

Sisters for Yah

Birdsong of Masada

(By Sister Debbie Reed)

The clear haunting notes of the songbird pierce the chilly breeze at the top of Masada. Perched on a rock ledge, I notice what looks like a cousin of the red-winged blackbird that inhabits the summer cattails surrounding the pond back home. He looks directly at me, cocking his head in that strange, questioning way of one creature attempting to comprehend another. We lock eyes for only a few seconds, but he and I both understand the unspoken eternity locked in that one moment.

A small group of us have come to Israel to see the land and people that make up so much of the historical background of our faith. Almost everything we have gazed at or walked upon was ancient long before Columbus set sail for the New World. The scope of the Hebrew history — the ancient port of Jaffa, the sacrificial altars of Tel Dan, the ruins of the second-temple synagogue on the Sea of Galilee, the 1967 Syrian trenches along the Golan Heights border, and the colorful collage of Jews, Muslims, and Christians with their separate and unique, yet interwoven cultures mingling on the streets of Jerusalem — is so alien and, yet, eerily familiar to pilgrims coming to the Holy Land.

Named after Isaac's younger son, Jacob, Israel has been the focal point of conflicts throughout history. The Canaanites, Israelites, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Moslems, Crusaders,

Mamluks, Ottoman Turks, and British all laid claim to this land at one time. Strategically situated between Asia, Africa, and the Mediterranean Sea, the numerous conquering armies left behind a variety of languages and cultures along with the ruins of their civilizations.

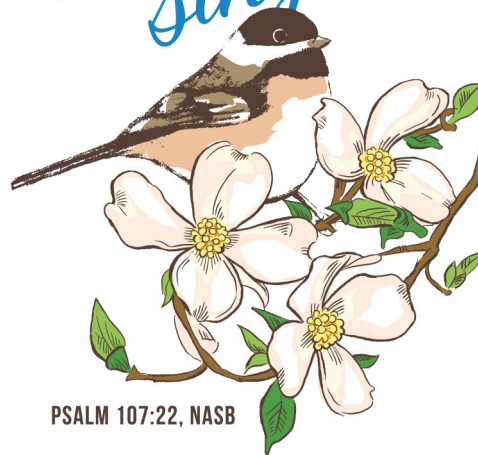
The Scriptures tell us that this land was given to the twelve tribes of Israel when they left the bondage in Egypt with Moses. Generations later, after the death of King Solomon, the mighty Hebrew empire split into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom, called Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, called Judah. The Northern Kingdom, comprised of 9 1/2 tribes (half of the Levites stayed in the Southern Kingdom) was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BCE and eventually dispersed throughout the world (known as the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel).

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TELL OF HIS
WORKS WITH
*joyful
singing.*



PSALM 107:22, NASB



The Southern Kingdom, comprised of the remaining tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and the other half tribe of Levi, was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BC and the first Temple built by King Solomon was destroyed. However, unlike the fate that befell the Northern Kingdom, they were allowed to return to Jerusalem and the land of Israel to build the second Temple seventy years later. These people are the “Jews” referred to in the New Testament Scriptures, and are the lineage from whence came the Savior, Yahshua Messiah.

During the first century BCE, the Kingdom of Judah, or Judea, lost its independence to the Romans. The Jews rose up against the oppressive Roman rule in 66 CE. The conquering Romans brutally responded to the Jewish rebellion, destroying the second Temple, slaughtering or enslaving the inhabitants and laying waste to Jerusalem. Approximately 960 zealots escaped to a mountain fortress, called Masada, built years earlier by Herod the Great in 37 BCE, as a place of refuge for himself should conflict threaten his rule.

Masada is not mentioned in the Scriptures, yet its history tells a dramatic story of a people’s struggle to remain free in the face of formidable odds. When the Romans were destroying Jerusalem, it is believed that some Jews were able to escape through a drainage tunnel leading from the Pool of Siloam at the foot of the Temple to just outside of the Western Wall. Walking through the dark, narrow passageway must have been terrifying to those fleeing with only oil lamps to guide them. The refugees that made it to the mountain fortress were able to live in relative security for three years, until the inevitable day came when 15,000 Roman soldiers breached its walls. What the Romans found, however, was not what they expected. Only one woman and a few children remained, the others having chosen suicide instead of slaughter or slavery. Historian Josephus Flavius and archaeological finds provide evidence that the Jews drew lots and chose ten men to slay all the rest. After they had performed their grisly mission, the ten chosen executioners again drew lots to kill the remaining nine, the last man taking his own life.

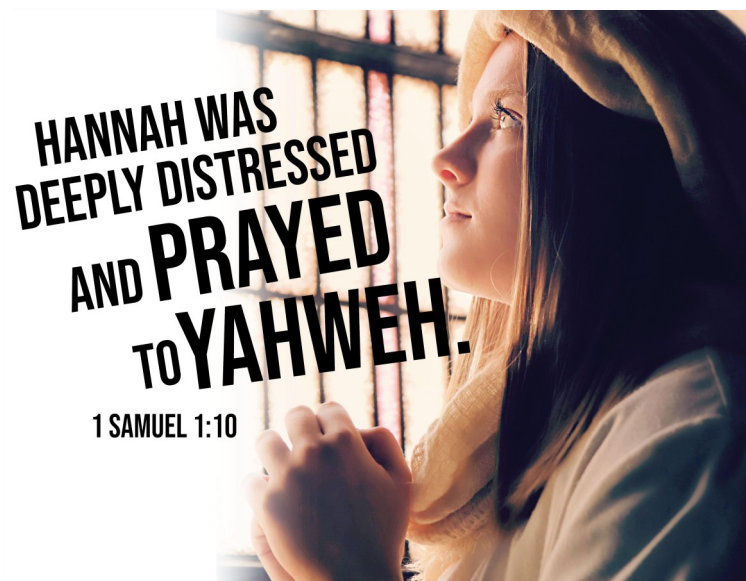
Seventy years following the tragic events at Masada, the Jewish people rebelled again. They were able to re-establish the Kingdom of Israel for three years before another defeat by the Romans. The Roman Emperor Hadrian, in his effort to wipe out the identity of Israel-Judah-Judea renamed the county Syria Palaestina. The Jews that weren’t killed, enslaved, or exiled remained to face persecution, indignities, deprivations, and horrors. Those who were sent into the Jewish Diaspora (dispersion or scattering) were likewise mistreated, the Inquisition and the Holocaust being the most infamous.

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 is nothing short of a miracle. Today Masada is a symbol of national pride and courage in Israel as its memory evokes the declaration, “Masada shall not fall again!” Perhaps this is the message that the bird was singing as he flew off the cliff, soaring freely in the updrafts from the valley below.



Are you distressed?

Do you ever find yourself distressed to the point of giving up? I think we all can say we have found ourselves in that place. Even our Master Yahshua has been there. Mark 14:33b-34 tells us, *“He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch!”*



Who can know the depth and intensity of the heart of Yahweh. None of us can measure his sorrow over an unrepentant sinner or His joy over a spiritual rebel who changes his ways and relinquishes everything over to Him. Yahweh has fervent emotions. He loves powerfully and He chastises powerfully too, for the good of those He loves.

So what can we do when we feel distress? The first thing I would suggest is that we pray about it. We are to cast our burdens onto Yahweh and allow Him to work on our behalf. We cannot do this life alone. The second thing we can do is listen to praise and worship songs. I've often been amazed at how much better I feel after singing songs of praise to Yahweh.

Going farther in our relationships with Yahweh

Some people are satisfied to have only a surface relationship with Yahweh. Others desire much more. Throughout history, Yahweh has looked for those willing to yield everything to Him and His desire to redeem the world. Sometimes Yahweh marveled that no one was willing to go with Him (Isaiah 63:5; 59:16). The prophets seemed to grasp more than the common people, for while society carried on as though nothing was wrong, the prophets agonized and wept over what they knew Yahweh was preparing to do.

Yahweh is calling His people to go deeper in their prayer lives with Him. He doesn't just want us coming to Him when things are going wrong. Do we also remember to tell Him when things are going well? On the night Yahshua spent in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the people responded in various ways. Then there was Judas, who knew where He was, but was too busy with his own schemes to join Him. The rest of the disciples joined Yahshua in the garden but were asleep. Yahshua told them the urgency of the hour, but they did not comprehend. Ultimately Yahshua prayed alone that night. Let us all draw nearer to Him!



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Fast and Yummy Asparagus Pasta

- 8 ounces linguine or angel hair pasta
- 8 strips turkey bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 8 ounces asparagus
- 1 cup chicken broth or white wine
- 1/2 cup parmesan
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Cook and drain the pasta. Saute the asparagus until crisp-tender. Add all the ingredients and heat through.



Soups to warm you up!

Easy Cheesy Potato Soup:

- 6 green onions, sliced (both green and white parts)
- 6 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 lb. bag frozen shredded hash browns
- 2 T. Old Bay seasoning (or any Cajun seasoning)
- 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar (and more for serving)

Put it all in a stock pot. Simmer on low for 10 minutes.

Tortilla soup:

- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1 rotisserie chicken, shredded
- 1 can 19 ounce red enchilada sauce
- 1 can 14 ounce fire roasted tomatoes
- 1 can creamed corn or sweet corn

Optional toppings: lime wedges, sour cream, shredded cheese, avocados, and corn chips

Heat first 5 ingredients until steaming hot. Ladle into bowls and top with toppings.

