



Prepare the Way of the Lord!

Summer Blessings in Messiah!

Elul: a month of preparation

The Hebrew month of Elul (pronounced eh-LOOL) begins on the evening of August 17, 2004 and ends on the evening of Sept. 15, 2004 (*Erev Yom Teruah*, also known as *Erev Rosh HaShana*). Our Jewish calendars for the 2004-2005 year are ready now so that you can follow God's sacred calendar and know the exact dates of His holy convocations. Be sure to order yours this month!

While Elul is the twelfth or final month of the year on the civil calendar, it is the sixth month of the year on the Biblical/religious calendar. As such, Elul is the month preceding the seventh and holiest month of the Jewish year, the month during which the High Holy Days occur. Think of Elul as the final month before a wedding, and you have an idea of what Elul is all about:

PREPARATION! The preparation is not physical and material in nature, but rather spiritual. An entire month is dedicated to preparing oneself to come before *Melech HaOlam*, the King of the Universe.

The Hebrew word *Elul* is often interpreted as an acronym with its Hebrew letters *Aleph, Lamed, Vav, Lamed* representing the words **Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li**" (Song of Songs 6:3: "*I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.*") According to traditional Jewish thought, this is a month in which God's people can find favor with Him. He is like a "King in the field" who is easily accessible and approachable. During Elul, the King shines His countenance upon all. A verse from the Prophet Isaiah is often quoted: "*Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon*" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

The Lord wants our Jewish Jewels family to know that His desire is to be very NEAR us during Elul. We are the ones who many times distance ourselves from the Lord. His desire for intimacy never changes. And in Yeshua, our Messiah, we have the promise of His perpetual presence: "*I will never leave you, nor forsake you*" (Hebrews 13:5). This same thought is echoed in Psalm 27:10 recited on a regular basis during the month of Elul: "*When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me.*" Psalm 27 also includes the idea of being hidden in God (see verse 5). A nice thought gleaned from **The Voice of the Lord**, a Messianic Jewish Devotional, concerning being hidden in God is this: "Elul is a time of spiritual preparation. The

most essential preparation may be learning to hide in the Lord." After a second bout with cancer, we can testify to the great importance of knowing how to walk out Colossians 3:3: *"For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ (Messiah) in God."*

(Thank you God bless you for your prayers, cards, tapes and advice regarding Neil's treatment. There will be no chemo nor radiation, just "immunotherapy" this summer and building up Neil's immune system. He will be in "tip top shape" for Israel by September 26, 2004!)

Elul in the Holy Scriptures

It interesting to read the Biblical account of what God did during the month of Elul. Let's thank and praise the Lord for His wondrous deeds this month as we do at other times of the year!

Elul 1 (August 18 this year): On the 1st day of Elul, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah and to Joshua, the son of the high priest (Haggai 1:1). This word was a piercing word, applicable to us today even as it was in the days of Haggai. The word was basically a mandate to rebuild the Temple. However, within the context of rebuilding the Lord's house, the following thoughts stand out: 1) God's people didn't properly discern His timing concerning building His Temple, 2) God's people lived in lovely houses while His house was in ruins, 3) God's people were prosperous but never satisfied. Their pockets had holes in them (verse 6), 4) God's people were seeking first their own kingdoms rather than God's Kingdom. For this reason, things were not working out for them. And so, we must ask ourselves this month: "Whose kingdom are we building?" "Are we taking care of God's house?"

Elul 5 (August 22 this year): On the 5th day of Elul, Ezekiel was translated in the Spirit and shown idolatry in the Temple (Ezekiel 8:1). The Bible tell us that Ezekiel was sitting in his house with the elders of Judah sitting before him. The hand of the Lord God fell upon him there. The Spirit lifted him up between heaven and earth and brought him in visions of God to Jerusalem where he saw all manner of abominations in the House of the Lord, including things done by the elders of the house of Israel "in the dark." Is there any idolatry, any abomination in the Temple you attend? Given the fact that, in Messiah, we become a Temple of His Spirit, (I Corinthians 6:19) should we not allow the Spirit to lead us on an individual search for idols and abominations in our temple during this Elul?

Elul 25 (Sept. 11 this year): On the 25th day of Elul the wall in Jerusalem was completed according to Nehemiah 6:15. Nehemiah had gotten permission from King Artaxerxes to return to the city of his fathers and rebuild it since Jerusalem was in ruins and its gates burned with fire. (An interesting and sobering 9/11 connection.) Nehemiah experienced much opposition in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, especially on the part of Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite who, according to Nehemiah 2:10, were *"...deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel."* (Satan and his agents hate those who take a stand for the Jewish people.) Nevertheless, Nehemiah had favor with the King, a burden from the Lord, and many who supported his vision as he placed it before them: *"You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build*

the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach. And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, 'Let us rise up and build!' Then they set their hands to do this good work" (Nehemiah 2:17-18). The Bible tells us that Nehemiah and his fellow workers persevered in the face of scorn, mocking, trickery and threats of attack, with tools in one hand and weapons of defense in the other. When the wall was finished after 52 days, on the 25th day of Elul, Israel's enemies and the surrounding nations were very disheartened "for they perceived that this work was done by our God" (Nehemiah 6:16).

What does all this have to do with us today? Jewish Jewels is helping to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem...spiritually. Jerusalem's physical walls have been rebuilt, but her spiritual walls are in ruins. They are destroyed. A verse from the prophet Hosea best describes the broken down spiritual state of the Jewish people: "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*" (Hosea 4:6) Our Jewish people need to be rebuilt spiritually. They need to know their God. They need to be taught the whole counsel of God. Their walls can only be rebuilt upon one cornerstone—the stone that the builders rejected—Yeshua, the Messiah (Psalm 118:22, 23; Matthew 21:42). Together as the Jewish Jewels family, we are rebuilding the spiritual walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah could not do it alone. Neither can we! We need people with vision, tools (finances, talents) and weapons (prayer, fasting, the Word of God) standing with us as we proclaim together: "*Our God will fight for us*" (Nehemiah 4:20). He **always** causes us to triumph in Messiah Yeshua, the Rock of our salvation (II Corinthians 2:14)!

Elul: a month of repentance

Repentance, *t'shuvah* in Hebrew, is the primary focus of the month of Elul. Since Elul follows the months of the two great sins of Israel, the golden calf (*Tamuz*), and the evil report of the spies (Av), traditional rabbis spiritually justify Elul's designation as "the month of repentance," "the month of mercy" and "the month of forgiveness." As New Covenant believers, we realize that repentance is **always** timely, and **always** necessary. We are forgiven, but not perfect. We still sin. We still need to make *t'shuvah*, to repent. We have the wonderful promise of forgiveness found in I John 1:9: "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" This verse, taken out of a Biblical Jewish context, might lead some to believe that merely confessing sin verbally, acknowledging it openly, is what repentance is all about. Not so. True biblical repentance always involves ACTION and implies RETURNING. **The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica** defines Repentance (*T'shuvah*) as follows: "The renunciation of sin, appeal for forgiveness, and return to righteous living."

If we have sinned against another person, true Biblical repentance involves rectification and restitution. A good example of this in the New Covenant is the story of Zacchaeus, a rich tax collector who was a known sinner, having cheated many people in the course of his profession. After having a personal encounter with the Messiah, Zacchaeus spontaneously offered to give half of his goods to the poor, and restore four times over what he had stolen from any individual. That is real Biblical *t'shuvah*: a complete turnaround to go in the opposite (righteous) direction.

Do we all need to repent during Elul? Not if you can honestly say, "My life and my home are completely in order (*beseder*), my relationships are exactly as God would have them." We cannot say that! In fact, we probably need more than one month for correcting errors of **omission** alone, for contacting people we care about but never seem to have enough time to keep in touch with.

T'shuvah always leads to positive change. What about our relationship with the Lord? As the

shofar is sounded daily in traditional Jewish synagogues, calling God's people to repent, can we hear the voice of God gently convicting us of spiritual unfaithfulness? Have we neglected God's Word? Have we spent more time in His presence than in pursuing personal pleasure or gain? Has our love for Him been passionate? Have we devoted ourselves to prayer? Fasting? Praise and worship? This is the month to search our hearts. In fact, the word Elul in Aramaic (the vernacular of the Jewish people at the time the names of the months were adopted) means "search." We should all pray as King David prayed: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"* (Psalms 139:23-24).

Elul is also a time of asking forgiveness of others. According to Jewish tradition, God cannot forgive us for sins committed against another person until we have first obtained forgiveness from the person we have wronged. (Scriptural? Read Matthew 5:23-24 and the admonition to reconcile with one's brother before offering a gift to God.)

A warning: Don't accept condemnation from the evil one. God will be pleased with one small step in one area. "Ant-size" progress is not only acceptable, but commended: *"The ants are... not strong, yet they PREPARE their food in the SUMMER..."* (Proverbs 30:25). We should follow the ants' lead and get ready in the summer for the fall season—the season of Messiah's return!! What better time to be reconciled to God and our fellow man, to perform spiritual "housecleaning" than the period preceding the shofar sound announcing the return of our King! Days are coming that will truly be "Days of Awe."

Preparing the Way of the Lord

In closing, we want to thank all of you who prayed for us while we were in Spain. The Lord greatly blessed our trip. Not only was it a time of rest, refreshing and enjoyment for us and our friends Barry and Nancy, it was also spiritually rewarding. Jamie gave **A Kiss A Day** (her book in Spanish) to someone in Spain each day of the trip. The country is still a spiritual desert (2% evangelized), so ours was really a work of "preparation." Twenty people **gladly** received Jamie's book and listened as she quickly shared the Gospel on taxi rides, in restaurants, and in shops and markets. On the final day of our trip, the Lord gave Jamie a kiss in return. Our travel agent had booked us into a hotel in Madrid on a street that "just happened" to have an evangelical bookstore on it (there are only 3 in a city of 7,000,000 people). The name of the store is "Amor de Dios" ("Love of God"). This took us by surprise. We figured that God had arranged it so that Jamie could leave a copy of her book with the manager of the store. Much to our delight, when we handed the book to the pastor who runs the bookstore he exclaimed, "Oh, **Un Beso Para Cada Dia**. I've had this book since May. I love this book! I just did a radio promotion on it and suggested that my listeners buy it." We were flabbergasted. How did God do it? There are thousands of hotels in Madrid, but only one is down the street from this bookstore. Jamie left a signed copy of her book which the pastor said he wanted to give away as part of a radio promotion. Isn't God AWESOME? He prepares our hearts. He prepares the way before us, and He prepares the hearts of those He desires to touch through us.

Glory to His Name!

May He prepare **your heart** during Elul,

Love in Yeshua,

Neil and Jamie

P.S. We're getting good feedback on UN BESO PARA CADA DIA from our Hispanic friends both believers and non-believers! Please consider giving the book as a gift, so that God can prepare a heart to receive ALL He has to offer! This also applies to A KISS A DAY in English, as well as a wonderful little book by M. Basilea Schlink, Repentance - The Joy-Filled Life. (a classic and one of our favorites.)