



December 2009

Hanukkah begins on the eve of Friday, Dec. 11, 2009

NEXT YEAR—in Jerusalem!!

Hanukkah Mercy Mission
Nov. 29–Dec. 10, 2010

*Save the date!
Details to follow.*

Warmest Greetings in the Prince of Peace!

December Realities

We received the topic of this month's newsletter in a dream! (This happens rarely, but when it does, we pay close attention.) The Lord has led us to highlight the reality of our world situation, especially as it pertains to the U.S. and Israel, by making connections with words that resound around us during the December holiday season. As we examine these words and what they represent in the final month of 2009, the picture of a world unraveling will appear before our eyes. But, fear not! Take heart! Yeshua, the Messiah, forewarned us that in the days immediately preceding His return, the world would be in chaos, with wars, rumors of war, nations rising against nations, famines, pestilences, earthquakes and more. (See Matthew 24:6-14.) The Messiah also told us that, in spite of grim realities, we could have peace **in Him**: "...In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Bethlehem

Millions will sing about the "little town of Bethlehem" this month. But the Bethlehem of December 2009 does not "lie still" in blissful, deep sleep.

Bethlehem is no longer a Jewish city. It is controlled by the Islamic terrorist group, Fatah. The Palestinian Authority took control of Bethlehem in 1995. Yasser Arafat was quoted as saying that Jesus was a Palestinian, not a Jew. Truth has been swallowed up in far-fetched lies. In August of 2009, Abbas' Fatah organization held its first conference in twenty years in Bethlehem. The conference opened as follows: "In the name of the shahids [suicide murderers] and in the name of Jerusalem, the capital of the Palestinian state, we declare the opening of the 6th convention of our movement, Fatah." The charter of Fatah calls for the elimination and destruction of Israel. This reality has not changed since the group's inception, nor has the reality that spokesmen for the group say one thing in English, and another in Arabic. The media has helped them do a good job of deceiving many, including world leaders.

Reverend Naim Khoury is a Baptist pastor still living in Bethlehem. His church has been bombed at least fourteen times. He has been ambushed and shot three times. Yet, he continues to say: "Israel is God's people and His promises will be fulfilled." (Pray for Reverend Khoury. He is a very brave man of God, born and raised in the Old City of Jerusalem.)

The Associated Press reported last month that Bethlehem may soon have few Christians left. They account for less than 15% of the population of Bethlehem today, where once they were 80% of the town's population. Christian Arabs like Ibrahim Shomali, a restaurant owner, is leaving soon with his wife for Flint, Michigan. "We Christians now feel like we are on the cross," he said. Shops are closed, few tourists attempt the journey through the Bethlehem wall built to keep suicide bombers from entering Jerusalem. There are armed guards and a checkpoint. Don Wooding in an article for ASSIST News Service expressed the frightening reality of Bethlehem today as follows: "The last time

I was in Bethlehem with my wife Norma, we were held up by five gunmen reputed to be from Islamic Jihad. They said they were going to kill us for being Israeli settlers. Our Arab taxi driver literally saved our lives by explaining that we were from the United States, and the gunmen, after some discussion, finally agreed to spare our lives." (Our Mercy Mission groups stay out of all dangerous areas!)

Judea

"...Yeshua was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king..." (Matthew 2:1).

Today, to be politically correct, we would have to say that Yeshua was born in Bethlehem, West Bank. However, what is today called the "West Bank" is actually the historical and biblical areas of Judea and Samaria. The name "West Bank" was created by Jordan after the 1948 War of Independence when Arab armies overran Judea and Samaria. Even after Israel drove the "occupiers" back across the Jordan River in the 1967 Six Day War, the term "West Bank" continued to be used by the media rather than the biblical names Judea and Samaria.

After Joshua conquered the land of Canaan, and for the next 3,000 years, the name Judea has been used to describe the territory from Jerusalem south along the Judean mountain ridge line extending east from the mountains down to the Dead Sea. The hill country north and west of Jerusalem has been known as Samaria since the days of King Jeroboam. Norma Archbold in her excellent book, **The Mountains of Israel**, explains that the West Bank and the mountains of Israel are nearly identical, and are the heart of the Land promised by God to Israel, the inheritance of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Joseph. These "mountains" are the location of Bethel, Ai, Shechem, Bethany, Bethlehem, Hebron and Jerusalem. Abraham was in the mountains of Israel between Bethel and Ai when God promised him the Land of Israel (Genesis 13:17) as an everlasting covenant.

Israel sinned. God scattered His people among the nations, but also promised to regather them and bring them back to their own land (Ezekiel 11:17). Actually, the land of Israel belongs to God (Leviticus 25:23). In Ezekiel 36 He reveals a plan for His Land which includes resettling the Jewish people in the mountains of Israel: the so-called "West Bank." (See Ezekiel 36:8, 10-12, 22-24.) Jews who live in the "West Bank" today are fulfilling Bible prophecy. Today's media and the world proclaim that it is wrong for Jewish people to settle there. This is a very difficult reality!!

Norma Archbold expresses the dilemma in this way: "The Lord promised to settle the Jewish people in the mountains of Israel. Yet leaders of the Arab nations insist that Jewish settlements in the mountains of Israel are the cause of unrest in the Middle East. The Lord is acting according to His Word, and the Arab nations are opposing Him." The leaders of America and other western nations listen to the Arab nations, take their side, and put pressure on Israel to go against the will and the Word of God by giving away Judea and Samaria. Who is the **real** occupier?

Shepherds

At the time of Yeshua's birth, shepherds were *"...living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night"* (Luke 2:8). Normally, this would not occur in December weather (one reason we know Yeshua's birth did not occur on December 25). Our focus this month is on the word "shepherd." Nogah Hareuveni in **Desert and Shepherd in our Biblical Heritage** notes that shepherds in Bible times needed the qualities of courage, physical strength and resourcefulness. Shepherding was considered responsible and honored work. Leadership, even the leadership of God, is described in terms of shepherding. We read in the Bible about both good and bad shepherds. (See Jeremiah 3:15; 50:6, Isaiah 40:11, Ezekiel 34.) Jeremiah especially deals with the failure of Israel's leaders as shepherds of God's people who also rebelled against God, the Great Shepherd.

Today, in December 2009, shepherds still exist in Israel, but their role is greatly diminished. As we travel from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea on our Mercy Mission trips, we always see Arab shepherds leading their flocks through the Judean wilderness.

What about spiritual and political shepherds in December 2009? In many ways, there is a shepherding crisis in the world. We continue to see spiritual shepherds fall due to moral failure. The ones who do not publicly fall, but are self-serving, are not as obvious. However, the Lord always has a remnant. All over the world there are still shepherds willing to lay down their lives for the sheep.

In the political realm? Unfortunately, in our media-driven culture, shepherds are chosen more for their charisma than their character. Nevertheless, there is good news coming out of Israel. Intercessors believe that God has answered the prayer they have been lifting before Him for years: "Lord, give us a leader through whom You can glorify Yourself." Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has taken a strong stand for truth concerning God's Land as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. During a talk in Tel Aviv this summer, Mr. Netanyahu made some clear, succinct, truthful points: "We are currently facing three tremendous challenges: The Iranian threat, the financial crisis, and the promotion of peace...The greatest danger to Israel, to the Middle East, and to all of humanity, is the encounter between extremist Islam and nuclear weapons." He then posed the question: "Why has the conflict been going on for over 60 years? The root of the conflict has been, and remains, the refusal to recognize the right of the Jewish people to its own state in its historical homeland."

U.S. President Barack Obama, in a speech given at about the same time, made reference to the "Holy Koran" and Islam's religious tolerance throughout history. Unfortunately, these were only two of the untruths in his speech. As the Cohens mentioned in their *Watchmen from Jerusalem*, Issue No 3, 2009, Koranic Islam demands conversion or death for all pagans. Muslims are killed if they convert to another faith. Women are defenseless. Jews are called descendants of monkeys and pigs. President Obama spoke of the suffering of the Palestinian people in pursuit of a homeland, when the truth is that Arab nations **rejected** the creation of a Palestinian State alongside a Jewish State in 1947-48, since they would not accept any Jewish State whatsoever. The reality in December 2009 is the same. President Obama never asked the Arab countries to accept Israel as a Jewish State, refrained from calling 'resistance attacks' against Israel 'terrorism,' ignored the truth that the Land of Israel was promised to the Jewish people—over 200 times in the Bible—and is determined to see that Land divided, including Jerusalem. Withdrawal is not the key to peace.

We must pray that the shepherd whom Americans elected begins to see the truth, embrace the truth, and walk in the truth, not only as it pertains to Israel, but to the final destiny of the U.S.A. We fear that our president is not "walking in the light." A treaty due to be signed this month called the "Copenhagen Agreement" is, on the surface, about climate-change. There is concern that this treaty contains the provision for a "world government," threatening the sovereignty of the nations involved in the agreement. Pray that everything that is hidden will be revealed (Matthew 10:26).

Gold, Frankincense & Myrrh

We are all familiar with the treasures brought by the wise men from the East to the infant Yeshua (Matthew 2:11). The Lord showed us that gold, frankincense and myrrh, as objects of worship and adoration of God, have become symbols of worship of self, pleasure, and power. Gold = Money, Frankincense = Oil, Myrrh = Drugs. The **love** of money really is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). People become obsessed with wealth and possessions, enter into a rat race, only to find that money does not satisfy. Rampant greed caused the real estate collapse. The fallout affected everyone.

Oil today is far from the oil with frankincense used in the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Temple in Jerusalem. Oil fuels worship of self, power, and pleasure today. In December 2009 we wonder: "Why does the price of gasoline keep rising when there is actually an excess supply?" Some refineries have actually closed, and many are operating at a fraction of their capacity. The answer is a small group of Wall Street speculators who are making enormous sums of money trading oil futures.

Myrrh was a painkiller in Yeshua's day. He refused it on the cross (Mark 15:23) because He chose to take **all** our pain upon Himself. Painkillers today are big business. Drugs, both legal and illegal, help drive our economy. Illegal drugs are a major problem in our country. The U.S. has a higher percentage of its citizens in prison than any nation in the world. Most are there due to drug-related crimes. Florida is known as the legal drug capital of the world. We are a very medicated society. We consume caffeine as a stimulant, alcohol to facilitate relaxation, and over-the-counter pain medications on a daily basis. We have little plastic boxes filled with so many different types of pills that we forget which one is for which ailment! Perhaps if we slowed down a bit, removed some of the stress from our lives, got more sleep, and spent more quiet time with the Lord, we would be less dependent on drugs, and find Him to be our "bundle of myrrh." (Song of Songs 1:13)

"Good Tidings of Great Joy"

With all the bad news, there is Good News, very good news, in December 2009! *"Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ [Messiah] the Lord.'"* (Luke 2:10-11) The good news in Hebrew is *b'sorah*, and it is the same as it was at the beginning. God has sent His Son, the Messiah, into the world to save us from our sin—both Jew and non-Jew alike. When we repent of our sin, and receive Him as our Lord and Savior, He makes us new creations and fills us with His joy. The Good Tidings are still to the Jew first, (God's order—Romans 1:16), and we rejoice to see His people receiving the Messiah in increasing numbers both in the U.S. and around the world. Julie, age 102, received Yeshua recently. If you tune in to a Temple Aron HaKodesh service via the Internet @ www.tak.org on Saturday, 11:00 AM (EST), you might see her swaying to the praise and worship music in the front row, somewhere near Jamie.

"On Earth Peace, Good Will Toward Men"

We always assumed that this angelic proclamation at the birth of Messiah meant that His coming would bring peace on earth and cause men to either experience good will or to show good will to one another. However, when we checked Luke 2:14 in various translations, we were surprised to find out that most of them read something to the effect of ...peace among men with whom God is pleased, or peace for men on whom God's favor rests. In other words, peace would not be **on** earth, but **in** earth—in **Us**—mankind, created from the dust of the earth. That is the reality in December 2009. In a world lacking peace, those who have the *Sar Shalom*, the Prince of Peace, in their hearts through the indwelling Holy Spirit, have what the Bible calls "peace that passes understanding." (Philippians 4:7) God's favor rests on us because we have received the gift of eternal life through His Son, Yeshua. We have peace on the inside, perfect peace, *shalom shalom*.

Peace on the outside—world peace—will not come until Yeshua returns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In the meantime, we need to take our stand as the Macabees of Old, who, by the way, the Jews looked at as "good shepherds." [Read what Yeshua said at Hanukkah in John 10 about Himself as the Good Shepherd.] Like the Macabees, we must dedicate ourselves to the worship of the One True God. We must resist the temptations of humanism, money, oil, drugs, pleasure and power, and point a lost and dying world to the only source of real, lasting peace—Yeshua, the Prince of Peace, the *Sar Shalom*. As Hanukkah begins this December, there will be the annual torch-bearing relay from Modi'in to Jerusalem. During the eight day holiday, we will rededicate ourselves to carrying the torch, the light of God's love, the Good Tidings, to Israel and the entire world.

God bless you for joining us!

Love in Yeshua, the Sar Shalom, the Prince of Peace,

Neil & Jamie

P.S. THANK YOU for helping us end 2009 VICTORIOUSLY, both spiritually and financially.