



DECLARE IT IN THE ISLES AFAR OFF

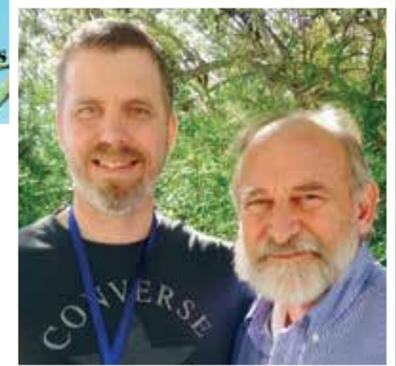
We live in the “isles afar off” relative to Israel. My wife, Farah, was a Gospel music recording artist in Jakarta, Indonesia. I was a lawyer engaged in religious liberties litigation in the United States. We were both hungry for more of God and seeking His purpose for our lives. After we met and married, God began to move on our hearts at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. This is where we also first met Eitan Shishkoff and were introduced to Tents of Mercy. In July 2004 we moved back to Jakarta, Indonesia to begin a prayer and worship community.

Indonesia is a nation of islands in Southeast Asia and the fourth most populous country in the world with over 230 million people. It is also 80% Muslim, making it the world’s largest Muslim nation. Christianity is legal, though in some places persecuted, and about 10% of the population is Christian. Perhaps because of the Muslim influence, there is a deep connection to the Middle East, and among the New Testament believers this connection extends to the Jewish people.

Through teaching and music, we are seeking to build on this existing connection in the hearts of the Indonesian people and to bring greater understanding of Israel’s covenant role in God’s overall plan of redemption. His faithful dealings with the Jewish people were not only in the past, but also continue into the present and future as well. In addition, we are highlighting the role Indonesia and the Gentile nations must play in God’s plan. We are in this exciting drama together.

Our connection with Tents of Mercy has been so meaningful over the years, offering tangible friendship, and real people to stand

Proclaiming God’s Covenant Faithfulness at the Ends of the Earth



Steve and Eitan near Jerusalem last month

with and pray for, instead of just theological principles to obey. It helps us see the unfolding of Scripture from the perspective of both the Jewish Messianic and Gentile believers. Without it our picture of God’s plan would be incomplete.

God has used Jeremiah 31:7, 10 to awaken our hearts to the role we will play.

**For thus says the Lord:
 “Sing with gladness for Jacob,
 And shout among the chief
 of the nations;
 Proclaim, give praise, and say,
 ‘O Lord, save Your people,
 the remnant of Israel!’...
 Hear the word of the Lord,
 O nations,
 And declare it in the isles afar off,
 and say,
 ‘He who scattered Israel
 will gather him,
 And keep him as a shepherd
 does his flock.’”**

Surely Jeremiah’s prophecy speaks of Indonesia, among others. As one of the world’s most populated countries, it

qualifies as being “among the chief of the nations.” Comprised of 17,000 islands it certainly qualifies as some of the “isles afar off.” As a nation with a rich culture of music and song, it is well suited to “sing with gladness for Jacob.”

Over 2,500 years ago God records a command to the nations of the earth telling them to get involved in the worship and intercession and prophetic declaration of God’s covenant faithfulness in redeeming the people of Israel in these last days. And now today, Christians on the islands of Indonesia are stepping up to do their part in fulfilling this command. ✨



RETURN TO ZION CONGREGATION

Shavei Tzion - Part of the Tents of Mercy Network

Haifa Theological Institute

For many years the leaders of Return to Zion Congregation longed for an effective way to help Messianic Jewish believers mature in their faith. The establishment of Haifa Theological Institute (HTI) in 2009 became an actualization of this vision. It provides Russian speaking Messianic Jewish believers in Northern Israel and elsewhere in the world with quality theological training.

One of the strengths of HTI has been its solid teaching on Messianic Apologetics, and how to share one's Messianic faith with non-believing Israelis. Most of the students come from Russian speaking Messianic congregations in the greater Haifa area, with additional online students mainly in Russia, Ukraine and Germany. The average attendance per course is between 25-40 students, not including online students.

Since 2010 HTI has been operating under the auspices of Return to Zion Congregation, with the academic help of Pastor Ross and the administrative input of the institute administrator, Olga.

Interviewer: Olga, please tell us about yourself.

I immigrated to Israel when I was 15 as part of a student program that enabled Jewish teenagers to make Aliyah before their parents. My parents arrived a year later. The boarding school was also the place where I met my husband, Dima. Later I studied economics and management in addition to becoming a qualified math teacher for junior and senior high school. Now my duties consist of mothering our four daughters and administering Haifa Theological Institute (HTI). I am also involved in the children's ministry in the congregation.

Interviewer: What kind of courses does HTI offer?



Oasis HTI - Learning in the new Return to Zion facility

The curriculum is divided into 3 main categories: Biblical Foundations, Historical studies, Leadership and Practical Theology.

Interviewer: Can English speakers study at HTI? Is the program meant for Israeli students only?

Currently we have two study programs: Messianic Studies and Biblical Studies. There are twelve non-accredited courses available for registered users on our website. Soon we aim to provide a fully accredited two-year distance-learning program. In the beginning it will be in Russian only, but we hope to eventually offer it in English and Hebrew too. One can also listen to individual teachings online upon registration. These programs are available to all on our website www.htinstitute.co.il. (At this point the site is only in Russian.)

Interviewer: How has moving into the new premises of Return to Zion Congregation helped HTI?

The move has given us a quiet lecture hall for the classes. In our old building, the music school was adjacent to the HTI classroom. The children attending the music school had to tiptoe in and out of their classrooms in order not to disturb the seminars.

Now that we have more room, we intend to start "reunion" style courses for our online students, who have never met their fellow students face to face. These visiting students would spend part of their time in studying the Word and the other part touring Israel.

Interviewer: How can ministry partners pray with HTI?

- God's blessings on the staff, students and administration
- Wisdom to select suitable lecturers and the ability to cover some of their expenses
- A smooth transition into the distance learning program
- Good quality translations into English
- Time and resources to edit the audio and video material

Interviewer: What can people reading this publication do to help?

If any of our readers speak either English or Hebrew in addition to Russian, we would value skilled translators who can prepare English or Hebrew subtitles for our Russian video lectures. They can also spread the word regarding HTI. ✡

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Our Vision:

Tents of Mercy - to participate in today's historic exodus by assisting Israel's returning exiles.

No spectators in the Kingdom - to be a worshiping, sharing community based in homes, equipping each one for service.

Come back Yeshua - to welcome Yeshua home to Israel, by restoring the Jewish roots of New Covenant faith.

DID GOD EVER TRY?

What is God attempting to do with Israel?

By David

Iwish I had a shekel for every time I have heard or read of people trying to understand “the Israel piece.” How and why in the world does this tiny people and land play such a central role in the Bible and in God’s plan? According to Deuteronomy 4, the reason is that Israel is God’s first attempt and prototype experiment.

“Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? Or did God ever try to go and take a nation for Himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror?” (Deuteronomy 4:33-34)

Has God ever attempted this? Has God ever tried? The same linguistic root is used in Hebrew for the word “experiment.” In other words, God is performing a trial run - a prototype experiment to see whether He can succeed in taking a group of people for Himself, to be His own.

Whether or not He can succeed, has great repercussions on whether He can expand the group and do the same with other people. In Jeremiah 31:35-37 God promises that as long as the sun continues to give its light, He will maintain Israel as a people and not cast them off. He has committed Himself, staking His reputation on being able to prove His covenant faithfulness to them and through them.

He will succeed in His attempted experiment with Israel, and He will succeed with many others as well. (I Peter 2:9, Revelation 7:9) ☆



Israel Impressions

By Daniel

An open letter following an extended, “close up” exposure to Israel and Tents of Mercy

Several years back, my impression of Israel before seeing it was of an ancient Biblical painting. I would ask an Israeli friend many ridiculous questions such as, “Do you have supermarkets?” and “Are there cars and roads or do you ride camels?”

Now after having lived in the Land for an extended time, I have come to see Israel as a modern cultural hub, and also as the epicenter for faith in the end times. Visiting the land of Israel and the ancient Hebrew people still excites the ‘Bible-nerd’ in me. I realize that God is not finished with this people or this land. We are participating in a unique time in history. We can stand with the re-born nation of Israel.

During my stay, I studied Hebrew while volunteering on a kibbutz not far from Tents of Mercy. My interaction with the kibbutz members helped me understand more about the country. The director had grown up in the original communal system in which children slept in bunkhouses so parents could be free to work all hours. My house “father” told me about finding his emergency summons to return to his army base, posted on the door of his apartment immediately following the surprise attack on the first day of the Yom Kippur War in 1973. I heard stories of aliyah, war, travel and history. The stories showed each of these Israelis to be as different as their experiences had made them, and yet all with something in common.

When I shared my background with others on the kibbutz, they were surprised. They wanted to know what this Gentile “redneck” from Kentucky was doing in Israel. So I showed them. Daily they saw my passion and desire to be a part of their small community. They could tell there was something different about me. I had peace. When asked the reason, I responded, “I have peace in a faraway land because I know the Prince of Peace.” **I was able to tell most of my classmates about my faith. It irritated some and intrigued others, but most recognized there was something “to it.”**



I am not Jewish. My Hebrew is still limited. I am not an Israeli citizen. And a few weeks ago when my visa expired, it was time for me to fly back to the US. But over the last seven months, Tents of Mercy has become my new home. In no other congregation have I ever been more accepted and welcomed, nor have I found a more fully balanced and grounded community. I want to share my experiences and some things that I've learned.

Tents of Mercy in comparison to my Church Experience

I've been to many churches. Growing up, my parents took me to a simple country Baptist church. We sang hymns and read the Bible and learned about Jesus. It was a great place for my family and me.

After some rough years in high school and college, I attended a discipleship program in Tennessee, where we occasionally visited a Methodist church. It had huge cathedral ceilings, brilliant stained glass windows, and a tall pipe organ in gleaming bronze - all proclaiming the greatness and beauty of Almighty Creator God. We had responsive declaration readings of "calling and responding." The order and structure were different but totally legitimate.

Later I was exposed to a charismatic fellowship, in which the Holy Spirit was invited to work in our hearts, heal us and inspire prophecy. People were jumping, dancing, praising and laughing. It was a little strange for me, but I could see their genuine love for God.

New Testament congregations tend to follow one of these three methods of worship:

Liturgical - focusing on the order and structure of worshipping God Almighty.

Evangelical - emphasizing learning the Bible and the supremacy of Jesus.

Charismatic - flowing in heart driven service that promotes the Holy Spirit.

These three can seem at times to be in competition with one another. Yet God has used all of them.

Liturgical – Almighty God at Mount Sinai

In Exodus 19 God instructed Moses to "set limits" around the mountain before the giving of the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 24 we see "call and response" put into practice as Moses reads the covenant and the people respond in affirmation. God is not a man. He is unlimited, unstoppable power. He has ordered creation and set limits to the land and seas. We are in awe and fear of Almighty God.

Evangelical – Jesus as Rabbi Teaching Among Us

Yeshua is fully God and fully man. John 1:14 tells us He, "**became flesh and dwelt among us.**" We encounter God revealed to us in the flesh as Yeshua preaching and teaching. Now we can be in a relationship with our Father, through Yeshua our mediator, and transformed into His likeness as we grow in our knowledge and experience with Him.

Charismatic – Holy Spirit Empowering Disciples

On the day of Pentecost the Spirit of God powerfully entered a room and filled Yeshua's disciples. Next thing you know, the disciples were proclaiming the Good News in different tongues. And 3,000 were saved! This was the fulfillment of Yeshua's promise to send the Helper to be with us and in us. The indwelling power of the Holy Spirit leads us and guides us in the Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit.

Three-In-One Mystery

Never have I seen these three styles of worship combined more fully than at Tents of Mercy. All three were present for the first time in my life. None greater, none lesser; all aspects were honoring and glorifying God in mutual exaltation.

We, in the Western church have much to learn from you about the different ways that God interacts with His people, and you are exemplifying that to us. I pray you will all treasure it, and explore ways that these methods can be employed in each one's personal walk with God. ✨



Daniel and a friend from Tents of Mercy