THIS FEAST IS FOR YOU!

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ELUL **5781** -TISHREI **5782**

By Hope Ganz

t was only supposed to be 12 days, off to Israel and back to Dallas, Texas. A cultural experience of sorts. Seeing new sights, eating exotic foods, learning about the fall Feasts from Messianic leaders and local Christian pastors it was like stepping into a fascinating new world. Little did I know things so foreign to me on that trip would soon become a familiar part of my daily life.

I grew up in an Evangelical church knowing I was Jewish. Like many believers in Yeshua, I had a basic understanding of the Jewish roots of our faith, but little interest. As an American, I was comfortable in my lack of knowledge. I took my Jewish Savior and placed Him in the only world I knew-a Western one. I celebrated Passover and Hanukkah occasionally with my family but never thought much about

the Feasts in general. I didn't think they were relevant to me... today. We did what most of the church does—we celebrated Christmas and Easter.

I had always been curious about my heritage, but I was scared the ancient world of my ancestors would be too complex and to find out not only was this a thing—in Israel, it was a big thing!

From the moment the airplane landed in Israel, I felt the excitement in the air of the holiday season. As our team was capturing stories in Israel and learning more about the Feasts



My favorite place to get holiday items is the Shuk! The Shuk is a massive market where you can buy just about anything; fresh fruits and vegetables, yummy desserts, and all with a cacophony of live music, the rush of people shopping, and store owners shouting in Hebrew for you to purchase their products, because they are the best in Israel, of course! For those who prefer to shop in peace, there are more traditional grocery stores.

overwhelming. But, when I was offered the work assignment from a major Christian TV network to produce a documentary in Israel about seeing Yeshua in the Fall Feasts, I realized my indifference was no longer an option.

I confided in Google. I searched, "Christians celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles" and was shocked

and observing the way Israelis celebrated, I felt like I was seeing moments from the Bible lived out before my eyes. The workdays were long, but it didn't matter because I felt like I was doing what I was created to do as a video producer.

Standing at the Western Wall, I felt my heart surrender to the realness of God. It was as

if everyone else standing by
me at the Wall faded away and
God was looking straight at
me. Suddenly, a future in my
comfortable America didn't feel
satisfying. But reality and destiny
don't always sit on the same
timeline. So, I finished up the
project and went home to the
U.S. But I was ready. When the
next opportunity came for me
to move to Israel to work as a
video producer—I jumped on it.

There would definitely be magical moments during my time there—but everyday life in Israel can be quite complicated. While there I met some people who helped me as a believer maneuver some of the challenges of getting settled and living in Israel. I only later learned in passing that they were from Maoz! The next five years were spent experiencing the seasonal holiday and cultural cycles of my ancient people. The fall Feasts were my favorite time of the year. From Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur to Sukkot, these holidays carried a sense of excitement and joy that separated them from other celebrations during the year.

Apples Dipped in Honey

Rosh Hashanah, literally "the head of the year" kicks off the first of the three holidays that make up the fall Feasts. If I had to sum it up, it's basically a holiday where everyone blesses the coming year. They even eat apples and honey (hello, sugar overload!) to symbolize the sweetness that is to spill forth from our mouths as we speak of the coming year.



Authorities estimated 100,000 Jews attended Western Wall for the "Slichot" (prayers of forgiveness) on the Eve of Yom Kippur

Rosh Hashanah is also called the Feast of Trumpets appropriately named because the fall holidays are the only time a shofar is blown in Israel. For ten days following the Feast of Trumpets I could hear the shofar blasts in surround sound every morning from my apartment in Jerusalem. Each time I heard it I felt inspired to pray for the nation of Israel as they prepared themselves for the Day of Atonement. For the Jewish people, those 10 days are called the "Days of Awe"—days of introspection where they consider their relationships and whether their actions offended or hurt anyone throughout the year. I could see why they call it that-I was in awe myself. I had never heard of another nation in the world that dedicates 10 days to reflection and examining their lives, actions, and relationships.

A Nation Entirely Still

The culmination of the "Days of Awe" is Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement. It begins at sundown. The streets clear of vehicles and people dressed in white begin to trickle out

onto the streets—many on their way to synagogue to read traditional prayers for forgiveness. Thousands of people come to the Western Wall for many hours to pray and ask God to forgive them personally—and collectively—as a nation. For the documentary. we were allowed to film these prayers from the bridge to the Temple Mount. There were approximately 100,000 people there that evening! I had the most incredible vantage point, looking out over this vast crowd of people who were there for one purpose, to repent.

In Hebrew, the word "repent" doesn't mean just to feel sorry like we think of it in English. It literally means to return—return to God. I remember crying as I felt the burden of the people and for the people gathered there—longing to return to God. It's a sobering moment to see

100,000 people crying, praying and bowing together. It made me

ask myself—when was the last time I truly felt the weight of my sins and the chasm it creates between man and God?

We walked home through the dark, but quiet, streets. It was fascinating to see a busy city like Jerusalem become so still. No one drove, no public transportation, no open stores, no planes in the air on Yom Kippur. A nation entirely still. The next day, because of the nature and solemness of Yom Kippur, most people withdraw into their homes as they fast from food and water and pray for 25 hours.



Empty streets give way to pedestrians with roller blades, skateboards, scooters and bikes.

The streets were empty—except for the kids! On the only day of the year where running around the streets is safe (but for the potential of an occasional emergency vehicle), kids were everywhere! From bikes to roller blades—anything with wheels and no engine was out in full force.

As the sun was setting and Yom Kippur was ending, I walked back to the Western Wall to watch a phenomenon Israelis have become famous for—the transition. As soon as the sun set and the shofar was blown, Yom Kippur was over and preparation for Sukkot was beginning. I couldn't believe the dramatic shift in the atmosphere. The intensity of repentance, fasting, and prayer was suddenly transformed into joy and exuberance! Still dressed in white, strangers started celebrating with each other dancing and singing, inviting others to commence in the joy of the coming Feast!

Sukkahs are built on balconies where the men in this religious community will dwell for seven days

A Humble House for **Everyone**

The Feast of Tabernacles is the climax of the almost monthlong journey of the fall Feasts. And Israelis wasted no time beginning preparations. Before I could even make it home from the Western Wall. I could already hear hammers as families started to build their sukkah together! Made of a metal/wood frame, with sheets/ plywood for walls and palm branches for a roof (so you can see the stars!), the sukkah becomes the centerpiece of the Feast where people will spend a full week eating, communing and even sleeping.

The whole week is designed to be a family-friendly experience where we relive a part of the story of God and His people, Israel. Since most people live in apartments in Israel, the sukkahs are often built on balconies or in alleys; you can even eat in sukkahs outside of restaurants! The

> sukkahs are usually decorated with colorful streamers and are very festive but what I loved about them the most is that they were fundamentally humble, simple structures.

As we interviewed some of the local Messianic leaders for our documentary, one of them said something I found to be very profound about the nature of humility in abundance. It's significant during the fall harvest when the barns are full of produce and the wine

vats are overflowing—that's when the Lord says to go and live in a sukkah for seven days:

"You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 23:42-43)

In a moment of abundance, when you think you can rely on yourself and your own hard work, God says to leave your house and live equally like everyone else in a place that is open to the elements. When you are sleeping outside your home, in a temporary structure, without a proper door or roof, it has a way of showing us our vulnerability. It's a tangible way to see that unless God had protected the children of Israel in the desert and provided for them, they wouldn't have survived. Abundance should never be mistaken for security. We must always stay humble, for as surely as the Lord gives, He can take away.

The Nations coming to Jerusalem!

The Bible talks about how in the last days the nations will come to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel. In a small way, this happens already every year during the Feast of Tabernacles. As part of my job in TV production, we documented this very event every year I lived there.

One of the events I got to attend while there was a gathering of Christians from all over the world put on annually by the

ICEJ (International Christian Embassy Jerusalem). Their celebrations began, not in an air-conditioned hall, but rather in the desert of Ein Gedi on the outskirts of Jerusalem. I remember thinking it was a wonderful place to start as there's something about being in the rough, desert terrain, feeling the hot desert wind, and imagining what the first Sukkot felt like for the children of Israel. There are also few sights as striking as thousands of Christians from over 100 nations singing in Hebrew, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" in the wilderness. It felt like a glimpse of heaven.

If Sukkot is the highlight of the fall Feasts—the 100-nation march down the streets of Jerusalem was the highlight of my Sukkot. The city of Jerusalem facilitates this annual parade of mostly Christians from all over the world dancing, waving their country's flag, and singing songs in their language to show Israelis they have come to Israel to celebrate the Feast and they have friends worldwide who love and support them.

Israelis, known for not being the soft emotional types, told me how moving the experience was for them. Some have come to watch the parade since they were kids and now bring their own children. For them, it was encouraging to see people who actually love Israel. I was so proud of the

was so proud of the testimony my fellow Christians were giving by taking this collective stand year after year in stark contrast to the hostility Israelis usually experience from the international community.

These days I look back on my early days of Googling, "How Christians celebrate the Feasts" and thank God for the gift He had given long ago that I only now have come to enjoy—the privilege of celebrating the Feasts. They are His Feasts and when we celebrate His Feasts, we are celebrating Him—together with Him. I'm sure there are many believers like me who either don't understand the value of these



Stacks of palm branches harvested for use as the "roof" of the sukkah. The objective is to have a covering where one can still see the stars.

the Feast of Tabernacles is unique. According to Zechariah (14:16) the Feast of Tabernacles is destined to be celebrated by the nations annually in the last days when the Messiah reigns in Jerusalem.

This year unfortunately, Israel is not allowing foreigners into the land until further notice as they try to stave off the spike caused by the now infamous "Delta variant." But in the meantime, there's nothing to stop us from celebrating locally—practicing for the day the gates at Israel's

Ben Gurion Airport will swing wide open again—preparing for the day when the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem will be on the calendar of all those who seek God's favor. After all, we've been invited to celebrate the story

of God. So, whether you are a Jewish believer or a Christian from the nations—when it comes to the celebration of Sukkot—this Feast is for you!

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Interestingly, Israelis from all walks of life come from different parts of the country to watch this march year after year. I interviewed some and asked how this sight affected them.

celebrations or don't realize they are for New Covenant believers as well. To them I would say, true, while the Biblical Feasts in general were given to the Children of Israel to celebrate,



he year was 1975. Just before Ari and I met, I became acquainted with Juliette, a neighbor in the apartment building next door to me, in a suburb of Tel Aviv. She was known as "Jo" and had three daughters.

Her husband, an alcoholic who wandered from one mistress to another, would come and go, periodically leaving her and their three daughters destitute. But love is a funny thing—and Juliette still loved her husband. For 20 years she tried to keep her family together. She was a good and faithful homemaker and unceasing in her efforts to help her girls.

As Ari and I got to know her well, we could see she was a broken woman. She began attending our Bible study, and shortly afterward, confessed she was ready to make Yeshua her Lord. "But," she said, "My husband has been looking for a legal reason to divorce me for many years. He has never found one. If I become a believer in Yeshua, he will have what he wants."

Choose: Yeshua or Your Kids

We answered that this would have to be her decision. She would have to count the cost of following her Lord.

She did commit her life to Yeshua, along with her eldest daughter. The transformation, especially in her 16-year-old daughter's life, became an incredible example of the power of God at work in a teenager's life. During that time members of our congregation occasionally took them food, since the husband refused to support the family consistently.

Sure enough, the husband sued for divorce and demanded custody of the children. He made it known he did not plan to raise his daughters but would put them in a home for children. He also demanded that their apartment and everything in it be given over to him alone, with his wife receiving no financial aid now, nor at any time in the future. In other words, his aim was to legally kick her out of her home and take the children.

The husband's lawyer wrote in the court proceedings that the reason this man is making these demands is that our Messianic congregation "has broken up his good home, has caused his children to deteriorate, and his wife to change her religion."

These types of cases often set a precedent for future legal and cultural decisions. As such, our congregation felt this attack must not go unchallenged. We had to stand with our fellow believer. Must an Israeli, who comes to believe in Yeshua as Lord, lose her children?

We began to pray for a lawyer who would not only represent us well, but truly understand the principles of Messianic Judaism—namely that a Jewish person can receive the forgiveness of God by believing in the sacrifice of God's Messiah and by being obedient to His Word. We as Messianic Jews aim to walk and talk with our God that we love, the God of Israel—not change religions!

We understood the magnitude of the battle: the right of a Jewish woman to believe in Yeshua without the State of Israel taking her children from her was on trial here.

Indeed! At the same time, another young woman in our congregation who had accepted Yeshua as Lord, asked her husband what he would do if she believed in the Messiah Yeshua. He answered that he would divorce her and take custody of their baby. He warned, "No court in the country would support you and give you the baby if you believe in 'Yeshu'

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(a non-believer's pronunciation of Yeshua's name)."

In Court

Looking back on what I recorded at the time in the Maoz Israel Report, it was clear we knew our prayers were being heard even before the judge made her decision:

"Yesterday Jo was in court, and although it has been a long, drawn-out affair, it is going very well, as we absolutely believed it would. Our hearts tell us we have won this battle in the spirit world according to the precious promises of the Word. And good results are following here on earth."

"One witness brought in by the husband to speak against us, actually spoke instead quite favorably about us. At one point the judge even asked where our congregation met, and unknown to us, a person from the government was sent to attend one of our meetings! God has favored us with a tremendous Israeli lawyer. He has been given supernatural wisdom to see, in advance, the strategy of the other side."

Even so, when the decision came down, we were shocked at the judge's reasoning! The judge (who was an orthodox Jewess!), stated that in her judgment that Juliette had not transgressed the religion of Moses. For example,

the judge explained, she had not tried to feed her husband unclean or forbidden foods. Nor had she transgressed the Jewish religion by breaking laws of modesty, behaving as a prostitute, or intentionally disturbing the orderly family life with her husband. This was a phenomenal change in the way a judge was perceiving an Israeli who believes in Yeshua the Messiah.

A newspaper article (March 1982) reporting on the case stated that the judge was "discussing the subject

of whether or not the joining of the sect of Messianic Jews is sufficient in itself to transgress the religion of Moses and Judaism." She declared that "joining in itself is no indication to pronounce her a convert to another religion."

In other words, this judge's written explanation became an Israeli legal document implying that a Jewish





person who maintains a Jewish lifestyle can believe that Yeshua is the Jewish Messiah and still be a part of the House of Israel!

We were encouraged by a prophecy [which is still being fulfilled] given in 1980 by Ron Wahlrobe of Lubbock, Texas, part of which is quoted here:

"The Gospel light will blaze in the Jewish community and touch thousands of people. Nothing will incite more of a reaction from Satan than this. He will lash out with threatening accidents; impulsive convulsed mobs; threats from nature; and imprisonment. Nevertheless, God will give you favorable court decisions, divine protection and an ability to see the plans of the enemy before they are executed."

Jo's husband even went to the Rabbinical Court, thinking he would get a more sympathetic ear. But his behavior was so notorious, that this court ignored him. Jo was given custody of her three girls. She was given legal ownership of the house and her divorced husband was ordered to pay regular monthly alimony.

The popular Israeli evening paper, *Yediot Aharonot*, of January 31, 1983, headlined, "He's

made to pay alimony to his wife in spite of her joining the sect of Messianic Jews."

We, through our Maoz contributors, ended up paying \$10,000 for that court case—a lot of money in the early 1980's! But oh, was it worth it! As far as we know, this was the first legal case in modern Israel decided in favor of a Messianic Jew. And we have never heard of another case since in Israel where the court removed the children from a parent because of the spouse's faith in Yeshua.

Bribing for Converts

Less than two years later came the next public challenge. On October 5, 1984, an article appeared in our local Ramat Hasharon newspaper stating that the mayor of our city publicly accused us, Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram, of being missionaries who bribe Israeli young people to convert to another religion.

To understand the severity of such an accusation, it is important to understand the accepted cultural convictions of the typical Israeli man on the street since the early days of the state of Israel.

The word "missionary" in Israel had a very negative connotation (and still does to many Israelis). Believe it or not, the word conjures up an image of a paid Christian foreign agent, who believes the Jewish people should all convert to Christianity and cease to exist as a people. No method would be off limits to the missionary's enticement to vulnerable Israelis.



Ramat Hasharon, the town which Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram raised their family and planted the first Spirit-filled Hebrew speaking congregation

especially the elderly, according to this nearly universal Israeli view. In those days, Israelis were confident no sane Jew would fall for Christianity (the religion that launched the Holocaust in the understanding of Israelis). Therefore, the nation was absolutely certain that missionaries must be offering generous benefits such as money and trips abroad in order to entice Jews to forsake their people and convert to Christianity.

In fact, our Knesset (parliament) so believed this narrative, that a few years prior they passed a law forbidding any individual (i.e., missionary) from bribing any Israeli to leave Judaism and convert to



Christianity, with the threat of a prison term! (Obviously, they've never been able to find someone to convict of this "crime.")

From the prime minister to the street-sweeper, Israelis believed missionaries help Jews leave the country, in order to pull them away from their families and historical heritage that God has given Israel. Missionaries were often compared to Nazis, who physically exterminated the Jewish people, while missionaries attempt to "finish the job" by spiritually exterminating the Jewish people. One newspaper called Messianic Judaism a "social disease." In another article a journalist discussed how "Messianic Jews and prostitutes" plague the State. In the 1970's and 80's we read

scores and scores of articles that warned about the peril of Israeli believers in Yeshua the Messiah.

Obviously, from the point of view of an Israeli born-again believer, what charge could be more absurd? What kind of "convert" would a person be who changed his religion because of money? Our Bible challenges the Jewish people not to change our religion, but to ask God to change our hearts—from a stony heart to a heart of flesh in order to know our God, to worship and personally communicate with him, as did the Israelites in the Bible.

It was clear that this accusation from our mayor, which had no substance, simply reinforced these false beliefs among the public. So, after praying and bringing the issue before our congregation, we sued Mayor Moshe Verbin of Ramat Hasharon for malicious and damaging slander.

Since Israel's Declaration of Freedom guarantees freedom And we asked Mayor Verbin to publicly apologize for his false accusations and pay our court costs.

The mayor laughingly responded to journalists saying he would not apologize nor pay damages. He added that he was sure we would withdraw our suit. No Messianic Jew had ever stood against such "accepted" slander before, and they could not believe we would. However, again, we hired one of the finest civil rights lawyers in Israel who is known for his battle to insure freedom of religion in this country.

Case Settled Out of Court

The case continued for about two-and-a-half years with many twists and turns. Finally, on May 11, 1987 an agreement was reached with Mayor Verbin to write an "apology."

Headlines of our local paper Tsomet Hasharon: "Mediated Agreement—Verbin will publish clarification that Messianic Jews, Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram, are

The word "missionary" in Israel has a very negative connotation...it paints a picture of a paid Christian foreign agent, who believes that the Jewish people should all convert to Christianity and cease to exist as a people.

of religion, we insisted we have a right to publicly speak of our faith in God, just as an Orthodox Jew has a right to speak of his. We have a right to exist! Therefore, we would continue to utilize that right, morally and gently, yet firmly. entitled to cling to their faith and to publicize it within the framework of the law."

His apology included denying he made statements which implied we were using unlawful methods to "convert" children and the elderly. He included that he



Together with the growing community of **Messianic Jews** in Israel, we were chipping away at the culture of a false narrative which painted us a cult and enemies of the State.

supporters as he runs for the Mayor of Ramat Hasharon

heavy political pressure from

the religious political parties

in Jerusalem not to "give in."

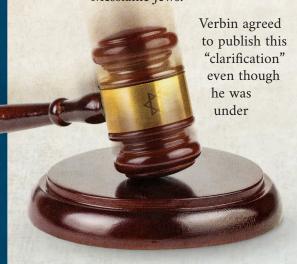
It was a courageous move

on his part as the religious

factions had been active in

pushing Verbin to make such

did not look favorably on our activities and in his opinion "Messianic Jews have removed themselves from the community of Israel." We, in turn, dropped our charges of slander against him after he agreed to include a statement which we had written of how we viewed our faith as Messianic Jews.



accusations in the first place. The national news carried the agreement on their broadcasts and believers throughout the land rejoiced in this first stand against this kind of abusive and slanderous publicity against believers. One Israeli reporter for a

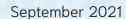
national agency, himself a believer, said he could not believe his eyes when the news came over his teletype!

Encouraged by our victory, several other Messianic Jews initiated court injunctions challenging harassing police

investigations due to salacious accusations. Challenging people of influence was a long battle of nerves, but we knew the long-term ramifications would make it worth the effort. Together with the growing community of Messianic Jews in Israel, we were chipping away at the culture of a false narrative which painted us a cult and enemies of the State. We were slowly gaining ground with the truth of who we really are, and the reason we have a right to exist in Israel.

Some months later, our doorbell rang, and there stood Mayor Moshe Verbin! He wanted to get to know us, what we believed, and why we believed it. He came to our home a number of times and we became good friends!

To be continued next month...





Shalom from Jerusalem!

One of our partners who has seen Maoz' work from the inside for many years recently described Maoz as a ministry that "blocks and tackles." In American football, the blockers and tacklers are the team members who hold back the "enemy team" so the runners and quarterbacks can score the points that win the game. Everyone remembers the guy who scored the points—but he would've never made it more than a few yards without his teammates running alongside him clearing his path to victory.

At Maoz we think about the big picture and we think long term. We can do that because for decades Maoz partners have run alongside us, trusted us and dreamed big with us.

Fighting court cases, translating, and publishing Hebrew books and the ins and outs of helping raise up leaders and plant congregations (among other things) are not always flashy stories. But so much of what you see in the believing community that exists in Israel today is evidence of the fruit of decades of these efforts.

Thanks to the early efforts of my parents and their fellow pioneering friends, Messianic Jews, rarely need to fight for the right to exist anymore. The Maoz team, however, still has a major assignment—to make the body of believers STRONG in Israel.

YOU are part of the team. You are the force behind our blocking and tackling. Your giving provides what we need to run down a clear path and advance the Kingdom of God in Israel.

Your efforts from where you are, in whatever capacity you are able, will make an impact on the believing community in Israel. An impact, we believe, will matter a generation from now.

Your Boots on the Ground,

Kobi and Shani Terguson

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

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