



## Israel's Love/Hate Relationship with "The Nations"

The positive feelings originate from:

- Wanting to be received as an ordinary, peaceful country, free from international focus and turmoil.
- Partnership and assistance in rebuilding the land, particularly from Christians. (Isaiah 60:1-16)

The negative feelings issue from:

- Millenia of conflict, exile, war and persecution to this very day.
- Biblical admonishments against following the idolatrous ways of the nations.
- Plain old ethnic pride.

## Judgment of the Nations

The Hebrew Scriptures say some pretty harsh things about the nations. Numerous references to the nations are an illumination of the depravity of humanity in sin, opposing God's plans and rebelling against His sovereignty. These include scathing rebukes and terrifying previews of judgment such as:

**"Behold, the name of the LORD comes from far, burning with His anger, and in thick rising smoke: His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue is as a devouring fire; and His breath is as an overflowing stream, that reaches even unto the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction..."** (Isaiah 30:27-28 mod. ASV)

**"I have trodden down the peoples in My anger, made them drunk in My fury..."** (Isaiah 63:6)

## Hope and Longing for the Nations

Yet together with with this exposé of evil and judgement of the nations, we also see the revelation of God's heart love for all peoples. Isaiah received astonishing revelation from both sides of this "coin." In addition to seeing God's redemption of the Jewish people, this Israeli – Zionist prophet saw that a time will come in which the nations will come to Israel not to make war against her, but in order to learn to obey her God:

**"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that ... Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways..."**" (Isaiah 2:2-3)

**"For the Nations shall seek Him..."** (Isaiah 11:10)

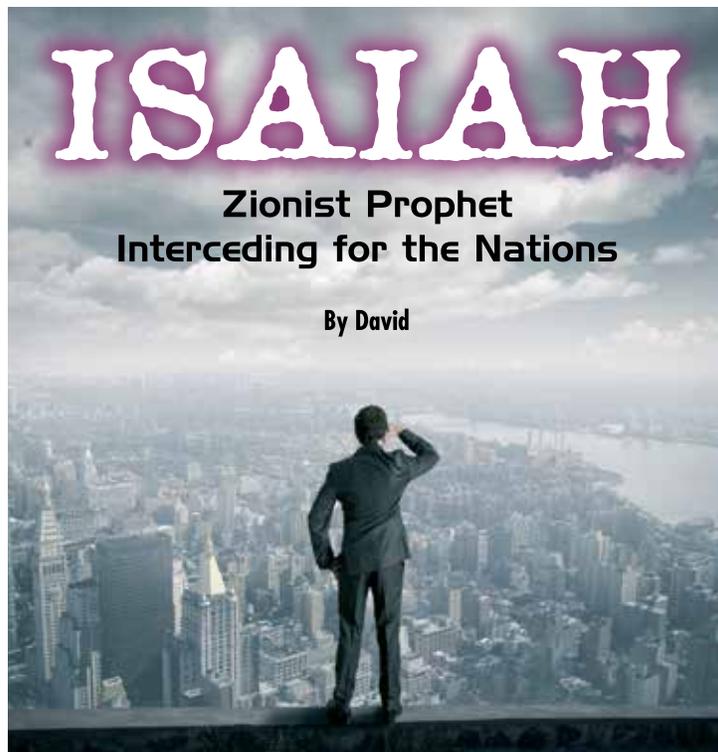
Isaiah overcame the human tendency to think only of our own people group, and as an intercessor, perceived God's desire to release and redeem all peoples. He received a download of God's expansive heart, not only for His first covenant people, but for all of humanity:

**"It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to**

**the Nations..."** (Isaiah 49:6)

**"Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, ... Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, ... For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."** (Isaiah 56:6-7)

**"The peoples shall come to your light... and they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord."** (Isaiah 60:3-6) ☆



# PIONEERS & PLANTERS

## Apostolic Restoration in Israel

By Eitan Shishkoff

In 2001, six years after we opened the Tents of Mercy congregation in a Kiryat Yam warehouse, we sent out our top young leader to establish a daughter congregation in Haifa, 30 minutes away. It was not easy. Leon, the young Russian-speaking planter, was dynamic. His vital connection with our largely Soviet background members, had a lot to do with our growth.

Prior to commissioning Leon, I had been excited to see our numbers increasing. We began multiplying house groups. I thought:

“Hey, why shouldn’t we have 100 groups of 10 each! That would be 1000 people—a mega-congregation for Israel.”

But I noticed two things. First, our group leaders were inexperienced. They were struggling to develop healthy small groups. Secondly, I perceived a pioneering drive within the strongest young leaders. They were looking beyond the confines of the “mama” congregation to other population centers nearby. Was I to hold them back? Or was there something to the Book of Acts model? In the first century, the apostles prayed and sent out evangelizing congregation planters to begin new works in unreached areas. This model had God’s approval. He had already done it this way here, in Israel.

### A Small, but Bold Step

We sent Leon, together with 30 people, to Haifa. We dedicated the work during Hanukkah (the Feast of Dedication) in 2001. It had the full blessing, continued financial support, and active oversight of the Tents of Mercy leadership. This first daughter congregation was called *Shavei Tzion* (those returning to Zion). It is thoroughly rewarding to see the fruit of this faith step. Today, *Shavei Tzion* owns its own building in an extremely accessible area of Haifa, Israel’s third largest city. It sports a part-time Bible college, music school, food distribution, guest facilities, and a television studio. A mere three years after its dedication, *Shavei Tzion* launched another congregation—this one in Nazareth. That work continues, providing humanitarian assistance and pastoral care in Yeshua’s hometown. Uniquely, it is led by Vakif, a brother from the Muslim culture of Tatarstan.

That was only the beginning of the “sending out” of congregation-planting teams. Several years later in early 2005 another promising young leader asked to be relieved as our general administrator, in order to found a congregation in Akko, Katzir Asher. Guy and Tali Cohen have poured out their lives, not only into their congregation, but into the city itself. As a native of Akko, Guy’s relationships go far beyond the body of believers. His testimony as a local-born Israeli is compelling.

### Each Congregation is a Sending Base

Former town councilman and business entrepreneur, Eric Morey, opened our fifth congregation in his Poriya home near Tiberias. His heart beats for new territory. In fact, each new “outpost” of believers creates another sending base from which to launch fresh communities of faith.

The Tents of Mercy Network of congregations is now spread across the Galilee. Back home at the “mama” congregation in Kiryat Yam, the last few years have brought Avishalom to the fore as my protégé, courageously taking on both the pastoral and humanitarian ministries of our center, Ohalei Rachamim.

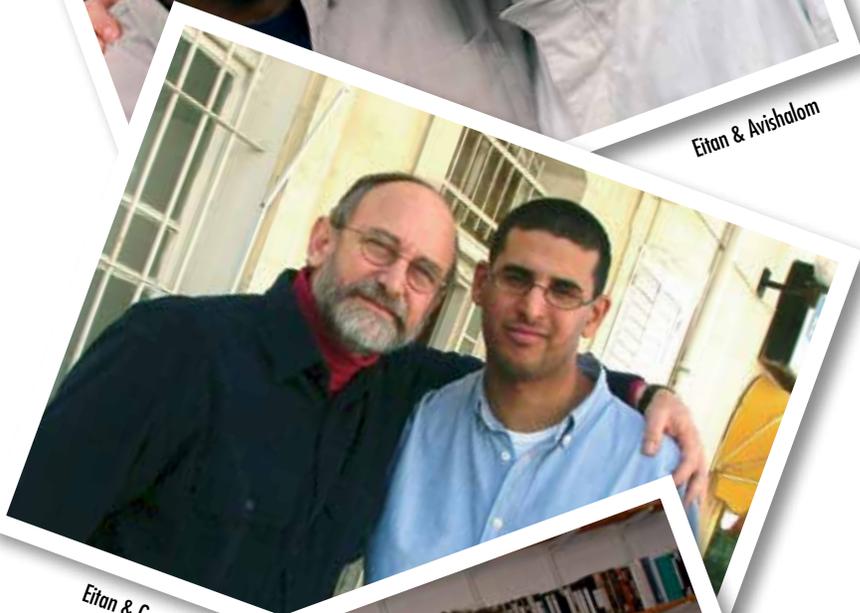
Why have we emphasized the planting of new congregations? It’s because our predecessors did it this way. In the Book of Acts we find a clear pattern of exploratory teams being “sent out” (the original meaning of apostle, apostolic). These teams remained in strong relationship with those who sent them, including periodic visits for encouragement and oversight, as well as councils that brought together those who’d been sent out.

The classic example happened at Antioch, resulting in many new disciples (14:21) and the appointment of qualified elders (14:33).

**“Now in the congregation that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers... As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said ‘Now separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.”** (Acts 13:1-3)



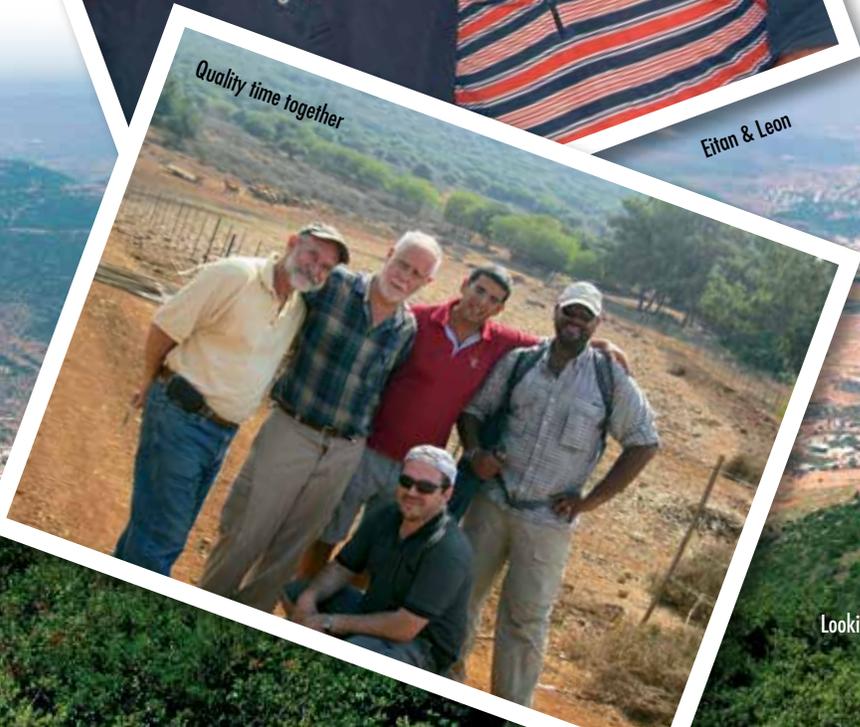
Eitan & Avishalom



Eitan & Guy



Eitan & Leon



Quality time together

I fully believe that we are seeing apostolic life restored in Israel. The way of life exemplified by the 1st century Messianic Jewish apostles was one of bringing Yeshua's redemption to unreached population hubs. Then, communities of believers were formed in order to strengthen their faith, celebrate their salvation, and draw their friends and neighbors into the kingdom.

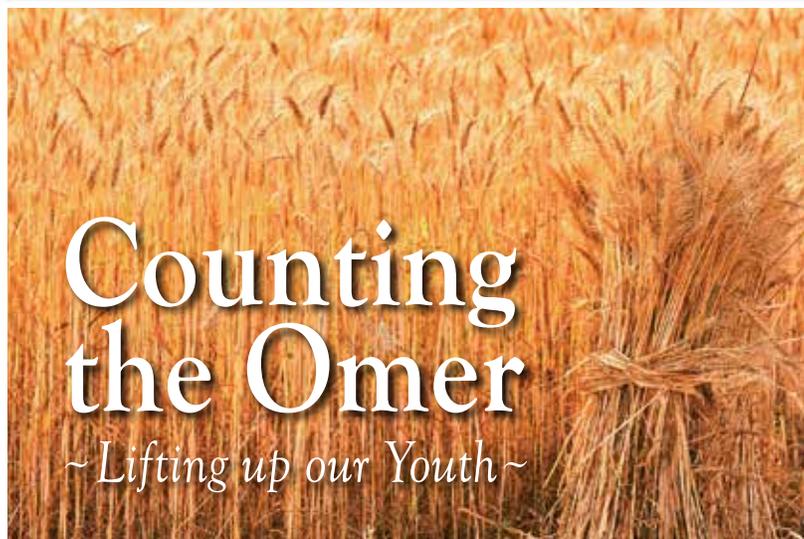
## An Intimacy of Brotherhood

The group that prayed, fasted and sent out Barnabas and Shaul in Acts 13 did not leave behind a YouTube clip of the fellowship enjoyed that day. I wish they had. They'd been given an historic mission. We can sense their expectant camaraderie.

Another passage which demonstrates the intimacy of brotherhood experienced by the first century apostles is Shaul's farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-38. We aspire to this level of affection. Our council of congregation/ministry leaders is a welcome opportunity to open our hearts to each other. We listen, laugh, eat, joke, counsel, pray, and speak into one another's lives. As papa/coordinator, I am submitted to these men and they to me. It is a rare gift to develop relationships over decades —pioneering together in our old/new land.

By the grace of God, new Messianic communities have been formed in 21st century Israel. Through the Tents of Mercy Network, the rugged founders of a handful of these congregations have chosen to walk in covenant brotherhood. The next step will be linking with other similar networks in Israel. After more than 30 years of trust-building with my longtime partner, Asher Intrater, the network he leads, Revive Israel, is the ideal candidate.

I believe that the Kingdom of God is extended through deep, committed friendship and the bonds that come from walking through persecution, apathy, and inexperience—yet overcoming these obstacles. Our apostolic team represents a wide range of origins. We hail from Belarus, Ethiopia, America, Tatarstan, and Israel. It is the privilege of a lifetime to participate in the restoration of apostolic life here, where Yeshua first called his disciples together and commissioned them to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. ✡



## Counting the Omer

~ Lifting up our Youth ~

The Counting of the Omer (*Sfirat HaOmer*) is the counting of the days that separate Passover and *Shavuot* (Feast of Weeks/Pentecost), as stated in Leviticus 23:15-16. For those forty-nine days, the priests would lift a sheaf of barley before God for and then present it as an offering in the Temple. In Bible times "Counting the Omer" was an act of faith, prayer and sacrifice, seeking God's blessing and a bountiful harvest. In our day the "Counting of the Omer" is still observed and creates an atmosphere of positive anticipation.

### Spiritual significance:

- 1) It is a reminder that the Land of Israel will yield its fruit, and of God's provision for His people.
- 2) It creates a positive expectancy for a good harvest, which always seems to come as a happy surprise.
- 3) It is a prophetic picture of resurrection from the dead. Yeshua (Jesus) became the first fruit of resurrection by overcoming the powers of death. Through Him we shall all be resurrected.
- 4) The daily counting of the Omer can be compared to putting our faith into action in everyday life.

In Genesis 26:1-3 God gave a strange instruction to Isaac in the middle of a famine. Isaac was a shepherd, not a farmer. Nevertheless, God instructed him to stay in the land and cultivate it. Through his obedience the land yielded fruit.

**"Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold."** (Genesis 26:12)

We also can lift our sheaves of faith, and expect a joyful spiritual harvest! After His death and resurrection, Yeshua continued to appear to His disciples almost on a daily basis. He sowed into their hearts a vision for a great spiritual harvest that was set in motion on Shavuot when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Holy Spirit seemed to come unexpectedly, even though it had been prophesied by the prophet Joel centuries before the time of the apostles.

### Return to Zion's Youth Ministry

The sheaf (*omer*) that Return to Zion is **lifting up** before God this year is our congregation's youth ministry. We are joyfully expecting its first fruits to appear! For many years we have been searching for effective ways to enhance our youth programs. Now God has begun to answer our long-felt need by bringing a young man with a warm, pastoral heart. His name is Yevgeni. He has served in the Special Forces of the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), and worked as a security guard in an Israeli embassy abroad. He is married and has two children.

We are lifting the sheaf of faith, that God would, through Yevgeni, build up our youth and change them into the image of Yeshua, that they would be able to fulfil their part in the calling of Israel. Please join us in prayer, that we would have the means to employ this fine young man. ✨



Youth group celebrating Purim



Yevgeni and wife Alina



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