

Shmuel with
ministry friends

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Shmuel's **HEBREW FOR SAMUEL**

By **Shmuel Wagner** as told to **Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson**

My mother's name is Hannah—like Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel in the Bible. When my parents were expecting their first arrival, my mother hoped to one day have a boy. For her first, she received a girl. Then another girl. And for her third child—yet another girl.

In the Biblical storyline, Hannah, who longed for a son, prayed to the Lord saying, “If you will give me a son, I will consecrate him to You.” So, after her third daughter was born, my mother prayed that same prayer. That’s when I was born.

My parents raised me with that prayer in mind—that I was consecrated to God. From a young age, I was taught that the most important thing for me was to know how to recognize the voice of the Lord. My earliest memories were of my mother telling me to seek God and ask for His guidance.




I grew up surrounded by prayer, intercession and devotion to God. Then my parents discovered they were Jewish and responded by immersing themselves in an ultra-conservative Jewish lifestyle which included moving our family to Israel.

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In my teen years, I began to experience an identity crisis. I remember thinking, “I’m involved in ministry, but I don’t really understand who I am as a person before the Lord.” I began to feel resentful that I had to bear this weight of “being consecrated.”

Amazingly, once we arrived and settled in Israel, we met many Israeli Messianic Jews and my parents realized they didn’t need to take on all the rabbinical traditions. They could live as devoted Jews who love Yeshua and live normal lives as Israelis.

In my teen years, I began to experience an identity crisis. I remember thinking, “I’m involved in ministry, but I don’t really understand who I am as a person before the Lord.” I began to feel resentful that I had to bear this weight of “being consecrated.” I didn’t know what it meant or what to do with it.

One evening when I was about 16, I remember leading a worship evening at a local house of prayer in Jerusalem and walking out, frustrated at God. I challenged God that if He didn’t show Himself to me right then and there I was done following Him! He was clearly unimpressed with my demands as nothing happened. And so, I decided at that point that I was done with my childhood beliefs.

I spent the next three years rebelling against my family, my “calling from God,” and anything that I

Shmuel (with guitar)
leading worship at house of
prayer in Jerusalem as a teenager

knew deep down was truth. I went as far as I could into the world so no one would even bother to come looking for me. I couldn’t deny God existed but it was very much, “I do me, You do You; we talk sometimes but I’m not going to follow You.”



Shmuel (in blue shirt) as a child with his siblings



Shmuel (second from the left) with fellow soldiers from his unit during intensive training in the desert

I knew the army was notorious for being difficult for believers. It's a bunch of 18-20 year olds away from their parents for the first time in intense training environments. But for whatever reason, for me the army had the opposite effect.

Then the army draft arrived. I was accepted into a special forces unit and this meant real-life risk. This sobered me and I began thinking about what it was I believed.

I knew the army was notorious for being difficult for believers. It's a bunch of 18-20 year old guys and girls away from their parents for the first time in intense training environments. But for whatever reason, for me the army had the opposite effect. It drove me to seriously reconsider the Lord. I discovered two other believers in my unit—something incredibly rare—and it reignited my belief that God was an inseparable part of both my identity and my destiny.

Ten months into my service, we were in the desert on a special training mission. I woke up and strongly felt the presence of the Lord. I began to pace and pray in our tent. In the midst of my prayers I suddenly cried out to Him, "I allow You to tear down everything that I have built by my own power. Do whatever You want with my mind, my health, my soul—everything."

As soon as the words came out of my mouth, I suddenly felt afraid! What had I just said? I had just given up control. So I added, "On one condition, Lord, as long as You raise me up and make me into a new person."

Sniper Dreams

Of all the roles we were offered during our training, the one I desired most was to become a sniper. The same week I prayed that prayer of surrender, I received news that I would be interviewed for the position. Remarkably, the interviewer was a believer, and a Messianic friend of mine was also invited to be interviewed. It truly felt like God was orchestrating these events for me.

Still, I wasn't getting a clear 'yes' or 'no' when I prayed about it, so when I got on the bus to go to the interview, I sent up one last prayer, "God, if this isn't You, You'll have to intervene right now because I'm going for this." I climbed onto the bus and sat down—and suddenly felt ill. My throat started hurting and I felt feverish. Instead of feeling upset, I suddenly remembered my prayer the week before. I felt strangely overjoyed sensing that God was answering my plea to wreck me and make me new.

I went back to my base and laid in bed. For four days they wouldn't believe

that I was really sick and refused to give me any care. By the fourth day I could only crawl, and finally they believed that I was sick and took me to the hospital.

The doctors gave me some tests and returned to me with the news, "We don't know what you have, Samuel, but you're getting worse."

At Death's Door

There's a room in the hospital where they put people who are waiting to die. I was in that room for three days with six other people. I laid there attached to a breathing machine so I could only listen to my surroundings. During those three days I heard an elderly Muslim woman die. I also heard her family's prayers. They were so heavy and dark.

The entire time, my mother never left my side. I struggled to breathe and could barely talk because my lungs had filled with fluid. But while I felt miserable on the outside, my spirit felt alive and full of peace. I was in a constant state of worship and awe of God. I felt like I knew what it was to walk with the Lord in the Garden of Eden.

New Life

After three days in that room, the doctor came in and announced, "We know what you have! It's called Lemierre's syndrome. It's a bacteria that accumulates in the jugular vein and from there spreads and eats organs like the heart, lungs and brain. In your case, it

is eating holes through your lungs, which explains the fluid in the lungs, but we have developed an antibiotic for you."

Statistically, they explained that the chances of a male my age catching this bacteria was literally one in a million. Only later did they also add that 90% percent of those infected with the bacteria die.

In the just over two weeks at the hospital I lost 12 kilos (25 pounds). Still, the doctors were amazed by my recovery as they had expected it to take several months. But within two weeks, the day before Thanksgiving, they sent me home with antibiotics I would continue to inject in my veins. I joined my family for a Thanksgiving meal and you can imagine the rejoicing at that table!

I spent the next two months learning how to walk again. The entire time I remained in this incredible spiritual bliss. Then one day, towards the end of my rehabilitation, I woke up feeling like I'd crashed a fast speed train. Everything seemed heavy and wrong, I felt confused, angry and ashamed. I was emotionally crushed and physically overwhelmed.

My spirit reached out for that sense of God's presence I had gotten so used to. I felt nothing.

I prayed for a good bit before I finally heard in my heart, "Welcome back to life on earth Samuel. Will you still worship me now when you don't feel Me close?"

I felt terrible on every level. But really, I think it was just the contrast of feeling the beauty of the nearness of God in a time of trouble and then suddenly feeling 'regular' again. Feeling normal simply feels terrible when you've been enjoying the beauty of God's presence during difficulty.

"I will always worship You," I responded.

The sickness lowered my military profile significantly. After I recovered I could no longer return to my combat unit and was subsequently released from army duty.

With the next stage of life in front of me, I wanted to begin by learning more about the Lord, His Word, and how to best engage with His plan for me. I went through a discipleship program outside the country and took a few online courses. The program was great, but I found myself disappointed. I wanted something in Israel. I wanted to go through a school program with other Israelis, to build relationships and understand the Word of God in the context of our lives in Israel.



Shmuel in the hospital while being treated for the life threatening Lemierre's syndrome bacteria

Ari and Shira pray with student as Shmuel (left) leads worship team

Also, I was looking for a school that would teach both solid theology and a Spirit-led life. I firmly believed that the gifts of the Spirit are for today. I knew the Bible teaches that our testimony should be followed with signs following.

That's when I heard about a brand new Bible school with Spirit-filled teachers called the Jerusalem Bible Institute (JBI) that was opening its doors in November 2024. My heart leaped—finally!

I didn't know who would be joining the first semester, but to my delight, several amazing musicians enrolled. By opening day, we had a fully functioning worship team! And I love how the curriculum begins from the most fundamental foundation and builds from there. We've only just begun, and I'm already in awe of the depth of teaching. I realized even though I grew up in a godly home, there were some holes in my understanding I hadn't considered.

We have full-time teachers as well as local pastors who come to share from their decades of practical ministry experience. They give us wisdom as well as a space where we collectively listen to learn what the Holy Spirit is saying to us. I'm sure as the word gets out to more congregations, many more will want to join. Experiencing this together has built such a bond already that I can't wait to see where this journey takes us. I'm excited about how experience of the knowledge of the power of the Holy Spirit will begin to change the face of the Messianic community. ■



מכון ירושלים למקרא
Jerusalem Bible Institute
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Jerusalem Bible Institute (JBI) is the only Spirit-filled, Hebrew-speaking Bible school in Israel and is a joint effort of local ministries and congregations who want their people to know the Scriptures and how to minister in the supernatural.

Here are just some of the congregations involved:

- Ohaley Rahamim Congregation, Haifa
- Ahavat Yeshua Congregation, Jerusalem
- Israel Hai Congregation Network
- Yam Ahavato Congregation, Bat Yam
- King of Kings Congregation, Jerusalem
- Beit Hallel Congregation, Ashdod
- Tiferet Yeshua Congregation, Tel Aviv
- Adonai Roi Congregation, Tel Aviv
- Nahalat Yeshua Congregation, Jerusalem
- Carmel Congregation, Haifa



January 2025



Happy New Year from Jerusalem!

My grandfather, Gordon Lindsay, was 63 years old when he announced to our family he was going to start a Bible school. My mother, Shira, initially told him he was too old, but when he insisted the Lord was in it, she got behind him and even helped come up with the name—Christ for the Nations.

It was three years later, on the first of April 1973, that Gordon was preparing to speak at the school on a Sunday afternoon. My grandmother, Freda, was at the pulpit inviting a Jewish man to come give his testimony. It was at this moment, when my grandfather, who was sitting with other school leaders on the stage, took a deep breath, exhaled—and died.

In a unique move for the time, in terms of women in ministry, my grandmother, Freda Lindsay, was handed the baton to lead the school. She led for several decades until she passed the torch to her son Dennis. Today, his children, a third generation of leaders, are embracing the mantle of growing a young generation into tomorrow's leaders.

Since then, Christ for the Nations has some 80 schools that were either established by CFN or who use their curriculum to train leaders in the ways of integrity, spiritual maturity, congregation planting and worship leading.

It is rare that we visit a country where we don't meet ministry leaders, worship leaders and even business owners who come up to tell us they graduated from CFN. I share this to say, that seeing potential in people and developing them into leaders has been a family passion and calling for generations.

For more than 50 years, our family has prayed together for God to raise up a Spirit-filled, Hebrew speaking Bible school in Israel. Through the years, Maoz has led many Bible study classes and seminars, and even founded a publishing company for Spirit-filled books to educate new Israeli believers in the knowledge of Yeshua the Messiah.



The first semester of the Jerusalem Bible Institute has begun. Pictured are the students together with the leaders of the school: Zvi Randleman, Akiva Cohen, and Eli Dorfman.

But until now, **Spirit-filled congregations in Israel have not had a place to send their congregants to be trained and mentored.** This is why we are so excited about the Jerusalem Bible Institute that just opened its doors in November!

Yeshua said, “the Jews seek a sign” which is why it is crucial that as Israeli believers we are able to demonstrate miracles, signs and wonders.

JBI has already raised half of the annual budget of \$200,000! Get in on the ground level of this collective vision to see Israelis learn of the presence and power of the God of Israel!

In His service,

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

Kobi & Shani Ferguson

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