

## *Prayer Update From Israel (May 19, 2014)*



### **1. LAG BA'OMER: STRANGE FIRES AND A LIGHT WHICH BRINGS DARKNESS**

*Lag Ba'Omer* is an occult holiday which is celebrated by both religious and secular Jews each year all over the world, and especially in Israel. Yesterday was the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of “Counting the Omer” (the numbering of the 50 days between Passover and Pentecost as commanded in Leviticus 23:16). “33” in the Hebrew language numbering system is *lamed-gimel*, hence the contraction “*lag*”. On this day tens of thousands of ultra-Orthodox Jews will have journeyed to Mount Meron in the Galilee to do homage at the grave of 2<sup>nd</sup> century rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who reputedly died on *Lag Ba'Omer* in around 170 A.D. On the day of his death, it is claimed by his followers that the sun stood still enabling Bar Yochai time to receive special secret revelations. These provided the basis for a book published 12 centuries later called the *Zohar* (“Book of Splendor/Radiance”), a primary text for followers of the Jewish mystical system known as *Kabbalah*. Although this year the Chief Rabbinate in Jerusalem requested, and was granted by the state, that the day be officially celebrated a day late so as to not desecrate the close of Shabbat, the ultra-Orthodox leaders in the Galilee refused this request, and at midnight Saturday evening a Boyan Hasidic dynasty rabbi ignited a fire on the mountain of Meron. Afterwards, other fires sprung up around the Galilee; in the rest of the country it began to be celebrated Sunday night.

One practice attending the celebration of this day is the lighting of bonfires. It has become a tradition throughout Israel for children and teenagers, religious or not, to gather wood, sometimes for days in advance, in order to create bonfires on this evening around which to sit with friends and family. This “watch” sometimes often extends throughout the night (schools are closed the following day). Yesterday evening, out for a late-night walk, we were everywhere passed by young teenagers dragging salvaged forklift pallets, pushing grocery carts piled high with burnable debris, all headed towards vacant lots where

hundreds of small fires were already burning, surrounded by friends happily talking, singing, roasting marshmallows. The civil authorities are tolerant; fire trucks are at the ready, should the fires get out of hand. The morning after the evening heralding *Lag BaOmer* the atmosphere over most Jewish towns in Israel is heavy with the smell of smoke.

If one asks what may be the origin or significance of these fires, he will likely receive many different answers. For some, the fires epitomize the “primeval light contained within the mystical teachings of the Torah” as released by Rabbi bar Yochai. Some Zionists relate the blazes to signal fires lit by the Bar Kokhba rebels to relay messages in defiance of the Romans during their revolt which is also commemorated on this day. Certainly for most secular Israelis, there is little or no religious significance at all...it’s just a fun thing which Jewish youth and their families have done from time immemorial on the night preceding the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of the Omer.

It is not for us here to condemn the lighting of the fires on *Lag BaOmer*. As we implied, many do not even associate the fires with the mystical beginnings related to Rabbi Bar Yochai. Believers in Israel follow their own consciences regarding this matter. Some Messianic Jews light fires and worship around them as a testimony, praising and honoring the True Light coming into the world, the One who is above every false light and whose Day will come, “burning like an oven to purify the Sons of Levi”. Others abstain.

*But honoring the day as a Jewish Holy day is another matter.* We were asked recently by some visiting believers from outside our land who were interested in rediscovering the Jewish roots of their faith, “What about this special Jewish celebration on the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of the Omer, which is listed on all the calendars.” We felt compelled politely but firmly to empathize that we do not at all see this as a “holy” holiday in Israel. Nor can we see observance of its original institution as in any way being blessed of God.

#### A WORD OF CAUTION

*We attribute the awakening to an awareness of the Jewish roots of its faith among many within the Gentile Church during the past two decades to be a blessed movement of God!* We see the rediscovery which goes with this as enriching and profitable—a re-entry into an important part of that which is the heritage of all of God’s children in Messiah. We know of several brilliant books which have been written to assist in this, among them *Your People Shall be My People* by Don Finto, and *The Messianic Church Arising* by Robert Heidler. *However, with this blessing, we have become aware of a growing danger.* Some have gone from a rediscovery of Biblical traditions into which as “joint heirs” they are entitled to join with their Jewish elder brothers and sisters in the Faith—to becoming intoxicated with “all things Jewish.” As though there were something hidden and holy and wise in all religious traditions of the Jews, simply because they are a chosen people. This can lead to great error. From the time that the *Holy Spirit*, in whose power Yeshua moved was rejected by the religious leaders of His people (Luke 4:14-30), other spirits have swarmed to fill the void. There are many traditions revered amongst modern religious Jews which received their inspiration through spiritual powers which hate the Messiah.

May the Lord in His Holy Spirit guide His children, both Jew and Gentile, in asking “for the ancient paths, where the good way is”—and walking in it! (Jeremiah 6:16).

*We believe that the holiday and celebration of Lag Ba’Omer epitomizes a spiritual darkness into which, without the life of its Messiah and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, religious Judaism has led its people for twenty centuries.*

\* It has spawned idolatry—Rabbi bar Yochai is seen by many (including the late Lubavitcher Rebbe Schneerson) as having borne within himself a re-incarnated spark of the soul of Moses. Tens of thousands go to his grave to receive a special redemption.

\* It provides a counterfeit spiritual experience. A friend who came out of ultra-Orthodox Judaism told of the incredible exhilaration she tangibly experienced when as a little girl her father would take her near to the grave. There is no doubt that there is an anointing released—but it is not from the Holy Spirit which Yeshua asked his Father to send to those who believed in Him in the world.

\* Bar Yochai presented himself as a messenger of light with power over the day, declaring on the day of his death, “*Now it is my desire to reveal secrets...The day will not go to its place like any other, for this entire day stands within my domain.*” Yet Psalm 74:16 says of YHVH Himself, “*The day is Yours, the night also is Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun. You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made summer and winter.*” II Corinthians 11:14-15 presents a warning, “*Satan himself transforms himself into an angel (messenger) of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*”

\*Bar Yochai is celebrated by ultra-Orthodox as a recipient and revealer of the deepest secrets of the Kabbalah.” *Kabbalah* means “receiving”. It is seen as a secret (It is properly studied only by mature men, and that in the hours after midnight) means of receiving wisdom and knowledge. As with the Serpent’s words over the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, it is extremely seductive, offering a pathway to knowledge and powers hidden from others. Yet it is a path to knowledge strictly forbidden by God. A good book to set against its deception is the *Book of First John* from the New Covenant--a Book effulgent with the True Light:

*“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all...Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Yeshua Messiah has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Yeshua Messiah has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of anti-Messiah [i.e. “anti-Christ”], which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world...Whoever believes that Yeshua is the Messiah is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.”*  
(I John 1:5; 4:1-3; 5:1)

**PLEASE PRAY:**

**\*That Israel will be drawn out of the deceptions of false Messiahs and messengers of Light. Pray especially for the ultra-Orthodox (Haridim) who live in a world of occult darkness and legalism—that “He in whom is Life, and the life is the light of men” will shine into their darkness—and the darkness will not be able to put it out! (John 1:4-5).**

**\*Zechariah 4:6b; Ezekiel 39:29—“ *‘Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit’, says the LORD of Armies.*” “*And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel*”. Pray that this light will shine into the darkness surrounding Mount Meron in northern Israel—that the powers present there will be bound from drawing and deceiving the children of Jacob.**

**\*John 6:39. “*This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.*” Pray *Resurrection Life of Yeshua/Jesus*—over the religious Jews in Israel. Many are caught in a blind idolatry to what they take to be the departed spirits of dead rabbis present at tombs. There is much going to these places of death to receive a touch of life where there is none. Yeshua came that they might have Life and have it more abundantly!**

**\*Pray for equipping of the Body of Messiah in Israel to stand in the power of the Holy Spirit against occult spiritual darkness in the Land—and how to lead their fellows out of that darkness.**

## **2. POPE FRANCIS TO VISIT ISRAEL NEXT WEEKEND**

***Next Saturday Pope Francis is scheduled to make his first visit to Israel. The itinerary for this three-day visit is complicated, with, of course, politics on all sides involved. The Pontiff is scheduled to first spend Saturday morning in Jordan, visiting the traditional site of Jesus’ baptism. After this, he will visit the disputed territories of Judea and Samaria where he will meet with Palestinian leaders, and then accompanied by Palestinian President Abbas to Bethlehem, where he will lead a service. (Since Israel relinquished control over the town in December 2005, the Palestinian Authority has done much to vaunt its reinvention of Jesus as a “Palestinian” to visiting world leaders.) While there, the Pope will be taken on a tour of the Deheishe refugee camp, which the PA has retained in its impoverished state (as with other ‘camps’ in Judea and Samaria) for propaganda purposes. From there, the Pope will fly to the Ben Gurion airport for an official welcome to Israel, then on to Jerusalem where he will visit the Holocaust Museum and various holy sites about the city. During his visit, Francis is also scheduled to visit with the top Muslim cleric in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount, and with the Patriarch of Orthodox Christians in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. He will meet with other Church leaders, including the leader of the Maronite Catholic Church in Lebanon Bechara Rai (who has caused anger in his home country for visiting Israel on this occasion). Francis is also scheduled to visit the traditional site of the Last Supper—one of several locations which the Vatican has persistently demanded be placed under the control if not the sovereignty of Rome. Complicating matters, ultra-nationalist Jews have recently embarrassed the government by plastering a number of Christian sites with anti-Christian graffiti, along with affecting similar desecration to Muslim sites, actions which have not escaped notice in the Vatican.***

**From the very beginning of assuming his office, Pope Francis has shown a marked respect to the Jewish community, and to Judaism in general. As this Pope, who has repeatedly surprised the world with his humble character and innovative actions, makes his way to Israel later in the week,**

**PLEASE PRAY:**

**\*That He will receive grace to enter the Holy Land in a spirit of graciousness, humility, and openness to the Holy Spirit.**

**\*That Francis will be granted spiritual discernment during his visit to “Hear what the Spirit is saying” to the branch of the Church over which he has been entrusted with leadership.**

**\*That that discernment extend to being guided by the Holy Spirit in dividing truth from falsehood in what he sees and is told. *“Guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my savior—and in you I hope all day long”* (Psalm 25:5).**

**\*That Francis’ tongue also be under the control of the Holy Spirit during his visit—that his speech be informed with grace, and he not speak or make any pronouncements out of season.**

**\*For protection for the Pontiff during his visit.**

### **3. THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRAYERS FOR THE “CROSSROAD” CONFERENCE**

**The conference which included delegates from a number of Middle Eastern states was truly blessed of God. It was attended at first with many challenges. Almost all of a delegation of Iranians coming from England who had obtained visas were turned away for undisclosed security concerns at the Israeli airport—as were a number of Iraqis. But others made it through. There were increasingly powerful meetings, with Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi Kurdish, Egyptian, Palestinian Arab, as well as Israeli Hebrew and Israeli Arab speakers and many others. There was a sense of enlarged and informed understanding of the circumstances of Believers in their native lands, a warm drawing-together in unity of the Holy Spirit, a desire fueled with new love, hope and faith for God’s purposes for today along the “Isaiah 19 Highway”. At times, there were incredibly powerful outpourings of worship which went on and on, accentuated by callings out to God in many different languages. And there were timely messages which equipped all present for days ahead.**

**Thank you again for your prayers. We indeed believe that atmospheres over Jerusalem were shifted.**

**PLEASE PRAY:**

**\*A rear-guard over all who participated. That nothing which was released by the Holy Spirit will be lost, but will germinate and bear good fruit in the nations to which they return.**

**\*Restoration and healing for those who tried to come to Israel for the conference, but were denied access. Grace to forgive, and bless those by whom they were rejected. Please pray for integrity and honesty among the security forces at Israel's Ben Gurion Airport. Pray that any strongholds of the enemy there which stand in the way of the flow of those God sends to bring life to his people, would be broken down and removed.**

**\*That all finances expended on the conference will be restored.**

**\*For protection and restoration for all expended by those who organized and led and oversaw the Crossroads Conference in Jerusalem. For wisdom and clear leading as to how this godly initiative should progress from here!**

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#### **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 Parashah for this week 18-24 May is called *B'Midbar*—"In the Desert":**

**TORAH: Numbers 1:1—2:20**

**HAFTARAH: Hosea 1:10—2:20**

***B'Midbar*** ("In the Desert/Wilderness") is the Hebrew name for the book, called "Numbers" in most English Bibles—after the numbering in the census lists of Chps. 1 & 26. The book describes key events taking place between Israel's leaving Mount Sinai and her arrival at the borders of Canaan some 38 years later.

**\*Numbers 2:2-3:** *"The sons of Israel shall camp, each by his own standard...On the east side, toward the rising of the sun, those of the standard of the forces with Judah shall camp according to their armies; and Nahshon the son of Amminadav shall be the leader of the children of Judah."* The tribe of Yehuda (Judah), along with Issachar and Zebulun, was to camp facing the

East. The Hebrew root for *Yehuda* is related to hands or arms raised in the giving of praise or thanks (cf. Gen 29:35). Judah was to camp on the side of the Tabernacle facing eastward—as though to “awaken the dawn” with praise (Ps 57:8). Psalm 63:1-4 bears a beautiful picture of this holy principal being demonstrated hundreds of years later by David (himself a descendant of Nahshon and Amminadav). He is also “in a desert” –and his Hebrew literally says, “*Elohim, my God are you, I will ‘dawn’ you...my lips shall praise you...I will lift up the palms of my hands in Your name.*” Numbers 10:14 (in the Parashah two weeks from now) will show that the tribe of *Yehuda* was also God’s choice to be in the lead when the camp broke up and moved forward. Hundreds of years after David, Jehosaphat would place singers in front of his army (II Chronicles 20:21) heading out to engage an overwhelming foe, singing “*Hodu la’Adonai ki tov, ki le-olam hasdo!*” (“Give thanks with the raising of your hands to the LORD for He is good, for to forever is his lovingkindness!”). A tribe epitomizing thanksgiving and praise, it is also the “royal tribe” which must always come first, from whom a royal scepter would arise which would never depart. From this tribe would come the King of Kings, Yeshua/Jesus—of whom Jacob had prophesied that his brothers would praise, and his father’s children bow down before Him (Genesis 49:8)! Zechariah 12:10 prophesies the repentance and renewal of “the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem”—yet 12:7 reveals that first must come salvation of the “tents of Judah.” We believe that spiritually this implies that the rebirth of Jerusalem and eventually all of Israel will be ushered in by an outpouring of Praise and Worship in Spirit and in Truth. There are many signs that this is beginning to happen!

**PLEASE PRAY: For praise, thanksgiving and worship to again rise to its place in the forefront of Israel (whose call includes being a praise in all the earth (Isaiah 62:7; Zephaniah 3:20). Pray for strength and inspiration for those in houses of worship and prayer which have been raised up in recent years. Pray for believers in the Israeli Defense Force and police to have grace in making praise and thanksgiving a priority. Since Nahshon was to be Judah’s leader—his name has come in modern Hebrew to be one of the synonyms for “pioneer” (Tradition says that he was the first to place his foot in the Red Sea after the command came to cross over). Pray for those called to pioneer worship in a resurrected Hebrew language in restored Israel today! There are many, both old and young, male and female, Jew and Gentile through whom praise and worship in the ancient language has, during the past 30 years, begun again to be awakened!**

**Numbers 4:4-6, 15.** “*This is the work of the descendants of Kohath in the tent of meeting, concerning the most holy things. When the camp sets out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and they shall take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it; and they shall lay a covering of porpoise skin on it, and shall spread over it a cloth of pure blue (Hebrew: tekhelet—a sky-blue dye made from a special mollusk), and shall insert its poles...When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy objects and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is to set out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them, so that they*

*will not touch the holy objects and dies. These are the things in the tent of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.”*

Given the clarity of these instructions, it is strange the pictures and figurines one may see in souvenir shop windows in Jerusalem depicting Levites carrying the golden Ark of the Covenant, with the *aron*—“chest” and its Cherubim plainly visible. As is here and in other passages make clear, no one *ever* was allowed to look upon the holy Ark, except the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (and then amidst clouds of incense). On the road, it was not paraded out for everyone to gaze upon. Before leaving, the Aaronic priests (not the other Levites) came in, took down the veil; it appears that they then moved forward holding it as a screen, until, upon reaching the Ark, they draped it over the holy object as a covering. Upon this, other coverings were then laid (upon this holy chest upon which *kippur*—another word for ‘covering’—was made in blood once a year on behalf of the people’s sin). But the Ark of the Presence was Holy...and touching it or even looking upon it was more than even the especially set-apart priests were allowed to do. Each person involved must embrace the special responsibility of his office—and not seek another. The Levites cared for the outer courts; from among the Levites, the sons of Kohath would be the ‘carriers’ of the Ark; from among the Levites, only descendants of Aaron (*kohanim*—“priests”) could approach the holiest chamber to dismantle it—and from within the descendants of Aaron, only he and his successor could actually enter, once a year, within the veil.

**\*Hosea 1:10:** *“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ there it shall be said to them, ‘You are sons of the Life-God.’”*

**PLEASE PRAY:** For more and more of the millions of returned Children of Jacob to be awakened to their true identity—to recognize that they are not merely an ancient people related to certain Patriarchs; they are, in fact, beloved children of the Life-God Himself (Heb: *El Hai*), Who has sent forth His Son that they may *“have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10)!

**\*Hosea 2:16; 19-20; 16:** *“ ‘And it shall be, in that day,’ says the LORD, ‘that you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer call Me ‘My Master’ ...I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD.”*

**PLEASE PRAY:** For awakening of a longing in Israeli hearts for these wonderful attributes—*righteousness, justice, loving kindness, mercy, faithfulness*---with which her God is wooing her. Pray that grace will be released on that longing which will result in the ‘knowledge’ of her Lord prophesied at the end of the verse! It is interesting that in verse 16,

the substituted word “my husband” is “*ishi*”, which literally means ‘my man’. **This knowledge can only come about in revelation of “the ‘man’—Yeshua the Messiah!”**

**\*Hosea 2:14-16 (NIV):** “*Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.*” *Achor* means ‘trouble’. “Door (or ‘Opening’) of Hope” is *Petah Tiqva* (There is a large city by that name in central Israel). **PLEASE PRAY** that Israel will find grace to lift her eyes from her troubles to the God of Hope (Romans 15:13), finding entrance into His life through the Door which He has provided (John 10:9).



*Martin and Norma Sarvis  
Jerusalem*

[The readings for next week 25-31 May are called *Naso*—“Elevate!”. TORAH: Numbers 4:21—7:89; HAFTARAH: Judges 13:2-25]

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