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# BRIDGES FOR PEACE

## *Israel Teaching Letter*

Vol. # 770909

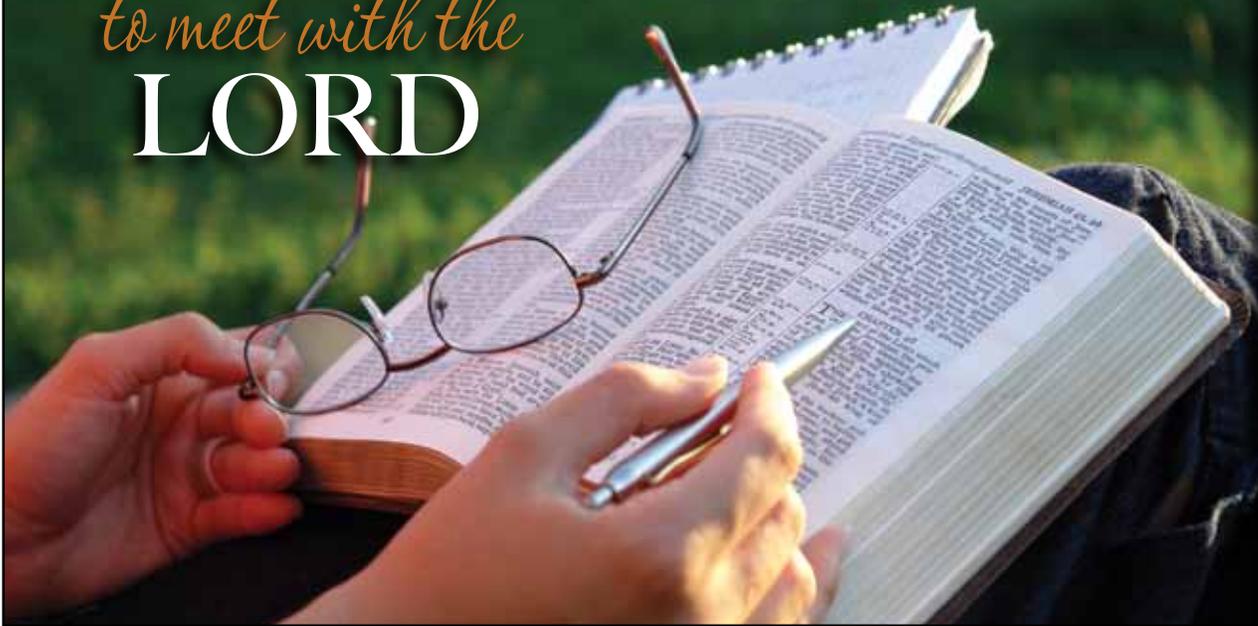
September 2009

# PREPARING



*to meet with the*  
**LORD**

# PREPARING *to meet with the* LORD



Once a year the staff of Bridges for Peace in Israel goes away for a three-day prayer retreat. It is a special time of meeting with God—a *moed* (appointment, set-apart time) when we seek the Lord for His direction for the future. In the month before the retreat, we concentrate on preparing ourselves spiritually for this special time and encourage each person to search their heart. In our devotional times, we concentrate on repentance and seeking God. The Friday before we leave for the retreat, the entire management team spends several hours praying for the Lord's direction and blessing for the staff. This time of preparation is a vital part of the retreat, enabling our team to come before the Lord with a clean heart.

## Israel Prepares for Shabbat

Every Friday in Israel is a preparation day, as the people prepare to enter into the Lord's *Shabbat* (Hebrew for "seven," Sabbath, or Saturday) beginning at sunset. Friday was, in fact, called the Day of Preparation in the time of Yeshua (Jesus), i.e. Matthew 27:62. On Thursday evening the pace quickens. Grocery stores are packed as ingredients are bought to prepare their festive *Shabbat* meal. Friday morning houses are vigorously cleaned, with every member of the family having a part. The table is covered with beautiful linen and set with the nicest dishes. Everyone showers and dresses in their nicest clean clothes. At the same time, delicious smells emanate from every kitchen, as the finest meal of the week is prepared.

Many people don't work on Friday, but those who do finish early (about 1 or 2 pm) in order to prepare themselves to enter into the Lord's *Shabbat*. It isn't taken lightly; after all, it is an appointment God made with His people thousands of years ago. After living more than 20 years in Israel, I have come to greatly value this special day of rest, when we (as a nation) cease the hectic work of the week, gather with family and friends, and bask in the presence of the Lord.



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We might compare it to meeting with the Queen of England. Jean Wilson, emeritus board member of Bridges for Peace, recently had that honor. When you are going to meet with royalty, you receive instructions on how to address the Queen in a proper manner, what kind of clothes to wear, where you will stand, if you will bow or curtsy, etc. When you arrive, you are subject to security inspection. Each step of the way, you are coached on the proper etiquette of being in the presence of royalty. You happily submit; after all, it is a great honor to meet the Queen.

Throughout Scripture, we see that God often instructed His people to prepare themselves before entering His presence. He desires us to come with the right attitude, having prepared our hearts. Let's take a look at a few of these instances and the things God required of the people in preparation for meeting with Him.



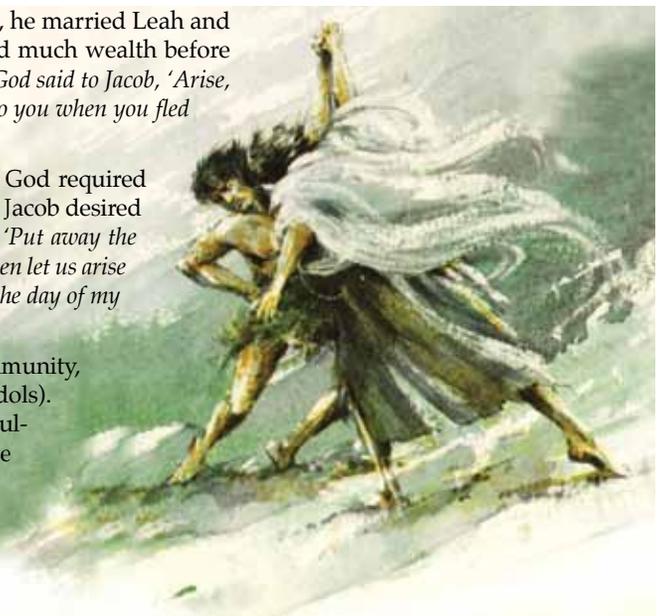
## Jacob Invited to Meet with God



Jacob spent 20 years working with his Uncle Laban. During this time, he married Leah and Rachel, had 11 sons (Benjamin was born later in Bethlehem), and gained much wealth before heading back to Canaan. When they arrived, God spoke to Jacob. *"Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother'"* (Gen. 35:1).

The very next verse records Jacob's response. Jacob knew the things God required and began to instruct his household to prepare for this important meeting. Jacob desired to do it right. *"And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone'"* (Gen. 35:2-3).

These were important preparatory steps. Don't forget, in Laban's community, polytheism was practiced (remember Rachel stole the household gods or idols). Putting away their gods and putting their faith in one God was a major cultural shift for them. It was vitally important that Jacob's entire household be united in worship of the one true God. They needed to understand what an honor it was to stand in His presence. The meeting that ensued was significant! It was here that God changed Jacob's name to Israel and reaffirmed the covenant He had made with Abraham and Isaac to give the Land of Canaan to them, and now to Jacob and his descendants.



## Encountering God at Sinai

When Moses encountered God at the burning bush, God immediately spoke saying: *"Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."* Moreover He said, *"I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"* (Exod. 3:5-6). I can just picture Moses not only taking off his shoes, but falling face down in awe. God was communicating to Moses that He needed to be approached with honor as the one and only holy God.





Later, in the third month after the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, God spoke to Moses saying: *“Go to the people and consecrate [set apart as holy or declare sacred for religious use] them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base’”* (Exod. 19:10–12a).

The passage goes on to spell out exact ways the people were to prepare and to approach God: consecration, washing of clothes, abstaining from sexual relations, and the distance they must keep between them and the mountain.

The entire nation was witness to an unprecedented encounter with God. Abraham J. Heschel describes it like this: *“And if you ask: What was it like when the people stood at Sinai, hearing God’s voice? The answer will be: Like no other event in the history of man. There are countless legends, myths, reports, but none of them tell of a whole people witnessing an event such as Sinai.”* Just like Jacob’s reentry to the land of Canaan with his family who came from a polytheistic culture, the children of Israel—coming out of Egypt with its many gods—needed to encounter the one true God, understand His power, glory, and holiness. I believe God did it in a terrifying awe-inspiring manner, so they would never forget. They could never view Him casually after an event like Sinai.

*“Take your sandals  
off your feet,  
for the place where you stand  
is holy ground.”*

Exod. 3:5



## Entering the Promised Land

After the death of Moses, Joshua becomes God’s appointed leader. He will lead the people over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. As with Moses, Joshua spent time with the Lord receiving instructions. He then communicated to the people that they needed to prepare themselves to enter into the promise of the Lord. Joshua 3:5 says, *“And Joshua said to the people, ‘Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.’”* This was another pivotal moment in the life of Israel. The people needed to encounter God for themselves, not just have heard the stories of what occurred at Sinai and in Egypt. This was a new generation, and Joshua gave them instructions for preparing themselves to experience wonders from God.

## The Ark of the Covenant

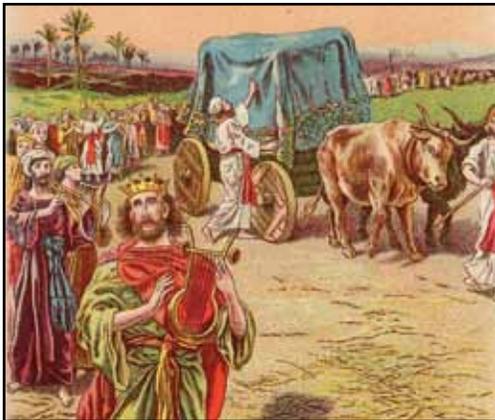
At one time in Israel’s history, the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines (I Sam. 4–6). This was a tragic event for the nation. Not only was the Ark a national treasure, but it was also a holy Ark created from gold according to the Lord’s exact design. The Ark went before Israel into battle, it resided in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. God had given specific instruction about how it was to be treated and carried. The Ark was a great blessing to the people of the covenant, but it didn’t bless the Philistines. In fact, they realized their many troubles were because they were keeping the Ark. They put it on a cart and sent it toward Israel. The men of Beit Shemesh found it and looked into the Ark (which was clearly prohibited), and God struck 50,070 men. There was great mourning, and the Ark stayed for the next 20 years in Kirjath Jearim in the home of Abinadab.

The Israelites continued to have struggles with the Philistines. One day, Samuel, the judge, spoke to the nation saying: *“If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines”* (1 Sam. 7:3). The people did so, and the Philistines were subdued.

After David became king, he decided it was time to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. With great zeal and excitement, and the agreement of his leaders, David made plans to bring it into the city with great fanfare. But he did not seek out God’s way of doing so. In their human wisdom, they brought the Ark on a cart. When the ark slipped, Uzza reached out to steady it and was immediately struck by the Lord and died. The giddy mood of minutes before changed immediately, and David was afraid of God that day.

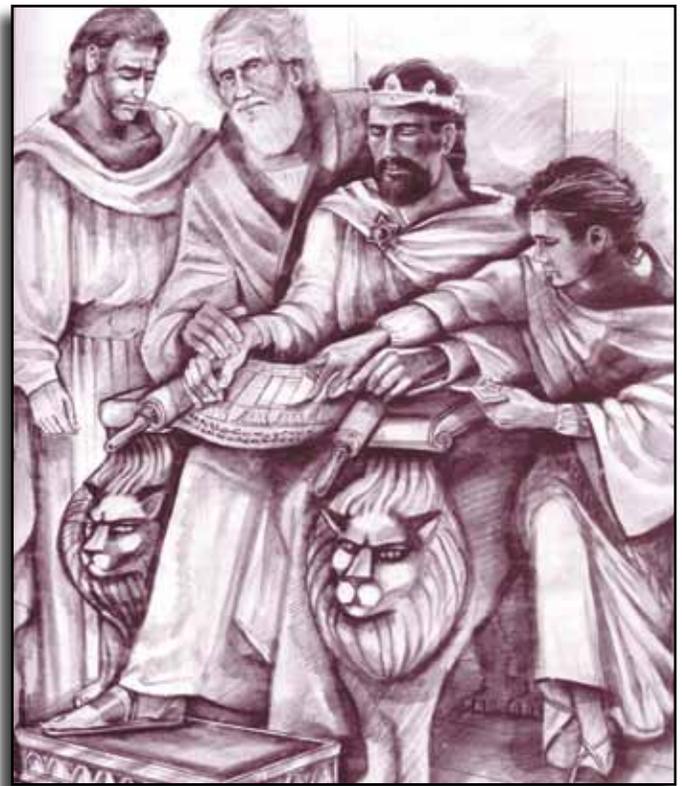
*“...Prepare your hearts  
for the Lord  
and serve Him only...”*

1 Sam. 7:3b



Later, when they finally brought the Ark to Jerusalem, it was with a different attitude. *“And David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests and for the Levites: for Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab. He said to them, ‘You are the heads of the fathers’ houses of the Levites; sanctify yourselves and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel to the place I have prepared for it. For because you did not do it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves...”* (1 Chron. 15:11–14a). Again, God was reminding the people of His instructions and His power. After these events, I am sure the people knew what it was to walk in the fear of the Lord.

In accounts of the kings of Judah and Israel who came after David, each king is described to be a good king or an evil king, depending on how he implemented the commands of God. Jotham was only 25 years old when he became king of Israel; he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. Then the Bible says, *“So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God”* (2 Chron. 27:6). Rehoboam seemed to start off well, doing several things that were pleasing to the Lord, but in the end, he forsook the law of the Lord and led Israel with him. The Bible says, *“And he did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord”* (2 Chron. 12:14). Making preparation, either for the heart or for the Ark, was crucial.

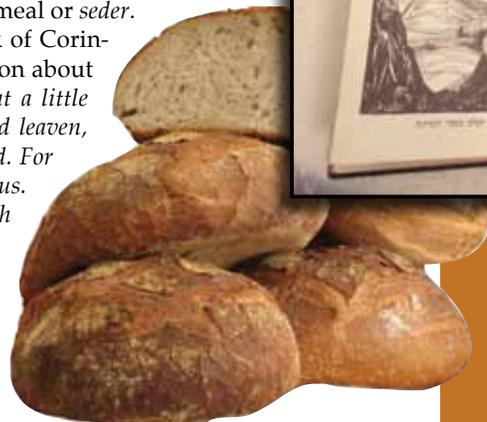
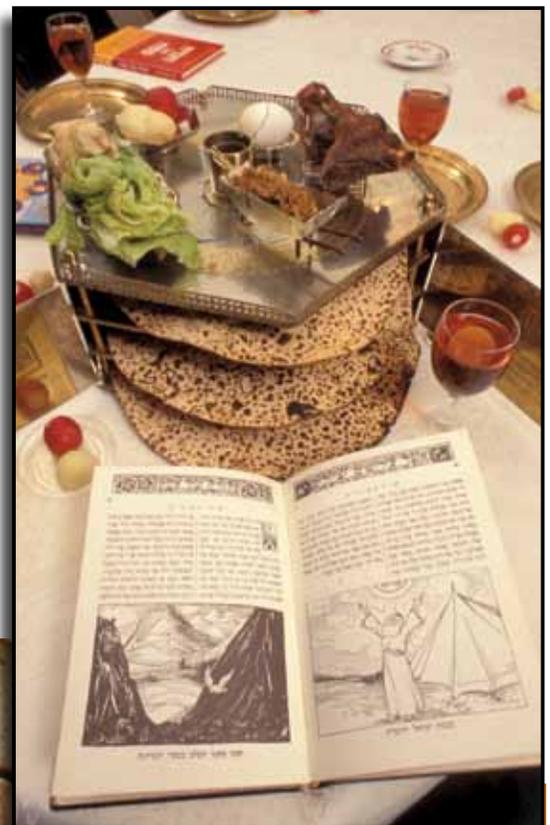


## Preparing for Pesach

Exodus 12 is one of the main passages which spells out the steps God prescribed for preparing and partaking for *Pesach* (Passover). *“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. And no unleavened bread shall be seen among you in all your quarters. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, ‘This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt’”* (Exod. 13:6–10). The Bible tells the exact time that the people are to commemorate this feast—the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan (usually in April).

Thousands of years later, the Jewish people all over the world continue to carefully fulfill these injunctions. My Orthodox friends have given me a window into their world. I know not to expect lots of lunches or other outings in the weeks leading up to *Pesach*. They and their families, along with the whole house of Israel, are cleaning their homes, cupboards, and cars to ensure that there is no leaven. Every item of clothing is cleaned, with pockets turned inside out to guarantee that no crumbs of leaven remain. It is always interesting to note that the vast majority of Israelis (even those who define themselves as secular) go through these steps and celebrate *Pesach* as God prescribed to Moses thousands of years ago.

As Christians, we know that Yeshua, the disciples, and the early Church celebrated *Pesach*. In fact, the Last Supper was a *Pesach* meal or *seder*. The Apostle Paul assumes that the readers of the book of Corinthians are celebrating *Pesach* and gives further instruction about leaven: *“Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ [Messiah], our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice, and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”* (I Cor. 5:6–8). Paul is emphasizing the need to sanctify our hearts as we follow the commands of God. It is an inward work that is exhibited outwardly.



*Purging out the leaven is an inward work that is exhibited outwardly.*

# The Upper Room

*“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place and suddenly there came a sound from heaven as a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.”*

Acts 2:1–2

Before Yeshua ascended to heaven, He told His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to them. They were to wait until they received power from on high. God could have just given them the Spirit immediately, and He could have done it anywhere, even to them individually. Instead, Yeshua gave specific instructions. They were not to depart from Jerusalem. They were to wait. Only afterwards would they receive the power. They did as they were instructed and remained together in one accord until *Shavuot* (Pentecost), and then they were filled with the Holy Spirit. There was a preparation time and a manner in which God wanted them to prepare.

In this case, I believe the specific instructions were given because God had a plan to bring 3,000 to salvation on *Shavuot*. It was one of three pilgrimage festivals when all men were expected to come up to Jerusalem, so the city would have been filled to the brink. Success is often a combination of being in the right place, at the right time, and doing the right thing. The scriptural account says: *“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place and suddenly there came a sound from heaven as a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire and one sat upon each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:1–4).

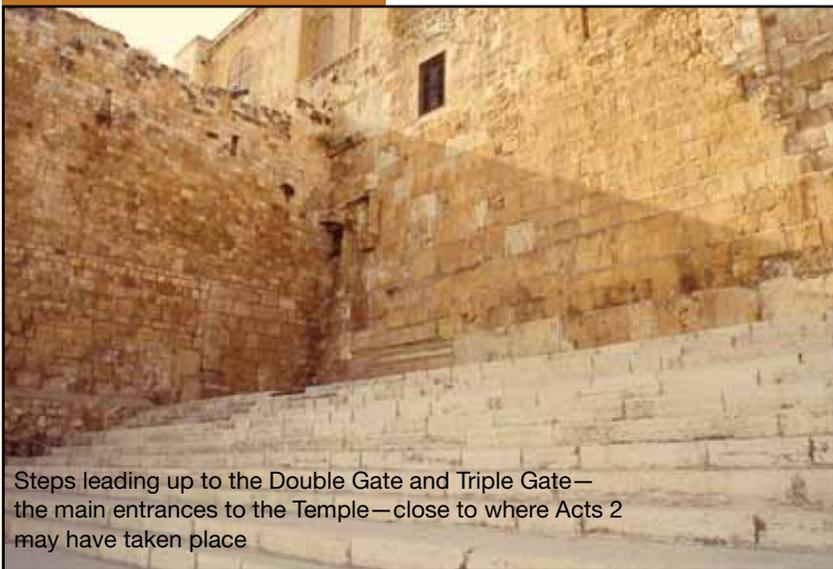
My husband Tom, a licensed Israeli tour guide, believes that “the house” where they were sitting was the Temple, which in Hebrew is often referred to as “the house” or “the house of God.” The *Nelson Study Bible* says, “The place may have been part of the Temple. It is difficult to imagine how the large crowd mentioned in verse 5 could have observed the activities in the upper room or congregated in the narrow streets outside the house where the disciples were meeting.” This event was not meant for a few to observe but many.

Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg in their book, *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus*, concurs and goes on to explain why it was so important for this to happen on *Shavuot*: “At least two hundred years prior to Christ’s birth, the rabbis noted that the Israelites reached Mount Sinai fifty days after they left Egypt (see Exodus 19:1). This led them to conclude that...*Shavuot* must commemorate the covenant on Mount Sinai. The traditional reading for *Shavuot* is Exodus 19–20, which recounts the story of what happened when God came down on Mount Sinai to give Moses the Ten Commandments, to seal the giving of the covenant. During this divine encounter, the whole mountain seemed consumed with fire. Just as the divine presence on Sinai was dramatically marked with fire, God was making His presence dramatically known at Pentecost with tongues of fire.” Spangler and Tverberg go on to marvel that the other Scripture reading on *Shavuot* is Ezekiel 1 that recounts the prophet’s amazing vision, which includes the Spirit of God in the midst of a windstorm complete with lightning and fire.

By following the commands of Yeshua, His disciples were part of the divine plan to show the people of Jerusalem that the God of fire and wind—that they were reading about in Exodus and Ezekiel on that very day—was showing up again with fire and wind.



The Traditional Upper Room



Steps leading up to the Double Gate and Triple Gate—the main entrances to the Temple—close to where Acts 2 may have taken place

# Jewish Thought

In many of these examples, we find the concept of sanctifying oneself. As I pondered these things, I wondered what Jewish sages had to say about the subject. I found that a central theme is ritual cleansing acquired by immersing oneself in the waters of a *mikveh* (ritual bath). This requires a person to examine himself and then go to a public *mikveh*; his actions show he is cleansed and sanctified.

Jewish sage Maimonides talked about the act of sanctifying oneself: "The person who directs his heart to purify his soul from spiritual impurities, such as iniquitous thoughts and evil notions, becomes clean as soon as he determines in his heart to keep apart from these courses, and bathes his soul in the water of pure knowledge" (Mikvaoth 11:12). Noam Elimelech, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Polish rabbi, gave a beautiful word picture of sanctification when he said, "The righteous should sanctify himself so that the Shekina [Glory of God] sings from his throat."



A mikveh south of the Temple Mount entrance

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## What Is God Saying?

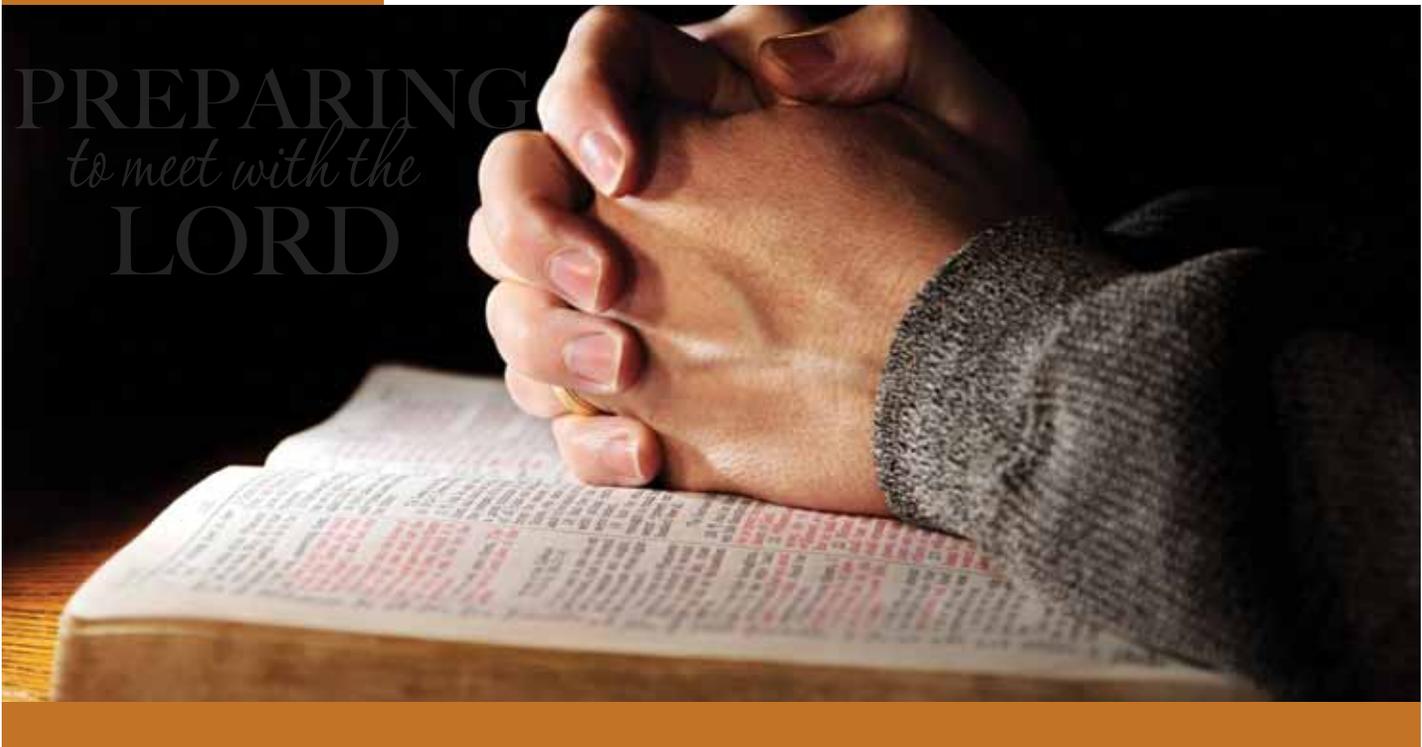
As I have studied these examples, it has become apparent to me that God reveals Himself as the all-powerful God who requires worship, often in specific ways. He is not a God that can be ignored, put on the shelf, or approached carelessly. He is not one of a group of gods. He is the only God. He is a God of smoke, fire, wind, and power. In the book of Revelation, we see a description of the throne of God. "One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings and voices...And in the midst of the throne and around the throne were four living creatures...And they do not rest day or night, saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!'" (Rev. 4:2b-5a, 6b, 8b).

*My cry is that  
we will not only  
know the truth,  
but we will also know  
the Almighty God  
of the truth  
and be wholly dedicated  
to Him—  
spirit, soul and body.*

God has expectations of how we should come to Him, meet with Him, and conduct ourselves. Repeatedly, we see the concept of preparing ourselves for these holy encounters. The themes of holiness, purification, sanctification, righteousness, and cleanliness are mentioned, as is preparing the heart to seek the Lord. Entering into God's presence is serious business. In today's modern world, with its hectic pace, challenges and concerns, many—perhaps not consciously—have put God on a shelf, like the ancient people did with their idols. We approach God at our convenience. Often our attitudes are casual. Sometimes we treat God like a buddy instead of the awe-inspiring ultimate authority in our lives.

We have been granted an invitation to enter His presence any time. What a privilege. Let's run to keep the appointments. But, let's honor His desire for us to approach Him with the right attitudes and behavior. Let's search our hearts and allow Him to work in us His perfect plans. May we be marked by the fruit of the Spirit, holiness, and sanctification. The number one criticism of Christians is that we are hypocrites. We say what we believe, but our actions don't agree. My cry is that we will not only know the truth, but we will also know the Almighty God of the truth and be wholly dedicated to Him—spirit, soul and body.

By Rebecca J. Brimmer  
International President and CEO  
Bridges for Peace



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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

**M**any pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding "yes"! It is our hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

