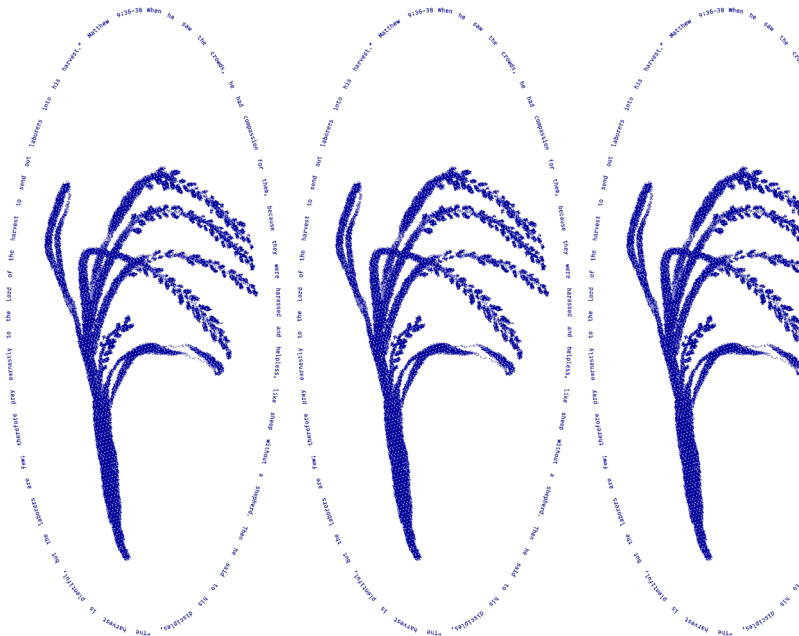


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Then he said to
his disciples,
"The harvest is
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the laborers are
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pray earnestly
to the Lord of
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Matthew 9:36-38

01 MAY
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**MATTHEW 9 FAST
21 DAY DEVOTIONAL**

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:36–38)

We are engaging in 21 days of prayer and fasting for the salvation of Israel. The central focus is to be found in agreement with Jesus' command in Matthew 9. Believers across the world are united in earnest prayer for the fulfilment of God's promises in lead up to Pentecost day.

While the command in Matt 9:38 has been rightly applied to the unreached people groups in the nations, it's original context was about Jesus referring specifically to the lost sheep of Israel (see Matt 10:5–7). This remains very so urgent, as after 2,000 years, most of Israel has yet to embrace Jesus as Messiah. To this, Paul exclaims that God is not yet done with Israel's story (Rom 11:25–26). There is an urgent invitation to pray for Israel's salvation and to contend for the promises of God pertaining His redemptive plan in the Middle East (Isaiah 19:23–25)

We believe the current context in the Middle East is God's divine invitation to engage in diligent study of scriptures, fervent prayer and urgent action to see His purposes for Israel and the promise of redemption in the Middle East come to pass.

We are praying that this period of trouble would precede a season of harvest and salvation.

This devotional is designed to help us focus our reading and prayers daily for God's purposes for Israel. It is divided into three parts:

Week 1: Responding to God's invitation to join Him in fasting and prayer, asking that He would accomplish what He has promised.

Week 2: Agreeing with God's promises to redeem Israel, with a focus on the prophecies of Isaiah.

Week 3: Entering into Paul's anguish for his kinsmen in Romans, and responding by offering our bodies as living sacrifices.

Unto His Return,
Burning Hearts Team
(With help from friends around the world, who prefer to remain anonymous on this side of eternity)

WEEK 01:
RESPONDING TO GOD'S
INVITATION TO JOIN
HIM IN FASTING AND
PRAYER, ASKING THAT
HE WOULD ACCOMPLISH
WHAT HE HAS PROMISED.

DAY 01: PRAY TO THE LORD OF THE HARVEST

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9:35-38)

Throughout church history, we have prayed that God will send workers into his harvest field of the nations. That is absolutely right and needful. Jesus commanded us to bring the gospel of the kingdom to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

But that is not the full story. The gospel of the kingdom started and will end with Israel. In Matthew, Jesus was preaching to the towns, villages and synagogues of Israel. He referred to the crowds there as sheep without a shepherd, which is one of God’s favorite ways to describe the people of Israel – his sheep (*Ps 28:9, 78:71, Isa 13:14, 40:11*). Furthermore, a few verses later, when Jesus sends out the twelve to follow in his example (to proclaim the good news, heal the sick and cast out demons), he gave them a peculiar instruction: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.” (*Matt 10:5-6*).

Clearly Jesus was not saying that the gospel was exclusively for Israel; his example and other explicit commands say otherwise. Rather, Jesus is emphasising that the people of Israel are the lost sheep that he had compassion on in Matt 9.

What is true then remains true today, with greater urgency.

2,000 years later, we have prayed Matthew 9:38 over every people group, except the people Jesus asked us to pray it for. We are now joining across the nations, for perhaps the first time in history, to pray Matthew 9:38 as Jesus asked us to pray it.

Prayer:

God, good and compassionate Shepherd of your people, have mercy! You see their harassment and helplessness. You see the state of the harvest and the lack of workers. Send workers into your harvest field that carry your heart of a shepherd!

DAY 02: FASTING IS AN EXPRESSION OF LONGING

Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. (Matthew 9:14-15)

Jesus was not against fasting – in fact, He assumed that His disciples would do the same (*cf. Matt 6:16-18*). But here, Jesus goes deeper. Beyond addressing the motive of fasting, he wanted to convey who He is and the times they were living in.

Here, Jesus was declaring that when He was around, the Bridegroom of Israel was in her midst, calling for a time of celebration instead of mourning. This account is placed in the midst of Jesus' miracles of deliverance. Matthew put this passage here to emphasize that these signs point to Jesus as Israel's Bridegroom (*Isa 62:4; Jer 2:2; 3:20; Ezek 16:8; Hos 2:19*).

Jesus was very clear: one day, my disciples will fast out of longing for my return. As the wedding date draws near, a bride's anticipation grows by the day. Her appetite for partying wanes, because of the anticipation of something her heart yearns for.

The time for fasting and mourning has come, because we are living in the days where "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" (*Rev 22:17*).

In this 'already but not yet' age, we profess that the Bridegroom has come, is present in His Spirit, and is coming again. We ache for His return in fullness and fast as an expression of longing and anticipation of His Second Coming.

Fasting is not a way to earn God's favor. Fasting is simply praying with your whole body.

On a personal level, do we hunger for more of Jesus's presence? Have we grown comfortable in His absence? Fasting is a form of renunciation, where we practice setting aside a lesser love for a time to awaken a deeper desire for the things of God. What are some good things in life I can forgo for the sake of pursuing God's heart and His will?

Prayer:

Jesus, we recognise that You are Israel's Bridegroom. Would You awaken Her to the Bridegroom Messiah's desire, to know Her God is not a distant deity or impersonal power, but the Bridegroom who wants the bride to "know" Him intimately. That He indeed has come and will come again for His people. We also ask that you'll increase our hunger and longing for You, that we'll not grow comfortable or settle in this age. Things are not okay until You come back again. We love you, and we miss You. We long for the day where You will dwell amongst us, where You will be our God, and we will be Your People. Amen.

DAY 03: THE INVITATION TO PRAY

And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.
(Matthew 24:19–21)

Here, Jesus' disciples asked him: when will the age end and what will be the sign you are coming as King (*Matthew 24:3*)? Jesus responded with the longest teaching on His second coming (*Matthew 24–25*). Jesus referenced the prophets and gave us a general outline of the events that must precede His coming. He predicted a “great tribulation” that precedes His return. We get an incredible insight into Jesus' heart: When trouble is coming the first thing He thinks about are those who are vulnerable (pregnant women and nursing mothers) and how they would cope.

In this context, He gave us a direct command: pray. To pray now before the trouble. This trouble, as predicted by many prophets, is inevitable – it will come. So Jesus' invitation is for us to pray for those who will face that time of trouble – inviting us into a role where our prayers can affect how the Great Tribulation is experienced.

Our response to intercede is therefore aligned with Jesus' direct command to read the Bible and pray into His will and the things He has promised. We are to pray in light of our knowledge of God, that He would do what He loves to do. If our intercession can affect the most difficult day in history, it can affect any day. If Jesus wants us

to pray for relief from suffering, how much more does He also want us to pray for people to experience His glorious salvation?

Have we truly recognised and responded to Jesus to pray and partner with God to affect how people experience history? Part of this process is our engagement with God through prayer, combined with our action in His work. Many people talk about “harvest” or “mercy.” Perhaps God is looking at us and saying, “Do you want a harvest? Do you have compassion for those in trouble?”

Prayer:

God of mercy we stand before You today. We stand in your presence and approach you with confidence because of the blood of Jesus. We know who You are and we know what You want. So we pray what You want. We are in days of unprecedented disruption. And one day there will be unprecedented trouble. So we boldly and directly ask you for unprecedented mercy. Show mercy on Israel. You called Israel and you love Israel. Surprise us all by giving Israel unprecedented salvation now and in these days. We know you will save Israel entirely at the end of the age. But save Israel now. Do what you love to do and give us an unprecedented preview of the glorious salvation of all Israel at the end of the age.

DAY 04: PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES

I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.
(Daniel 9:2-3)

Daniel's life is an invitation to the joy of intercession. This is available to us all, even if we are not in the king's court deciphering mysteries. The 'secret' to Daniel's life is simple, but profound. He studied the scriptures to discern the will of God. He then responded in humble prayer and fasting. Daniel did what every believer is called to and is able to do: seek God by studying His word and agreeing in intercession. This is what we are doing during this fast.

Daniel's intercession for Israel was effective because it was not based on Israel's merit. He pleads not on Israel's righteousness or right. He acknowledges the judgments as the result of Israel turning away from God's law: "the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses... have been poured out on us" (*Dan 9:11*). Moses warned that blessing and peace in the land is predicated on Israel's covenantal faithfulness (see *Leviticus 26*). However, if Israel persisted in rebellion, ever increasing judgments will surely come.

The desolation of Jerusalem is God's doing, but so is its restoration. *Leviticus 26:40-45* is the invitation of God to partner with His heart: "But if they confess their sins and the sins of their fathers... I am the LORD their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant

with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God.”

Prayer:

God of mercy, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. O God, hear the prayers and petitions of your people. For your sake, Lord, look with favour on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.

DAY 05: THE LOST SON

“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’” (Luke 15:25-32)

The heart – wrenching agony over the loss of a child on a father’s heart is unimaginable. There have been cases where a family loses one of their children; the heartbreak and heaviness is haunting. The empty seat at the dinner table, the vacant bedroom, the shoes by the door, the toothbrush in the bathroom — a reminder that their family is incomplete. And until that child is returned home, they will not rest easy. Their eyes will always be scanning the crowd for signs of their child. Even when years pass by, they will be plagued with the thoughts, “I wonder where they are right now,” “It’s their birthday today” or, “I hope they have a jacket for the winter.” Their other children, beloved as they are, cannot make up for it. The whole family mourns and longs.

Such is Israel's absence at our family table. It weighs heavily on God's heart, as he desires that all – especially Israel – should repent and be saved. It should bother us, haunt us, that our brothers and sisters are not at the table. It should bother us that Jesus Christ, a Jewish Messiah, died for the sins of the world, and His own people, Israel, does not believe.

As children of God, we might sometimes approach the topic of Israel with a nagging thought in the back of our minds: "What about me? Does God's love for Israel mean that He loves the Gentiles a little less?" If we view God's blessings as zero-sum game, then there won't be enough to go around. Someone else's blessing will always be at the cost of our own. We will always need to secure a bigger slice of the pie, to keep fighting for our blessings.

But God's love for Israel does not diminish His love for the Gentiles – we don't need to be insecure about our place in God's family. There is a place for us at the table. And it is time for us to pray that those empty chairs where Israel used to and will be sitting would be filled again.

Prayer:

Father, we thank you for the mercy shown to us in extending the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every nation. And yet, there is an ache in Your heart for Israel to be saved as well. You are longing for Israel to return to You with their whole heart, and we want to make this longing of Yours, our longing as well. Soften our hearts when our hearts are hardened towards Israel. Illuminate our minds when our minds are darkened towards Israel. We want the longing of Your heart to be our own as well.

DAY 06: REJOICE WITH GOD

Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people.” (Deuteronomy 32:43)

From the beginning, before Israel entered the land, Moses prophesied in song that there would be gentiles who enter God’s joy in rescuing, defending, and atoning for His people and His land.

The LORD gave Moses this song to be a witness of His storyline with Israel through the generations (*Deut. 31:19, 21*). Later, Paul drew on this passage to explain the vast ingathering of Gentiles to the God of Israel in his generation. He understood his ministry as being for the purpose outlined in *Deut. 32:21 (Rom. 11:13-14)*. In fact, he described Jesus’ ministry to the Gentiles (through him and others) as being for the purpose of forming this rejoicing Gentile people (*Rom. 15:7-10*).

This joy of God over Israel is to be our strength (*Neh. 8:10*), sustaining us as we persevere in prayer and contend for His promises to them. The psalmists and prophets (e.g. *Ps. 117; Jer. 31:7*) saw this manifested in a singing people who were moved in their deepest souls over a people who were not immediately theirs. This may have been difficult to understand before the New Testament clarity that the promise of the New Covenant is oneness with God and His emotions. To be moved in compassion for a people thousands of miles away, is a supernatural gift. This joy comes from

the very heart of God and will sustain us even as the nations rage out of lack of understanding of Him and His heart. Knowing He has ordained such a New Covenant people, we can ask Him to become like them. Knowing this is what Paul laboured for in the nations as Jesus' suffering servant, let us not settle for anything less than this supernatural impartation to our hearts and minds.

Prayer:

God of Israel, thank you for your mercy. You have called us into your family, and made us your sons and daughters. Show us your heart toward Israel. Give us the gift of experiencing the emotions that you feel. To long for the reconciliation of your lost sons. Grant to us compassion to your people who have strayed, that we might rejoice with you when they are saved.

DAY 07: THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH

I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea. “The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.”
(Exodus 15:1–3)

Israel’s deliverance from Egypt was entirely the work of God. Trapped between Pharaoh’s army and the sea, Israel could not save herself. The only fitting response was to trust, obey, and then sing when the LORD had done what only He could do.

The song of Moses makes plain how effortless the victory was for God. The powers of Egypt were mighty, but before the God of Israel they sank like stone into the depths. The LORD alone is Israel’s strength, Israel’s song, and Israel’s salvation.

This remains true today. Israel ultimately cannot deliver herself from her enemies by horses, chariots, armies, or alliances (*Psalms* 20:7). Likewise, we cannot deliver ourselves from the deeper bondage of sin. Salvation belongs to the LORD. The God who brought Israel out of Egypt is the same God who has promised to redeem Jacob from ungodliness and take away their sins. He is not only mighty to save from earthly oppressors; He is mighty to save from sin itself.

Prayer:

LORD, God of Israel, reveal Yourself again as the warrior who saves. Break the confidence of man in horses and chariots, and turn the hearts of Your people to trust in You alone. Deliver Israel not only from her enemies, but from sin and unbelief. Cause praise to arise in the land once more: "The LORD is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation." Be exalted in Israel, and glorify Your name in the sight of the nations.

WEEK 02: AGREEING WITH GOD'S PROMISES TO REDEEM ISRAEL, WITH A FOCUS ON THE PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH.

The first section of Isaiah (up till Chapters 39) ends with prophecies of judgment to Judah, fulfilled several generations after in 586 BC. The temple is destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the people exiled across the Babylonian kingdom. Isaiah 40 is not dated, but opens with an abrupt shift in tone. The second section (Chapters 40-66) prophesies the return of the exiles, which happens around two centuries later (530s BC). This section was possibly compiled by Isaiah's disciples and spoken to a generation in exile during Ezra and Nehemiah's time. The book ends with a hope of the inauguration of the eternal kingdom of God.

Isaiah 40-55 introduces the idea of a "New Exodus", by employing motifs from the original Exodus from Egypt. Isa 40 begins with a call to prepare 'the way in the wilderness' (40:3). God then makes 'a way through the sea' (43:16-17). Isaiah calls the remnant to flee from the coming judgment: "Depart, depart from there!" (52:11). These motifs would have evoked the imagery of the first exodus for the readers of Isaiah.

Isaiah's message gave Judah hope that the God of the Exodus will save Israel once again. He will save them from the sword of their enemies and the yoke of sin. He will have his chosen people and treasured possession. He will complete what began at Mount Sinai. Isaiah's words are as timely to our context as ever.

DAY 08: THE GOOD NEWS TO ZION

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7)

The good news did not begin in the New Testament. In this passage, Isaiah coins the term “good news”, also known as the gospel. Both Jesus and Paul preached the gospel of the kingdom from “Moses and the Prophets” (*Lk. 24:27; Acts 28:23*).

This good news is proclaimed “to Zion.” While it is not exclusive to Israel, it is given first to the Jews (*Rom. 1:16*) and ultimately directed toward Jerusalem. The Lord calls Israel to “awake” (*Isa. 52:1*) to the completed work of His atoning salvation – the Cross (*Isa. 53*). Israel, having fallen asleep in “the time of her visitation” (*Lk. 19:44; cf. Isa. 50:2*), is now summoned in a new moment: “the year of the LORD’s favor” (*Isa. 61:1–3*), the appointed time to show favor to Zion (*Ps. 102:13*), has arrived. Therefore, God commissions His messengers to proclaim to Zion, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come!” (*Isa. 35:4*).

Why does Israel need this specific message, “Your God reigns”? Why is that good news?

Because the Bible makes it clear that at the Second Coming the nations will “rage against Yahweh and His Messiah” (*Ps. 2:1–3*),

ultimately by surrounding and attacking Jerusalem (Zech. 12:1–3; 14:1–2; Joel 3:1–2). It is in this context that Jesus will rend the heavens and “fight against those nations” (Zech. 14:3), as “His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives” (Zech. 14:4). And the result will be this: “the LORD will be king over all the earth” (Zech. 14:9). In this way, “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever” (Rev. 11:15). Isaiah encapsulates this glorious reality into one phrase: good news.

Prayer:

Abba, release the spirit of wisdom and revelation upon the messengers (Eph. 1:17–19). Raise up voices in the wilderness (Isa. 40). Endue them with the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). Fill them with the knowledge of Your will (Col. 1:9–11). We ask for Emmaus Road encounters. Increase the ministry of the Holy Spirit to teach them (John 14:26) and open their minds to understand (Luke 24:45). Draw them into the council of the LORD (Jer. 23:18). We ask for the Spirit of counsel and might (Isa. 11:2–3). Release the exceeding greatness of Your grace and power to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom. Let Your word go forth like a hammer (Jer. 23:29). Let it prevail mightily (Acts 19:20).

DAY 09: WATCHMEN FOR THE RETURN OF GOD

Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy.
When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.
Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has
comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. (Isaiah 52:8-9)

In Isaiah 40, we are introduced to the watchmen as “the voice” crying out in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord (*Isa. 40:1–10*). In Isaiah 62, these messengers appear as intercessors, praying for the salvation of Israel (*Isa. 62:6–7*). But it is in Isaiah 52 that we discover something more: these watchmen are singers. The messengers with the “beautiful feet” who bring good news (*Isa. 52:7*) are, in the end, a singing people. The final expression of global mission is worship.

Pay close attention to the nature of this singing. The conjunction “for” is utterly crucial. They sing because they are overwhelmed with “joy.” Their song is not forced. It erupts. They cannot help but sing, because the heart overflows with gladness (*Ps. 45:1*). Psalm 67 prophesies the same reality: “Let the nations be glad and sing for joy” (*Ps. 67:4*). But why gladness? What is the source of such delight?

The answer is “for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion.” Jesus said that “every eye will see Him” (*Rev. 1:7*). These watchmen are visibly witnessing the return of Jesus, specifically to the city of Jerusalem. This is staggering. This is Jesus’ homecoming

to Jerusalem. That is the source of their joy. It is the joy of finding “the treasure hidden in a field” (*Matt. 13:44*). As Isaiah had already said, they sing for joy “over the majesty of the LORD” (*Isa. 24:14*). When King Jesus returns to Jerusalem, all peoples will behold the “King in His beauty” (*Isa. 33:17*) and explode in white-hot worship (*cf. Rom. 11:33–36*).

Prayer:

Abba, You said that You would set watchmen on the walls for intercession (Isa. 62). Consume Your Church with Your zeal for Zion (Isa. 62:1; Ps. 69:9). Let Your covenant for Jacob become like a fire shut up in our bones (Jer. 20:9). Pour out the Spirit of grace and supplication (Zech. 12:10), and the spirit of groaning (Rom. 8:26). We ask for a divine impartation. Increase the spirit of prophecy upon singers and musicians. Let new songs break forth (Isa. 42:10). Let them sing for joy. Release songs of comfort over Zion. Make Jesus Christ the crown of Israel (Isa. 28:5). Let Him become the desire of their soul (Isa. 26:8). Set His love as a seal upon their hearts (Song 8:6). Show them His glory (John 17:24). Son of David, open the eyes of the apple of Your eye.

DAY 10: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:10-11)

This prophecy was spoken to a people who knew the Creator as their God and made a covenant as His chosen people. They knew Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah. Tragically, most of Israel rejected the Suffering Servant.

The Suffering Servant was unlike anyone else in history. He alone was without violence (*see Isa 53:9; in Hebrew: hamas*) or deceit. Every one of us has sinned and gone astray. Yet it was God's will to crush the only perfect one, that His sacrifice would become our atoning sacrifice.

Our depravity, iniquity, pain, and affliction belong to us, and we are undeserving. Yet, the Righteous One is crushed for us, the unrighteous. He takes what belongs to us—our depravity, iniquity, pain, and affliction. In return, He gives what we could never earn: forgiveness, healing, righteousness, and peace with God.

There is no room for pride when we stand in intercession for Israel. We do not stand above her, as if we were less guilty or more deserving. Our salvation is by grace alone. We were no better than those who reject the Messiah or even Israel's most strident enemies. Without the Suffering Servant, we would all perish. The ground at the cross is level.

Prayer:

LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thank You for Your righteous servant who justified us. He brought us, once a faraway people and nation, close to You. Remove pride and self-righteousness from our hearts as we pray for Israel. Let the arm of the LORD be made known. Let many in Israel come to see that Yeshua their Messiah has borne their iniquities. Bring forth the reward of His suffering in Israel's salvation.

DAY 11: GOD IS ISRAEL'S HUSBAND

For your Maker is your husband — the LORD Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit — a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” says your God. (Isaiah 54:5-6)

As we explored earlier, God is Israel's Bridegroom. Jesus is the husband who gave his body and blood that she might be made clean (see *Isa 53, Eph 5:25-27*). He is not just Redeemer, not just Provider, not just Deliverer. He does these things because “Your Maker is your husband!”

This declaration is strong, personal and intimate. The Uncreated God is in a covenantal relationship with Israel. While Israel had wandered off in unfaithful and adulterous pursuit of other lovers, God has been steadfast in his commitment.

God asks Hosea to marry an unfaithful wife (Gomer), so that he will experience the anguish that God feels toward Israel's waywardness (see *Hosea 1:2*). In the intense rebukes that God has toward Israel, it seems as though she is rejected (*Hos 2:2*). By law, she deserves it. But God promises that one day, he will betroth Israel to himself in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion, in faithfulness, and they will acknowledge Him as their God (*Hos 2:19-23*).

Prayer:

God, would you have the consummation of our wedding with Israel! You are the faithful husband, persistent in pursuit and steadfast in faithfulness. Even when your people have abandoned you, you did not renounce them, because of who you are. Remember your promises to betroth them to yourself forever, that they will be your people and you will be their God.

DAY 12: HIS EVERLASTING KINDNESS

“For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,”
says the LORD your Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:7-8)

Israel has been “abandoned” by God on many occasions. God often gives her into the hands of the very empires and powers that she puts her trust in, as judgment for adultery (see *Ezekiel 16:35-39*). His judgments are very severe, and is proportional to the zeal of a husband betrayed by his wife.

The state of Israel (both spiritual and political) is a complex one. In biblical times, Israel had relied on Egypt, Assyria and Babylon at various points – much to the prophets’ chagrin. The prophets warned that relying on the strength of horses and chariots is not just vain – it is spiritual adultery. Israel’s protection lies only in living in covenantal faithfulness with God. Sadly, today we are witnessing the same dynamic: Israel is reliant on the might of United States for her protection, not the God of Israel. The biblical pattern on where this leads is crystal clear.

Yet God’s love will have the final say. Though Israel has been brought to the brink of destruction on many occasions, God’s mercy is roused and it always triumphs over judgment. His everlasting kindness is the rainbow after the flood of judgment.

His judgments are redemptive, for the LORD's name is Israel's Redeemer.

Prayer:

Redeemer of Israel, we pray for you to look on your people with compassion. Turn your face to look on them. Draw them with your loving kindness, and bring to remembrance the countless times you have preserved them against all odds. Save them again. Just as You love to do. Your name is at stake in Israel's preservation and salvation.

DAY 13: THE RETURN OF THE KING

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.
(Isaiah 62:1-2)

God declares His desire to see Jerusalem's vindication shining brightly. Her salvation will glow like a burning lamp. The light of her testimony will instruct the nations about the mercy and faithfulness of God. Who else is her vindication and salvation but Jesus himself?

Jesus is the one who shines like the sun at the break of dawn (*Song of Songs 6:10, Isa 58:8-9*), piercing the darkness. Jesus alone is Zion's vindication and salvation. Jesus appeared as a blazing torch (*as what theologians refer to as the pre-incarnate Christ*) to make a covenant with Abraham (*see Gen 15:17*). Jesus is the very glory of God. The event described here is not Israel attaining some level of righteousness that puts the nations in awe. Isaiah is describing the return of Jesus.

Jesus declares "For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back" (*Isa 42:14*). The Psalmist cries out, when Israel's enemies conspire to wipe them out entirely: "O God, do not remain silent; do not turn a deaf ear, do not stand aloof, O God"

(Psalm 83:1). But the day is coming, where Jesus will break his silence.

Prayer:

Jesus, we long for your return. Come and be the vindication and salvation of Israel. Shine forth like the dawn, piercing the darkest night. Shine forth like a burning torch, save your people. Vindicate your people in the sight of the nations. Come, Lord Jesus.

DAY 14: WATCHMEN ON THE WALLS

I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth. (Isaiah 62:6-7)

God has sovereignly chosen the city of Jerusalem to reflect his glory. Why this city specifically? Psalm 132:13-14 simply says: “For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling place: This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.” God from a place of His desire, not basing His decision on Israel’s merit.

Until Israel steps into her destiny as a light to the nations, we will not experience the full blessing of God as He intended. Isaiah 62 is thus more than a call to intercede for Israel. It is an invitation into the knowledge of God, and have His zeal for his house consume us (*Psalms* 69:9).

God invites us to partner with him. God sets His watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem not by coercion, but by revealing His desire to His friends. Those who catch a glimpse of His desire will join Him to cry out day and night without losing strength because they are sustained by communion with the One who does not grow weary. They put God to remembrance by storing His word in their hearts, and turning those words into prayer.

Prayer:

Jesus, we stand in agreement with Your desire for Zion. We join you in your unceasing prayer that Jerusalem will be established as your throne, and that her righteousness will go forth as the brightness of the sun. Redeem Israel and make her a praise on the earth.

DAY 15: PROCLAMATION OF THE COMING SAVIOUR

The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: “Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.’” (Isaiah 62:11)

Isaiah 62 follows the same pattern as Matthew 9: The call to prayer leads to a call to witness. Earlier, Isaiah 62:6-7 called for watchmen to intercede for Israel. A few verses later, God instructs the ends of the earth to proclaim His coming to Zion. This is a specific command to the people of God throughout the nations: He wants us to speak to the people of Israel.

This ought to shape our missiology. In Acts 1:8, Jesus commissioned his disciples to be his witnesses from starting from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and unto the ends of the earth. Isaiah 62:11 completes this amazing expansion of the gospel witness. The ends of the earth will bring a witness back to Jerusalem! The gospel going to every tribe, nation and tongue is absolutely glorious, but that is not the finish line. People from every nation will be part of the global witness back to Israel.

We must behold the King in the place of prayer, in order to proclaim courageously and accurately to the daughter of Zion. We must wrestle with the difficult and painful predictions that Israel will undergo a time of distress (*Jeremiah 30:7, Matt 24:15, 21-22*), but this is for her redemption and not condemnation. To a people who

thought that their God has abandoned them, we will cry out: Your Saviour comes! He will surely come!

Prayer:

Jesus, give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of You. Open the eyes of our heart to see you rightly, to see Israel rightly, to see the harvest rightly. Stir up laborers from the ends of the earth to be sent to proclaim Your Word boldly.

WEEK 3: ENTERING INTO PAUL'S ANGUISH FOR HIS KINSMEN IN ROMANS, AND RESPONDING BY OFFERING OUR BODIES AS LIVING SACRIFICES.

In the first part of the letter, Paul sets out his seminal treatise on sin, the law, faith, judgment, righteousness and salvation (*Rom 1-8*). We are justified by faith in Christ alone, and made slaves to righteousness. He comforts the believers that regardless of the hardships that they face, nothing can separate them from Christ's love (*Rom 8:37-39*). This is glorious, but not the end.

In Romans 9-11, Paul reveals that all of Israel will be saved, to the glory of God. There will be open vindication in the sight of the nations that every prophecy and promise toward Israel has come to pass. And we get to play a part in this. Therefore, Paul writes, we must present your bodies as living sacrifices (*Rom 12*).

DAY 16: ANGUISH FOR ISRAEL

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race. (Romans 9:1-3)

There has been an objection based on “replacement theology” that since Israel had rejected God’s invitation for salvation, the covenant has been transferred to the church. The church – in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile – is therefore the recipient of all the promises of Israel in the bible (*except the ones on judgment and chastisement, strangely*). However, Paul grappled with this very issue. His own people, the ethnic Jews, had mostly rejected Jesus. On the other hand, many Gentiles were embracing the gospel through Paul’s ministry.

Paul wrote the letter of Romans to address the very issue: is Israel still relevant, when majority of the believing people of God are Gentiles? Paul’s answer is found in Romans 9:1-3. He does not make excuses for Israel’s fallen state, but he also does not say that the Gentiles have replaced Israel. Instead, Paul describes great sorrow and unceasing anguish over his people. Many had not yet embraced Jesus. His anguish was so deep that he echoed Moses’ intercession *cf. Ex 32:32*) that he rather be cut off from salvation for their sake.

Dare we disagree with Paul?
Can we move on when Paul hadn't?
Dare we move on when God has not?

Prayer:

O Lord, would you touch our hearts of stone and give us the heart of flesh that your servants Moses and Paul had? Would you grant us some measure of the sorrow and anguish for the plight of your people? That we would agree with your heart.

DAY 17: STRENGTHEN THE WORKERS

[This is written by a brother who has been laboring in Israel for over 10 years.]

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile —the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”
(Romans 10:12-15)

Paul continues his exposition. The anguish leads to intercession. He clarifies: Jew or Gentile, one must call on Jesus to be saved. Their heritage and irrevocable covenant do not exempt them from this. In the Passover, both Jew and Egyptian must be covered by the blood of the slain lamb. Today, both Jew and Gentile must be hidden in Christ to be redeemed.

But Paul exclaims: how will they believe in Jesus, unless someone gives a witness to them? How will there be a witness unless they are sent? The call echoes Jesus’ command in Matthew 9: Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers.

Alas, Paul laments: “to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart” (2 Cor 3:15). But he quickly provides the solution in the next verse “but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away”. God has chosen the Gentiles to cause the Jews to jealousy (*Deut 32:21, Rom 11:11*).

When the time of reckoning arrives, may we have the faith of Isaiah who says, “Here am I. Send me” (*Isaiah 6:8*).

Prayer:

O Lord, we pray strengthen the workers in Israel. Strengthen their feet, to stand strong and keep running with endurance. Give them courage and wisdom to be a witness of your Son. Send workers who will bring the good news to Israel!

DAY 18: PRAY FOR THE REMNANT

[Today's entry is written by a Messianic Jew.]

Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah — how he appealed to God against Israel: “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”? And what was God's answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. (Romans 10:2-6)

God has always preserved a remnant of the Jewish people. I am one of them.

We are asking for the body of Christ across the globe to remember us in your prayers. Intercede for your brothers and sisters in Israel. Pray for comfort and restoration for those who are grieving and traumatised from the loss of loved ones and the constant weight of war. Pray for God to refresh those who have become spiritually dry, discouraged or apathetic. Pray for provision of jobs, especially for families facing financial hardship.

Ask for boldness and clarity for us to share the gospel openly, faithfully, and without fear. Pray that God would raise up especially for the younger generation (Gen Z) to be a witness with bold creativity and power, doing things that have not been seen in previous generations.

Pray for unity in the body of Christ in Israel. Ask God to break down divisions between churches and ministries for the sake of the gospel. We want Him to prune away gossip, division and pride from the Body. Clothe our leaders with humility, purity and love. Even right now, God is saving Jewish people in Israel and around the globe. We believe the God will save all of Israel when Jesus comes back a second time. Pray that the body of Christ in the land of Israel will be ready for the harvest: to become a true spiritual family that welcomes, strengthens, and discipless new believers. Pray for God to establish discipleship and training centers that will go deep in leading people into genuine transformative encounters with Jesus. That He would raise up places and communities where believers can grow together, live out their faith daily, and remain spiritually on fire.

As Jesus instructed in Mathew 9, pray for shepherds. Pray for the shepherds that the Lord has already put in place. And pray for more shepherds to be established by the Lord that Israel would not be like “sheep without a shepherd.”

Prayer:

God, preserve your remnant for your Name's sake. Let your grace abound to them. Send laborers. Give them your comfort. Give them boldness to proclaim your gospel. Give them oneness of heart.

DAY 19: ALL OF ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED

[Today's entry is written by a Messianic Jew.]

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." (Romans 11:25-27)

Paul makes an astounding prophecy here: All Israel will be saved! The salvation of the whole nation of Israel is part of God's covenant with them (*see Isaiah 59:20–21 and Jeremiah 31:31–34*). God ensures that all will be saved, not only a remnant. This is a special promise to Israel that is the culmination of God's special dealing with this unique group of people since Abraham.

God has not given up on His firstborn people. While this promise has looked impossible for thousands of years, He promises that the outcome will be glorious. Do we believe the words of Paul? God has prepared a reconciliation between Israel and Jesus. They will see the one they pierced, and all of them will be saved (*Zechariah 12:10*).

The certainty of Israel's salvation at the end of the story should not lead us to inaction. Rather, it should give us sure footing that our prayers are not baseless. As we have seen earlier, Paul's response is to contend for laborers! Laborers who would love the Jewish people and share the gospel with them.

Israel will not be saved without urgent prayer and laborers sent by the Lord. Pray the Lord would use these 21 days to increase fervent prayer and that He will accelerate the sending of laborers.

Prayer:

God, you promised that all of Israel will be saved. Stir up the full number of Gentiles, who will respond to your call. Send the laborers, that more might be saved in our day.

DAY 20: LIVING SACRIFICES

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is —his good, pleasing and perfect will.
(Romans 12:1-2)

After 3 chapters dealing with the mystery of God's redemptive plan for both Jew and Gentile, this chapter explodes into the only fitting response:

Because of His great mercy to both Jew and Gentile
Because of the hardening of the Jews for the sake of the Gentiles.
Because all of Israel will be saved one day.

We must offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. Nothing less is owed.

These 21 days of scripture and prayers isn't just about growing in knowledge, grappling with Israel, or even strengthening our prayer life. It's so that we can learn to die. It's so we can offer up – in love – our bodies as a living sacrifice. To offer Jesus the true and proper worship He deserves.

God, in His mercy towards the Gentile nations, encountered a man named Saul on the road to Damascus – a Jew of Jews, perhaps the person best well-equipped to reach his own people. Instead,

God appointed him as an apostle to the Gentiles. To lay aside his preconceived notions about the Gentiles (*whom Jews typically despise as pagans*), to lay down even his ache for his own Jewish people, and eventually to lay down even his life in order that the ends of the earth would receive the saving grace of the Gospel. He offered his life as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. He didn't look to the world for answers, but knew that only a mind renewed by the Spirit would be able to test and approve what is God's will.

There is poetic symmetry in that it is now the turn for Gentile nations to be renewed in their mind to not only reach their own people, but a people who are "other." A people who have no relation to our lives, except that their story is all over the Bible. A people that despite their hardness of heart towards their Messiah, will be reached with the saving Gospel of Christ. A people whose God-given promises we have yet to see. We are praying the Lord would send Gentiles as He sent Paul. Gentiles who will bring the gospel back to Israel and suffer for the sake of the Jewish people and their salvation.

Prayer:

God, our desire is that our lives, our minds, our hearts, our prayers would be holy and pleasing to You. We confess that we allow the world to shape our views, we allow the world to direct our actions, we allow the world to define our thoughts. And so we need Your Holy Spirit to transform us through the renewing of our minds. We don't want to chase after our will and our plans, but we want to know Your good, pleasing, and perfect will. Help us to surrender to You again and again as you lead us on this journey.

DAY 21: EKBALLO LABORERS

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9:35-38)

In Matthew 9, Jesus asked us to pray that the “Lord of the Harvest” would “send” laborers. Matthew did not use the typical Greek word (*apostello*) for “sending.” Instead, he uses another word (*ekballo*), which has a connotation of forcing people to go where they don’t want to go. In the New Testament, *ekballo* is usually used for driving out demons. This is not a normal “sending” where people volunteer. It is a “sending” where the Lord of the Harvest chooses people, disrupts them, and compels them to go where they did not want to go. The word “ask” here is also not the normal word for prayer. It refers to urgent, ongoing prayer, which Jesus only used three times.

One way to summarize Matthew 9:38 would be: Urgently beg the Lord of the Harvest to forcibly send people to go where they don’t want to go so they can become laborers in His harvest so He will receive what He wants.

During these 21 days, we have been praying Matthew 9:37-38 together and asking Jesus to *ekballo* laborers. We are asking Him to mark people and compel them to go because He wants a harvest. We are urgently asking God to *ekballo* laborers to Israel. This is something we have never seen in history. Throughout the Bible there is no example where people were “*ekaballo-ed*” in response to urgent prayer. All the laborers in the New Testament were “*apostello-ed*” to unreached people groups.

Once again, Paul gives us a glimpse of what this looks like. Paul was a very observant Jew who cared deeply about his people. And yet God took Paul and sent him among Gentiles who were Paul’s natural enemies. And Paul loved the Gentiles deeply and suffered tremendously for their sake so we would have the gospel. At the end of the age, God wants us to urgently beg Him to do something similar with a much greater scope. We beg Him to *ekballo* Gentiles whom He will choose for the sake of Israel. And also *ekballo* Jewish believers He will choose to become like Paul and serve the Gentiles. The age must end with a great sending, and God is waiting for us to ask Him in urgent prayer.

Prayer:

Lord of the Harvest we stand before you united across the nations to obey what You asked us to do. You want to ekballo laborers so we now ask you to do the very thing that you want to do. Ekballo laborers into your harvest field. Ekballo laborers to Israel. And also Ekballo Jewish believers into the nations of the earth that you might receive a great harvest from Israel and the nations.

When he saw the
crowds, he had
compassion for
them, because
they were
harassed and
helpless, like
sheep without
a shepherd.
Then he said to
his disciples,
"The harvest is
plentiful, but
the laborers are
few; therefore
pray earnestly
to the Lord of
the harvest
to send out
laborers into
his harvest."
Matthew 9:36-38

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