest among us in Israel for this blessing!**

3. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Monday April 8th is Holocaust Memorial Day in Israel. At mid-morning a 2-minute siren will sound, and most Jews here will stop whatever they are doing, even getting out of their cars to stand in silent memorial. Each year there are fewer left among us who endured and survived that horror. We pray it will “never again” happen. This week’s news reported a rising sentiment in economically desolated Greece that “it is the Jews who are to blame.” As Satan seeks to sow this perennial accusation among the nations; and in other sectors, the new accusation, that it is “not the Jews, but the Zionists” (now centered in Israel)...

PLEASE PRAY:

***Psalm 25:22: “*Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles!*”**

***That Jews will put their trust for protection not just in “education” and “never forgetting”—but in the God Who watches over Israel, who preserves us from all evil and guards our soul (Psalm 121:4, 7).**

***For angelic protection and ministry to holocaust survivors still living and their children. That they will receive revelation of truth about their God, which will break the paralyzing power of the accuser. That those who have suffered loss will be comforted by the God of all comfort, and be counseled by Him regarding the ultimate sacrifice of His Son, which destroys sin, evil and the power of death—and which is drawing them in lovingkindness to life, hope and a future.**

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.

This week (March 20-26) the readings are called *Shemini* ("Eighth" day...):

TORAH: Leviticus 9:1—11:47

HAFTARAH: II Samuel 6:1—7:17

***Leviticus 10:3b:** *"By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored."*

***Leviticus 11:44-45:** *"For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean...For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy."*

This week's readings center upon the Holiness of Israel's LORD—including the consequences to his children of not honoring that holiness. In Leviticus 10, Nadav and Avihu offer "*strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them*", and fire comes out from His presence and consumes them. They had a high and exalted "positioning" given specifically to them by the LORD. But their desire after that of their father led them into a place where their unique protection was no longer with them. In the II Samuel passage, Uzzah touches the Ark which was being carried improperly, and "*the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for the irreverence, and he died there by the ark of God.*" Malachi 3:2-3 says that the coming LORD "*is like a refiner's fire*" and will "*purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness.*" **Please Pray—for a sense of the 'holy' in the Body of Messiah in Israel—that we will not be presumptuous in our worship, yet will at the same time yield ourselves to the refining, that the offerings which we offer up will be done in righteousness, in spirit and in truth.**



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[The Torah and Haftarah portions for next week 7-13 April are a “double reading”: I. *Thazria* —“Quicken with Seed, Conceive”: TORAH: Leviticus 12:1—13:59. II. *Metsora*—“Skin disease, leprosy”: TORAH: Leviticus 14:1—15:33; HAFTARAH: II Kings 7:3-20]

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