

ISRAEL'S RESTORATION

Published Monthly Since 1991 / Based in Israel

February '24

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**Is God Jewish? And Other
Thoughts Around Christmas...**

02 | Ariel Blumenthal

How Many Days?

03-06 | Hannah Tekle

"Thus far has the LORD helped us."

05 | Leon Mazin

After the War...

07 | Jonathan Moore

Let There Be Light

08 | Revive Israel

I Know That You Have *Little Strength*

Page 04 | By Guy Cohen

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Is God *Jewish*?

And Other Thoughts Around Christmas...



By Ariel Blumenthal



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Is God Jewish? And how should the answer to this (odd) question influence your attitude towards the Jewish people, Israel, and the Arab-Israeli conflict? Let's start by looking at God's covenant with King David.

After David's great victory and prosperity, he settled in a first-class mansion in Jerusalem made of finest cedar wood. David then began to have a bit of "holy guilt" because God was still dwelling in a tent, and not a beautiful temple. David wanted to honor God by building Him a permanent, glorious resting place (Psalm 132). God's reply was, "*Thank you David for your heart, and yes to a temple, but you're not going to build it...instead I've got bigger plans for the both of us – together!*"

"... I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me." (2 Samuel 7:12–16 NASB95)

Friends, did you catch that? The LORD promises David a "son" whose throne will be eternal. At the same time, He promises that this Davidic scion will also be a son to God Himself. The two of them will be joint patriarchs of the same glorious Son – the Messiah – Son of God and Son of David.

Most Christians have agreed throughout history: Jesus, son of David, son of God, was born a Jew, an Israelite from the tribe of "Jew-dah." The bigger question is: is He still Jewish? Did the Messiah, Son of David, son of Joseph and Miriam, come into the world as a Jew – in order to fulfill the prophecies so that He could "graduate" to becoming the universal, divine Son of God, savior to every tribe, tongue and nation? Was His Jewishness only important at His first coming?

Well, Yeshua Himself seals Biblical revelation by saying, "***I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star***" (Revelation 22:16). Just like the "I am" statements in the Gospel of John, the Lord declares that He still is both the root (preceding David) and the offspring (David's Son). This Jewish, Davidic identity continues to be a part of who Yeshua is, in the New Testament present tense. This means that Yeshua is both divine, and human – but not just any universal human, a real human with a unique DNA from the Judean House of David.

Let's ponder and pray about what this means for us. If Yeshua is indeed one unified person, then this means, if you're comfortable saying it, that God is in fact Jewish! Or, at least that God, in His coming down as a flesh and blood human, did so as a Jewish, Davidic man. He is *still* that man, and it is that Man who sits on the throne of heaven and will ***soon return to rule*** the nations and the universe from Jerusalem, the city of His father David.

So when you see Him in the manger, remember that eight days after the birth, He was circumcised according to Abrahamic and Jewish covenant. And as you look at the situation in Gaza, or the Arab-Israeli conflict, or at rising anti-Semitism around the world, ask yourself these questions:

- Is not the anti-Israel sentiment throughout world history, at its core, a Satanic mutiny to keep the Son of David from reigning over all?
- If Yeshua is still Jewish, then how do I need to stand with Him, for Him, in the midst of all this?
- And if He is still Jewish, what does my attitude need to be towards His people, His down-to-earth physical tribe?

Even amidst Jewish unbelief and continued resistance to the Gospel, we believe God is faithful to His covenants (Romans 11:28).





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How Many Days?



By Hannah Tekle

*Lord, You have been our dwelling place through all generations.
 Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the earth and the world,
 From everlasting to everlasting You are God.
 You return man to dust, saying, "Return, O sons of mortals."
 For in Your sight a thousand years are but a day that passes, or a watch of the night. ...
 So teach us to **number our days**,
 That we may present a heart of wisdom.
 Return, O LORD! How long will it be?
 Have compassion on Your servants.
 Satisfy us in the morning with Your loving devotion,
 That we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.*

(Psalm 90:1-14)

The verses above, attributed to Moses, paint the broad strokes of human existence, from creation, through the generations, to the life of the individual. We are but one link in a long chain of generations. We are mortal and will return to dust at the end of our days. Wisdom, compassion, love, joy and gladness – these are what make our days meaningful and worthwhile.

Isn't the passage of time a strange thing! One moment I was 15, and the next moment 50! "Numbering our days" is just a fancy way to describe evaluating life in terms of goals and resolutions – a natural and beneficial exercise for the soul. You know... like New Year's resolutions.

What are your goals for 2024?

Lose weight? Read the whole Bible? Get in shape? Be kind to your mother-in-law? Make sure the kids do their chores? Get your taxes in order on time? Paint the house? Bring the hostages home? ... Oh, wait! – That one's not on everyone's list, just for Israel and friends.

As a country we are numbering the days that kidnapped Israelis are still being held in horrifying captivity. In our workaday routine, we never lose sight of the terribly tragic fact that 136 of our citizens are kept hostage only a few miles away from our border, in Southern Gaza. While Israelis bravely and necessarily continue on with normal tasks, life is anything but normal.

Even deciding what to write in this article was a challenge – how can one insignificant collection of a few hundred words impact the desperate circumstances we are facing. However, by God's grace we press on, heartened by the fervent prayers of the righteous worldwide, standing in the gap for those bound in captivity.

Just days ago, it was reported that 6 more IDF soldiers were tragically killed in an explosion along with nine wounded. One of the soldiers injured was a beloved national celebrity. Idan Amedi is a singer, songwriter and actor. A Jerusalem native, on October 7th he abandoned his celebrity "glory" to show up for duty in his combat engineer unit like every other reserve soldier.

Continued on page 6



I Know That You Have *Little Strength*



By Guy Cohen

“I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name... I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown...”

(Revelation 3:8,11 spoken to the congregation at Philadelphia)

Can you feel the relevance and reassurance of Yeshua’s words, right now? He knows everything that’s happening and He will take care of it all. During these challenging days, I am drawing strength from these words and experiencing a depth in God in ways I never have before.

The congregation of Philadelphia in the book of Revelation paid a high price for their loyalty to Yeshua, yet they did not deny their faith. They were willing even to be humiliated in the eyes of many, in order to be considered worthy and respected in the eyes of God. He saw their works and heard their prayers. As we read the verses above, written so long ago, their choices still resonate and stand as an example to us today.



The Emotional Drain of Danger

Residing in dangerous regions, such as Israel, necessitates a constant level of alertness and wariness that is emotionally draining. Normal life is hard enough, but now the continuous exposure to injustice, violence and the slaughter of innocents is thoroughly exhausting. I see in the life of believers here in Israel how suffering challenges our soul’s ability to remain in His Peace. Yet in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 we see that: ***“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”***

When a person is strong and capable or rich and successful, he is convinced that success is the result of his own abilities. However, when a believer in God is weak and yet overcomes, it’s clearly God’s doing. Also, when a believer who is poor succeeds in advancing in life and building a better future, it is clear that God is the one who helped him.

The human weakness of Philadelphia’s believers allowed them to remain humble and dependent on the grace of Messiah. Humility leads to continual purification and blessings. As believers we must seek to live a life of surrender and humility. It’s not wrong to be wealthy and successful or strong and motivated, on the condition that Yeshua is the center of our lives.

As His disciples, our eyes must be on Yeshua all the days of our lives (Hebrews 12:2-3). He will enable us to focus on Him and to give Him our pain and sorrow – physical pain as well as emotional and spiritual exhaustion.

“I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Put your hope in the LORD. Be strong and take heart and hope in the LORD.” (Psalm 27:13-14)

Living in a war zone, with uprooted border populations and hearing the pain of God’s children, I continually ask Him to show me how to reflect His love. Through God we will overcome! He brings victory to the battles in our lives, even in our weakness—especially in our weakness, when we lean on Him.



“Thus far has the LORD *helped us.*”



By Leon & Nina Mazin

Last year was not easy for the Israel and its citizens. It was marked by much division and stress; and then the war, which broke out on October 7th, turned our reality upside-down against all expectations. We are still in the midst of the war and its repercussions which have drastically altered the lives of people in Israel and many outside it.

But those who trust in God know that He has never abandoned us. He is with us. He helps us, protects, and leads us forward to victory. As 2024 begins, we stand in faith the Lord will continue to bless His children here and throughout the world.

Thanks to God's mercy and grace we are able to continue ministering during this hard time. It's a great blessing for us to provide hot meals to elderly people, and to help new immigrants who arrive in Israel. We are also involved in helping parents of children who come to Israel for medical care, specifically for cancer treatment.

God has blessed our music school “Keshet Tzilim” (Rainbow of Sounds) with new teachers. Some of them are new immigrants who have recently come to Israel. New students have also joined us and they actively and joyfully participated in the recent concerts for new immigrants, Holocaust survivors and local seniors. The Spirit of God visibly touched the hearts of our guests as the young children and professional musicians played together.



As you know, since the war began over 300,000 reservists were called up to serve in the army, among them many believers. We were led to begin a ministry to serve our brothers and sisters in the IDF to provide them with hot meals, warm clothing and more. We also seek ways to provide for the needs of IDF soldiers in general. It's an honor and blessing for us to bless them as they sacrifice their safety and comfort to protect us.



We want to thank all of you for praying for Israel and for being partners in all these ministries in 2023. May God bless you and your loved ones with health, prosperity, genuine joy and shalom in our Lord Yeshua!

“While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites... Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying 'Thus far has the LORD helped us.' So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory...” (1 Samuel 7:10-12 NIV)

A Call for Prayer Warfare:

During peace time soldiers train, prepare and simulate battle... the object of their training. When war breaks out, they are called to the battlefield and engage. Their routine peacetime lifestyle is disrupted. In war mode they are in the field, alert, using physical and mental effort to overcome the obstacles at hand, and defeat the enemy.

In a similar way, we as believers are called to be prayer warriors - to stand in the gap, intercede and pray for God's will to be done; to foil the plans of the enemy, and overcome evil with good.

Since October 7th, Israel has been fighting a battle for its very existence that could develop into a global war of Ezekiel 38-39 scale. This is a universal clash between good and evil. Please join us by warring in prayer!

Return to Zion Congregation

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Amedi is known for his skillful and honest songwriting, as well as his dramatic climb to fame as an actor. He first became nationally known when he participated in a TV singing contest (A Star is Born - "kochav nolad") singing an original song with poignant lyrics about his experiences in the military.



Idan Amedi (R) with IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi (© IDF)

While our countrymen can seem honest to the point of being rude, Amedi is a beautiful representation of what is positive in the modern Israeli. One can't help but think of the historical and Biblical tradition of King David as the warrior poet, fierce yet sensitive, who penned the majority of the verses in the psalms that so faithfully offer us comfort and give voice to our souls' need for God the Father.

Many of Amedi's songs are self-effacing existential ballads, with thoughtful lyrics about time, regret, love and humanity. We pray healing for him and all the other wounded soldiers – body, soul and spirit!

As we passed the 100 day mark of the war, commentators have compared the national atmosphere to the years of the Covid-19 pandemic, but sadly are concluding that this crisis is so much worse. In that difficult season we figured out how to proceed with daily life – and we are having to do it again. Even our entertainment has come to reflect the new normal. The popular Israeli satire show, *Eretz Nehederet* (A Wonderful Land), is now calling itself *Eretz Nilchemet* (A Land At War). The content of the show deals in a surprisingly real and sensitive, yet humorous way with the reality of war; unexpectedly inspiring us to tears and to prayer. "A cheerful heart does good like medicine" (Proverbs 17:22)!

When we came out of the Corona crisis, I remember looking back and counting. How many people critically ill? How many years? How many weeks of lockdown? *How many days* in quarantine? How many milestones and holidays missed and negatively affected by the epidemiological regulations?

The longer we lived with the pandemic, the more the reporting of the numbers changed. So too has it been with this war. In the first week the numbers of those killed and captured, and the number of rockets and the days experiencing war, were reported meticulously. **As the numbers grew, we became numbered to the sharp significance of each life, each day.** To put it mildly, War is awful!

If we were already desperate for God to step in and intervene during the COVID Crisis. How much more now!

Israel is seeking God in spirit and in truth – like I have never seen before. Pray and fan those flames.

In our own way, at Tents of Mercy, we too are "numbering our days" – looking back and looking forward in our community's activities; to find the balance between emergency projects and regular life. We have revamped our weekly and monthly schedule to encourage fellowship, worship and breaking bread together. And we just published a beautiful calendar for 2024 – to celebrate the yearly congregational life cycle and to treasure our days as a community.





After the *War*...



By Jonathan Moore

Throughout Israel one tricky and particular question keeps coming up, “What about the day after?” Scared citizens and politicking politicians are all asking what life will look like after the war ends. Who runs Gaza post-Hamas? How safe will the south be to live in? How safe will the north be? What will life look like for any of us?! Let’s take a deep breath...

First and foremost, we know that the Lord God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, is still on His throne and caring for every little detail in our lives.

“Aren’t five sparrows being sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:6-7)

Secondly, we can legitimately ask God what He plans for the future. We can ask if anything needs to change in our lives or our congregations. The Covid-19 years significantly altered our congregation and we’ve permanently adopted some of those changes in our community life.



So what will Ahavat Yeshua congregation in downtown Jerusalem look like the day after the war? We are a congregation whose purpose is rooted in people, primarily our members and secondarily our neighborhoods and our city – Jerusalem. The “day after” for us is about God’s master plan for humanity – relationship. For example, within each of the congregation’s families, is PTSD affecting their marriage? Their parenting? Are members having trouble stilling their hearts to have quiet time? Are neighbors receiving a testimony of God’s goodness through our daily interactions? These are questions which don’t have an easily quantifiable metric or deliverable. Yet I believe that these “minor” investments into lives of on-the-ground salt-of-the-earth members is what will bring the greatest Kingdom impact. It may not be as quantifiable as books or helmets distributed, but I believe that Ahavat Yeshua is poised for tremendous Kingdom impact the day after the war. I know this because I already see it happening now, during the war.

I see it in the young, newly married woman caring for children whose fathers were killed on October 7th.

I see it in the young man who isn’t serving in the military with his friends because he was medically discharged. So instead he is blogging on how young guys can step up as men.

I see it in the determination and positivity of our group of newlywed wives who have been without their husbands for the past three months due to wartime reserve duty call-up. If they are more than overcomers during even this difficult time, I believe they will shine as brilliant lights in Jerusalem on the day after.

Thank you for your prayers and support of ongoing congregational life to expand the Kingdom in Jerusalem.





Let There Be *Light*

Youth discipleship week for youth from Southern Israel

By Revive Israel

Thank you for bringing our recent youth discipleship program before the throne of grace.

We are at a pivotal time when the people of Israel are seeking emotional, physical and spiritual relief, restoration, and rebuilding. And, while we seek the Lord's guidance for discipleship training, we never know how He is going to work. *"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Most of the **teenagers that participated in the program came from towns in southern Israel which have been under rocket fire from Hamas and Gaza for years.** When they left our community after a very full week of fellowship with God and with each other, we were in awe of how God moved. He exceeded our expectations. We'll let them share with you through their testimonies and experiences:

"I appreciated the approach of learning about God and then immediately putting what we discussed into practice... The Word came alive and began working in my heart. Before coming, I felt somewhat distant from God; and this week, I returned to Him and began to draw closer to Him." – Yosef, 18 from Beersheba

"Being homeschooled... I don't have many believing friends. This week provided me with the opportunity to meet new people, and I'm grateful for the friendships I formed. As a result of the program, I've decided to actively seek opportunities to deepen my faith and build connections with believers. Despite my initial hesitation, God met me in a special way, and each day, I found myself wanting to invest more time in the program rather than distance myself." – Ruth, 15 from Abu Ghosh

"Thanks to the time I spent with the community, my trust in people was restored... One morning during the worship time... I was tired, and negative thoughts began running through my head. One of the leaders came and prayed over me, speaking exactly what was in head without her knowing anything. It was there I understood that God knows my heart. He sent her to show me who I truly am. It touched my heart and began a transformation. I started to be kinder to others after this moment." – Adiel, 15 from Beersheba

"Through the program, I realized that there are various ways to learn about God. While I used to prefer discussions over lectures, I found Youval's teaching thought-provoking and despite the limited discussion, I gained valuable insights from it." – Yaron, 15 from Ashkelon

"Throughout the program, I gained a deeper understanding of the meaning of life and how to live as a believer and grow closer to God. I also realized how much the people around me influence my life, both the negative and positive influences. I considered how much weight I give to their words in my life, and decided to distance myself from those who are negatively influencing my life." – Isaac, 16 from Ashkelon

"I've gained a new appreciation for everything in my life, learning not to take things for granted. Life has its share of ups and downs, but I've learned the importance of gratitude, and the benefits of waking up early and spending time outdoors in nature. I'm motivated to continue waking up early and engaging in morning scripture reading." – Dana, 15 from Beersheba

These testimonies are the fruit of your support and prayers. Thank you for the opportunity you gave to these teens!

