

AUGUST 2022 | AV - ELUL 5782

# The **Power of a Story**

By Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson

**M**y earliest memories of devouring books is in the third grade. It was a children's series in Hebrew called *Gingi* (redhead) about a redheaded boy and his neighborhood friends. Every kid I knew read these books. There was no sci-fi or magic involved. The award-winning author simply managed to turn the rather mundane life of a regular kid in his apartment building into a series of mysteries and adventures.

In the fourth grade, I learned to read and write in English—and the world of books I had access to exploded *from dozens to thousands*. I read virtually every genre my parents would let me get my hands on (and perhaps a few they didn't know about). I often read well into the night and may

have, on occasion, decided I was “too sick” to go to school because I *needed* to stay home and finish a riveting story. My mother had a hard time punishing me. She herself got in trouble more than once as a child for reading instead of sleeping—or doing chores.

For the record, I didn't care for *all* books. When it came to schoolbooks, I only bothered to open them when my teacher told the class what page to turn to—and that was if I remembered to bring them to class at all. I'm pretty sure I failed grammar class in both Hebrew and English. But when I was taken in by a good story line—the world paled (and all the responsibilities in it)—and another one was created. It was an

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experience I loved having—and one I dream of giving others with my own writings.

My mother used to say there’s nothing better than a good history teacher—and nothing more dull than a poor one. The good ones knew how to tell the story of mankind in the most fascinating manner. Less dates and events and more how people of those days experienced those events. They also used those stories to teach us general truths about life. They taught us truths that we would’ve likely rolled our eyes at if they had just come out and said them in their plain, conceptual form. Parables have the same effect. For example, saying “developing the reputation of an honest person is important” doesn’t hit home quite like the story of the boy who cried wolf.

Yeshua understood the power of stories quite well as He shared countless parables to explain the deep truths of the Kingdom of God. He used simple everyday examples—bread, yeast, agriculture, shepherding etc. to explain complex ideas. Stories have a way of sticking with you. They also have a way of helping you learn important things intuitively. If you read the *Maoz Israel Report* regularly, you’ll find you absorb a lot of knowledge and understanding about Israel by just reading the interesting stories of people’s lives here.

At any given time Maoz is in the process of translating and publishing half a dozen books. Some take months, some take years—but all hopefully will have a lasting impact on the lives and hearts of Israelis. ■

## Books on the Way



### A Jewish Slave Girl

I came across the *Mark of the Lion* trilogy by Francine Rivers over a decade ago. A historical fiction set in the time of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the story follows a young girl—a Jewish believer in her day—who is captured by the Romans and sold into slavery.

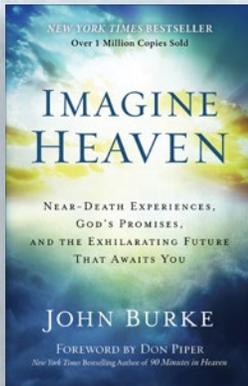
I believe Francine’s intention was to tell a story of a girl who held onto her faith in the Lord despite challenges and juxtaposed her character with others in the story who followed their own desires and paid dearly for it. However, as an Israeli I was

struck by how she was able to bring to life the existence of Jewish believers in the first century.

One of the most difficult challenges we face as Jewish believers in Israel is trying to present Yeshua in His Jewish context because when Israelis think of Yeshua, they imagine someone like the Pope. They only learn about Yeshua in the context of 2000 years of the Church’s persecution of Jews. They never hear about Yeshua in the context of the time period when

He walked the earth or in the years following when Gentile Christians were overwhelmingly grateful to receive the Gospel message from the Jewish apostles.

While we have translated and published many teaching and discipleship books and Bibles, we felt strongly the *Mark of the Lion* has a perspective Israelis need. One that could peel away thousands of years of negative filters Israelis have when it comes to accepting the New Testament as a book written by Jews—to the Jew first—and also to the Gentiles.

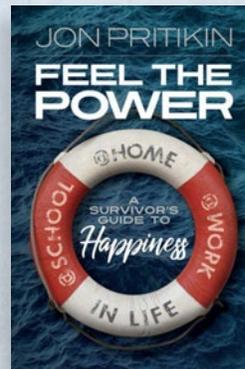


## A Hope Within

Rather than explain the importance of this book to you, I will just share what our translator had to say about it. Her experience with the book is one we hope other Israelis will have when we make it available to them.

“When I began translating this book, I had my doubts.

Do we really need a book on this topic? How authentic are these stories? It didn’t take long, however, for me to understand how deeply the hope of life after death is imbedded in our hearts—and how rarely we talk about it. As I went through the chapters I began asking myself, “Why are we so afraid of death when the life-after is so full of life and light and joy?””

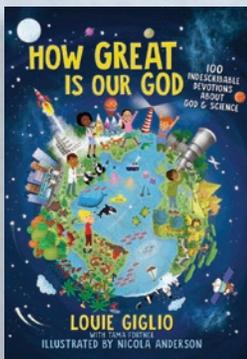


## The Ugly Duckling

About six months ago I got a series of texts from my son’s teacher. It was several videos of a big muscular guy speaking to the students at the school, bending pans and overall impressing everyone present. The kids were impressed with his ability to destroy things. The teachers were impressed with his ability to identify bullied kids out of the crowd and highlight them as special

in front of everyone. His uncanny ability to do this in different cultures all over the world is nothing short of supernatural. But the open doors he has in places like my son’s public Israeli school is mind-blowing.

It took me a second to realize... “I know this guy!” I wrote her back! “We’re translating his book right now!” “Please let me know when it’s ready,” she responded excitedly. “Every teacher in this school will want a copy of his book as soon as it’s out!” Israelis are so tribal in nature, socially, you’re either in or you’re out. The consequences of this mentality result in severe disconnects within Israeli society and affects both believers and unbelievers. Jon’s message is one that we believe uniquely addresses this issue.

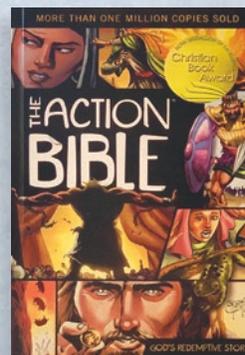


## Wow, God!

It’s not uncommon for us to have parents write us—or post a request on Facebook—for recommendations on books in Hebrew for their children. Childhood is a unique time where children develop appetites for different things. The world provides many counterfeits in the realms

of magic and fantasy—and of course, evolution. Therefore it is crucial that we have resources to encourage an appetite for the spiritual things of heaven.

*How Great is Our God* is the second of two children’s devotionals we have been working on (the first book *Indescribable* was officially released just over a month ago). Both books are a collection of short musings for kids about creation and its Creator. The pages are full of colorful photos and fun facts about God’s creation, but in a very practical way they present God as a fascinating being worth exploring Himself.



## God’s Adventures

Our two boys love to listen to audio books in the evening before bed. Before bedtime we only allow Bible stories, but as they are five years apart they have their own preferred Bibles. Our 6-year-old likes the heartwarming *Jesus Storybook* (which we have also published in Hebrew!) while our 11-year-old prefers the more intense *Action*

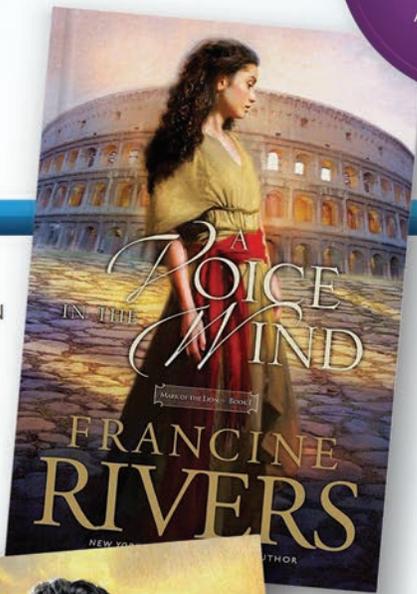
*Bible*. There is usually some wheeling and dealing between the two as they decide which Bible they will listen to that night. But needless to say, the comic style *Action Bible*—both the physical book and the audiobook—has been a staple in our family for over a decade and we are beyond excited to make it available to Hebrew-speaking kids in Israel and all over the world.

# BOOKS

**MARK OF THE LION TRILOGY**

TOTAL COST: **\$123,600**  
ALREADY RAISED: **\$0**

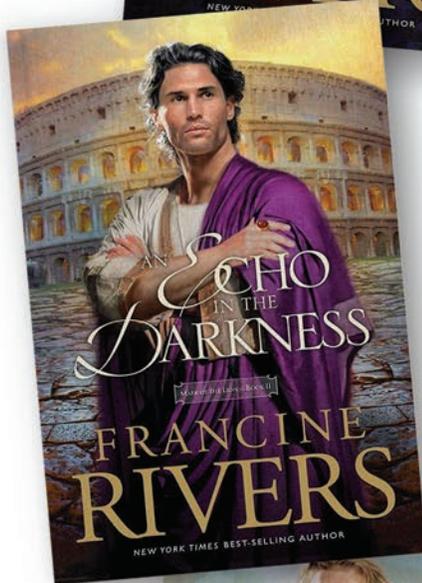
  
BOOK SELECTION



BEGIN TRANSLATION

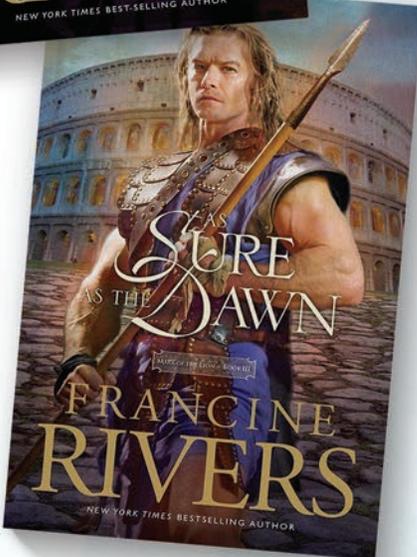
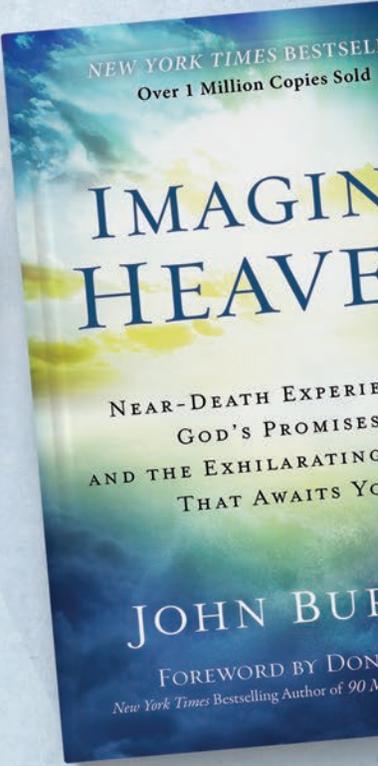
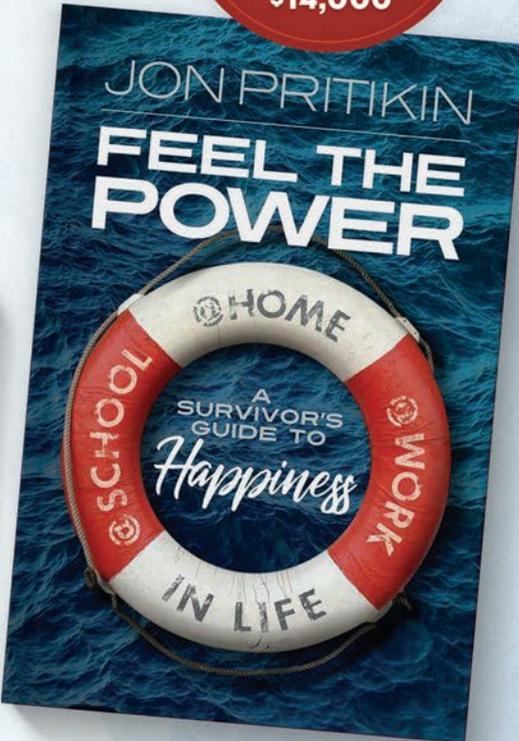
INITIAL TRANSLATION COMPLETE

EDITS & CORRECT



**FEEL THE POWER**

TOTAL COST: **\$20,100**  
ALREADY RAISED: **\$14,000**

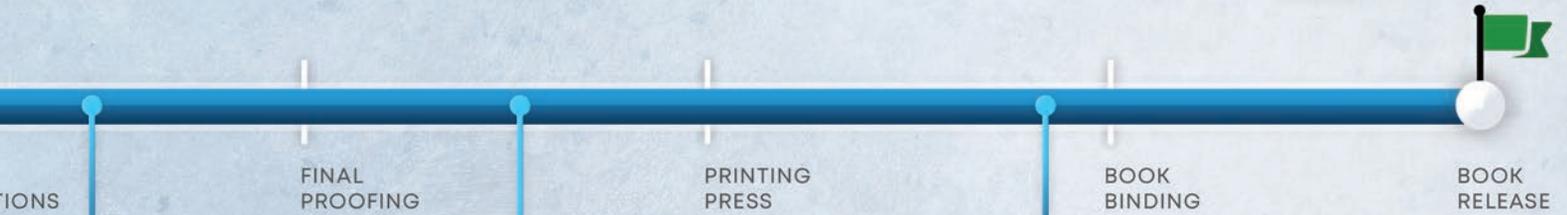


£: 19,660 & 13,690  
CAD: \$25,880 & \$18,030

£: 15,845 & 1,955  
CAD: \$20,860 & \$2,575

£: 120,890 CAD: \$159,150

# ON THE WAY



**IMAGINE HEAVEN**

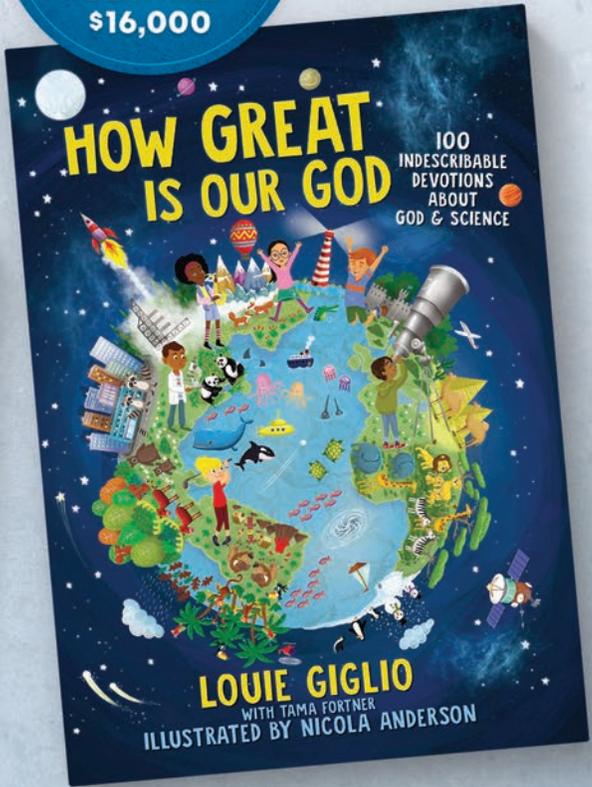
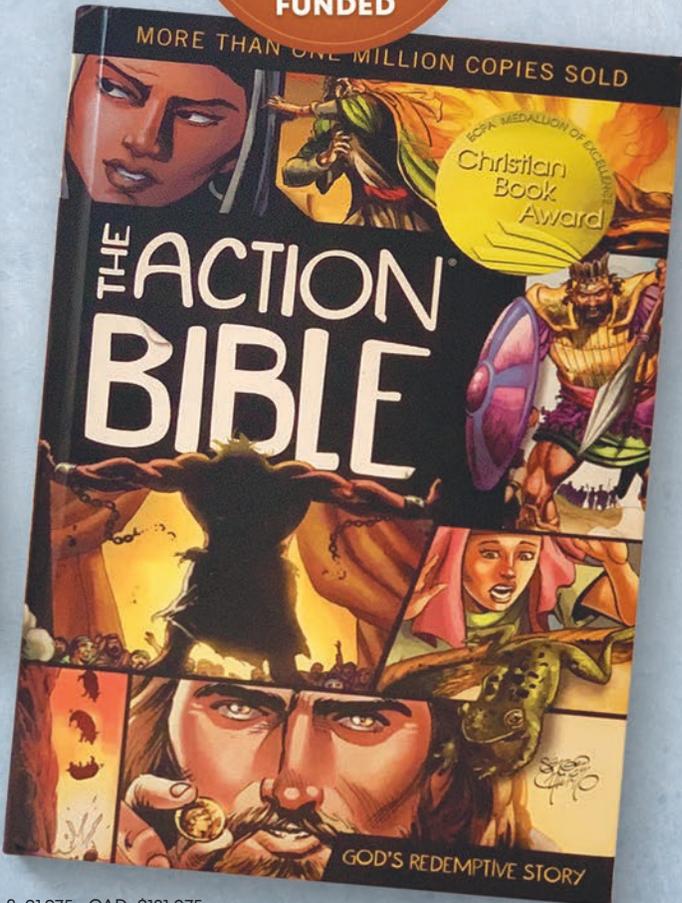
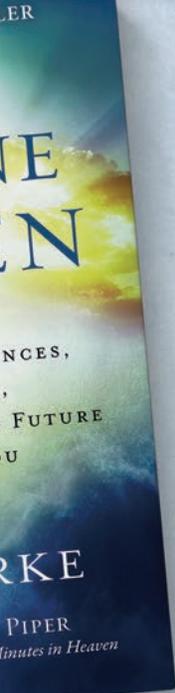
TOTAL COST: **\$16,200**  
ALREADY RAISED: **\$2,000**

**THE ACTION BIBLE**

TOTAL COST: **\$94,000**  
**FULLY FUNDED**

**HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD**

TOTAL COST: **\$26,000**  
ALREADY RAISED: **\$16,000**



£: 91,975 CAD: \$121,075

£: 25,505 & 15,695  
CAD: \$33,485 & \$20,605

HOW IT ALL BEGAN - PART SIXTEEN

# THE JERUSALEM

# Wedding

By Shira Sorko-Ram

Jonathan first saw Rachel (not their real names) at a spring picnic during Shavuot (Feast of Weeks) in 2001. It was a moment of starry eyes and chirping birds, and perhaps a chorale of angels. Then the starry moment came to a grinding halt when Rachel picked up a baby to cuddle.

“It’s not hers,” assured a friend of his when he inquired about the girl. Intrigued, Jonathan decided to introduce himself only to be let down again as Rachel explained she was returning to Canada in two days. She said she was planning to come back, though, and that was enough of an open door for Jonathan. He wouldn’t waste this time apart; he would take it as an opportunity to establish himself as the most romantic man she would ever meet.

It didn’t take long. Within a few months Rachel was back. Jonathan would meet with Rachel a total of seven times when he decided it was time to ask for her hand in marriage. They became engaged during Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles) and set their wedding date to just a few days before Passover.

Spring of 2002 arrived quickly, and Jonathan was full of anticipation, though the nation itself was in the midst of four years of suicide bombings and attacks which took more than 1000 Israeli lives.

It was a challenging time for everyone because Israelis were determined to both be cautious and still not allow the threats to crush their spirit or change their way of life.

Israeli believers were uniquely at peace during this time, yet there were concerns. The attacks could happen anywhere and with the nature of bombs being full of nails and other sharp objects, even surviving an attack didn’t always mean your life would ever be the same. But believers were not afraid of death, and reports of believers leaving an area moments before a bomb exploded were not unheard of. The approach we had at the time was, we wouldn’t be foolhardy, but if we needed to go somewhere, we would pray and go with confidence.

## The Romance

From an early age, Jonathan stood out as a brilliant and talented charismatic prodigy. He began composing classical music as a small child, and as a teenager received invitations to play his flute before Israel’s prime ministers, president and Knesset members numerous times. At age 14 he was composing an opera, and at 15 he had already been a guest conductor in eight Israeli orchestras.

When it came to romance, Jonathan may just be in the top 1%. He would design everything for the wedding—from the décor to the music to the program. When I say he designed everything, I mean he had the décor custom made, produced the music himself timing every note to the steps the bride would take down the staircase and climaxed the scene with lighting and fireworks like a Hollywood movie.

He selected a restaurant for their spring wedding on a gorgeous site overlooking Jerusalem from the south on a hill—higher than the Mount of Olives—alongside a promenade that overlooks all of Jerusalem where the elites of the British military used to hang out before the State of Israel was born. Jonathan wanted the wedding there—outside.

Because of the rather isolated location, he had to receive special permission from security authorities. Undaunted, Jonathan procured permission from the landlord, the city and the police. To be sure, Jonathan and his family are people of deep faith, but they were also practical; so eight professional armed guards would be hired to guard the wedding.

Naturally, his guards prioritized security above all. To them there could be a terrorist behind every rock—on a good day. And with 60 attacks in the past year and a half, these were not good days. The head guard insisted he would have to be beside the bride as she walked down the aisle. Jonathan was dismayed. This would ruin the perfect imagery he wanted to create with the bride and the Temple Mount behind her at sunset. The guard insisted;



Jonathan and Rachel's first dance

it was exactly because the event was such an emotionally beautiful occasion, it could be a target like a Bar Mitzvah a few days before. Thankfully, they came to a compromise that allowed for the guard to be a few steps away—and out of range of the photographer.

### Plans and Adjustments

March arrived and friends and family flew in from Europe and America, ready for the wedding. Workers and volunteers came to help set up the extensive canopy the day before so there would be time the morning of the wedding to string up all the beautiful lights he had planned. The setup was so striking even residents from the nearby Arab villages sat with binoculars and watched the decorations go up.

Jonathan was driving on the other side of town when he was stopped by a roadblock of police who were checking every car for terrorists.

**Jonathan designed everything! He had the décor custom made, produced the music himself timing every note to the steps the bride would take down the staircase...**

When they asked for Jonathan's ID, he identified himself as the groom going to the site of his wedding-to-be. The cop responded, "Oh! You're the guy who's going to get married on the promenade! Jonathan then realized that the Jerusalem police department had been briefed about his wedding as they searched for terrorists across the city.

They were calling it the "winter without—rain," as the rainy season had been one of the driest on record. While that didn't fare well for refilling the Sea of Galilee (Israel's primary water source), it made for great outdoor spring weather.

It wasn't until Tuesday, two days before the wedding, that Jonathan felt the first twinge that things might not work out like he had so painstakingly planned. The meteorologist made a surprise forecast: "Winter is (finally) coming—but for one day only! It looks like rain will be coming on Thursday." Jonathan was disappointed, but not deterred. He found a special tarp that could cover the beautiful canopy he had designed and would keep his guests dry.

Wednesday morning was beautiful as they began the wedding setup. However, early in the afternoon,

the forecaster came on with breaking news, "Tomorrow it will rain as predicted, but the storm will begin tonight with unusually fierce winds of over 100-kilometers an hour." Jonathan's friends were determined to stay through the night if needed to protect the decorations from the storm.

Wednesday night, as darkness fell on the city, the beautiful canopy so carefully designed and specially sewn to cover all the guests, began to rip away from its pegs. At midnight, the rains came. At least 60 guests, some who had flown in, were there, working with all their might in the rain, to hold the canopy down. They tied it with ropes and wire. But by 4 a.m., they gave up. They called Jonathan and said, "It's no use. The canopy is gone." Some of the volunteers had gone home to sleep for a few hours and came back to collect the tools they had used to create the canopy. But the tools had been stolen.

As Jonathan and Rachel watched their plans fall apart—literally—they held their peace. "God, you knew the date of our wedding. There has not been a drop of rain all winter, and certainly no storm like this all these three months? We don't understand but we trust You are good."

One of the volunteers told me later that when the wind began to blow, some suggested that they rebuke the wind and command it to stop. But he said the Lord spoke to his heart and said, "There is more than one way to stop the wind. You can also stop it by moving the wedding to another location."

Now it was noon, the day of the wedding, and they did not have a clue where the wedding could be held.

The staircase and view of Jerusalem from the promenade



## Scrambling for a New Venue!

Aside from the issue of short notice (just hours!) all the hotels and event halls had already made their facilities kosher for the upcoming Passover Seder and would not accept any wedding to be held at this late hour. “What about the Jerusalem Convention Center?” Jonathan’s mother asked suddenly, as it had a number of halls for conference meetings of all sizes. The Convention Center said “Yes!”

As I (Shira) was praying at home in Tel Aviv, I received a call about mid-Thursday morning telling me there had been a change in the wedding plans. The wedding would begin in six hours, and they were in the midst of starting from scratch to prepare the hall for the wedding.

Two trucks full of outdoor lighting and a generator drove to the promenade only to see the wedding decorations in shambles. The trucks rushed back to Tel Aviv to bring indoor lights to decorate the new hall.

Ari and I had been invited to the wedding as we had been close friends ever since they immigrated to Israel, and Jonathan was like a son to Ari. So in the days leading up to the wedding, I myself was praying up a storm, although not a literal one! As I said, we never shied from going to places we needed to go, but we also prepared in prayer ahead of time. Now with four suicide terrorist attacks in the last seven days, and a bombing every few days in Jerusalem, I wanted the wedding covered in our prayers.

I had prayed for days, yet, on Thursday morning, the day of the wedding, I was feeling some unrest in my spirit and decided to cancel my morning appointments. I wanted to know that I had touched heaven before driving up to Jerusalem. I knew most of the attendees would be believers who would be praying. Three to four hundred people would be there. But I wanted the affirmation of the Holy Spirit in my own spirit.

## The Moment it Happened

All morning the rain continued falling and the wind blowing. With the dreary weather and constant threat of terrorism in the air, Jerusalem looked dark and troubled. The streets were absolutely empty, with only a lone pedestrian here and there. Suddenly there was a terrible explosion.

The news reported that at 4:20 p.m. that afternoon, another suicide bomber had detonated himself in downtown Jerusalem, on King George Street. Jonathan’s bride heard the explosion from the downtown beauty salon. Three persons crossing the street were instantly killed.

We heard the news, but at 5:00 p.m. I got in my car, picked up Hannah, a family friend of Jonathan, and we drove to Jerusalem together. Hannah, who was not a believer, had been terrified for days about this wedding. Before we set off, I prayed together with Hannah for God’s protection and drove toward Jerusalem knowing everything was going to be all right. I knew it in my spirit, and I was thankful for the unique opportunity to present a bold testimony to a terrified Israeli during this season.

## The Wedding

The wedding was gorgeous. The beautiful music (edited last minute to match the new venue), the décor, the ambiance—I had never experienced anything like it before. I remember thinking this compared with anything Hollywood could have produced! The gourmet dishes, the lights, the sound effects and even fireworks (outside the windows). The stunning experience all took place, of course, under the watch of eight armed guards, one with a ready machine gun.

The wedding was crowned with the passion of Jonathan and his bride’s very first kiss ever! It was electrifying as the guests looked on in wonder and then broke into cheers.



## Insider Information

As we were enjoying the delicious catered meal, we were approached by a young man on the police force. We had known him since he was born as he came from a Messianic family that attended our congregation in the early days. He was now doing his military service on the police force in Jerusalem and had received several citations for excellence in the line of duty.

He said to me, “You know the suicide bomber that blew himself up this afternoon downtown?” “Yes,” I replied. “Well,” he said,

“We were looking for him all morning. Arafat had arrested him after Israeli security had given the Palestinian Authority information that he was planning a suicide bombing in Israel. Then Arafat transferred him to a Ramallah jail, but on the way (guess what?) the terrorist escaped from Arafat’s men.” (The next day the newspapers confirmed this story.)

My police friend continued, “We looked for him all morning in the Talpiot residential area of Jerusalem, near the promenade, but we couldn’t find him ...”

I interrupted, “The promenade?” You mean where the wedding was supposed to be?” I asked the obvious, “Do you think that the terrorist could have been waiting to target the wedding?” “Possibly,” said my undramatic friend.

“But,” I questioned, “How would a terrorist have known there was going to be a wedding at the restaurant on the promenade?”

“Easy,” my policeman said. The succah (covering) and all the decorations outside had been put up the day before, and the Arab village right across the valley would have seen everything.”

“So you think maybe the terrorist hid waiting for the evening to come ... but then when he saw the wind had blown down the covering and the decorations and no one came to repair the damages all afternoon, he finally decided that the wedding had been called off and took the bus downtown.”

**What we do know is that today, in midafternoon, the terrorist boarded bus 19 at the promenade bus stop by the restaurant and exploded himself downtown a short time later.**

Jonathan and Rachel's first kiss



My friend said, “What we do know is that today, in midafternoon, the terrorist boarded bus 19 at the promenade bus stop by the restaurant and exploded himself downtown a short time later.”

We know God’s ways are higher than ours. I’d heard of believers missing terrorist events because they accidentally slept in or suddenly felt nauseous and got off the bus one stop before it blew up.

God promises to be our shield in times of trouble. Sometimes He sends His angels to keep us in the midst of danger, and other times he blows down our tent and moves us to another place of safety. And though there are times when as believers we suffer significant tragedies, an attack on this wedding could’ve wiped out the fledgling core—the first fruits—of the Body of Messiah in Israel at the time. The stories of God’s protection over our lives in our decades in Israel are numerous. This wedding was just one example. Such was life being a part of the pioneering Messianic Jews of Israel! ■



Shalom from Jerusalem!

August 2022

I've observed my mother over the years as she got so excited about a book that she had read, and concluded, **"We MUST get this book into Hebrew!"**

So she would write about it, describe the book, tell why it would be so good for Hebrew readers to have access to it in their language, and **ask our Maoz partners to give to help make it a reality.**

And though our partners generally **LOVED** what we were doing, the long, arduous, and expensive process of getting a book from English to Hebrew often did not **CAPTURE the hearts and minds** of English speakers who always had an **abundance of books at their fingertips.**

**YET**...enough of our partners **understood the importance** of providing Israelis with access to **spiritually-enhancing materials** that they pitched in and here we are **160 books and Bibles later!** Even with the explosion of multimedia we realize books remain one of the **most effective ways for Israelis to get in-depth understanding** about issues that matter. And so we continue.

You've read for yourself about the projects that are in the works today. They have the potential to **change a life forever!** They have the **power to bring life** to the scriptures for young children and set them on their **path for the Kingdom!**

The uniqueness of books like **Mark of the Lion** have a perspective Israelis **need to experience.** One that could peel away **thousands of years of negative filters** Israelis have when it comes to accepting the New Testament as a book written by Jews—to the **Jew first—and also to the Gentiles.**

**Has a book ever changed your life?** With your **extra gift** this month towards Maoz Publishing, **someone's life may change forever.**

Changing lives, one book at a time...

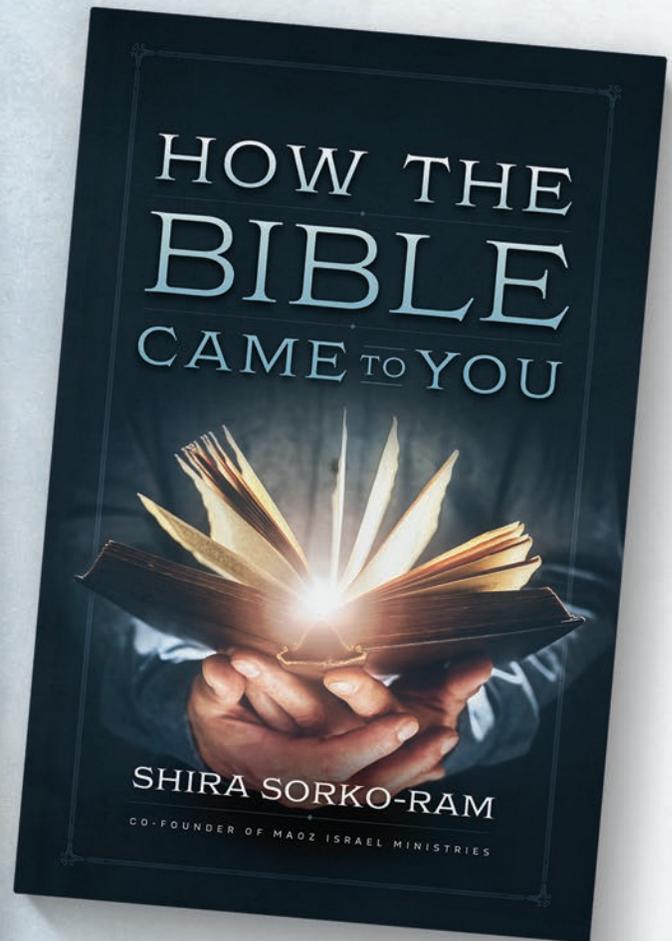
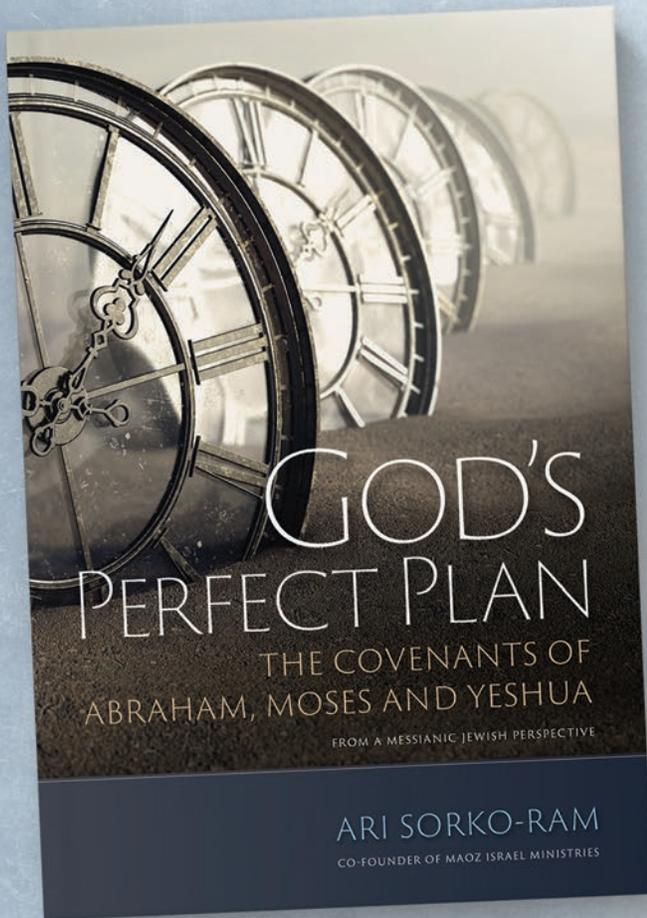
*Kobi and Shani Ferguson*

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