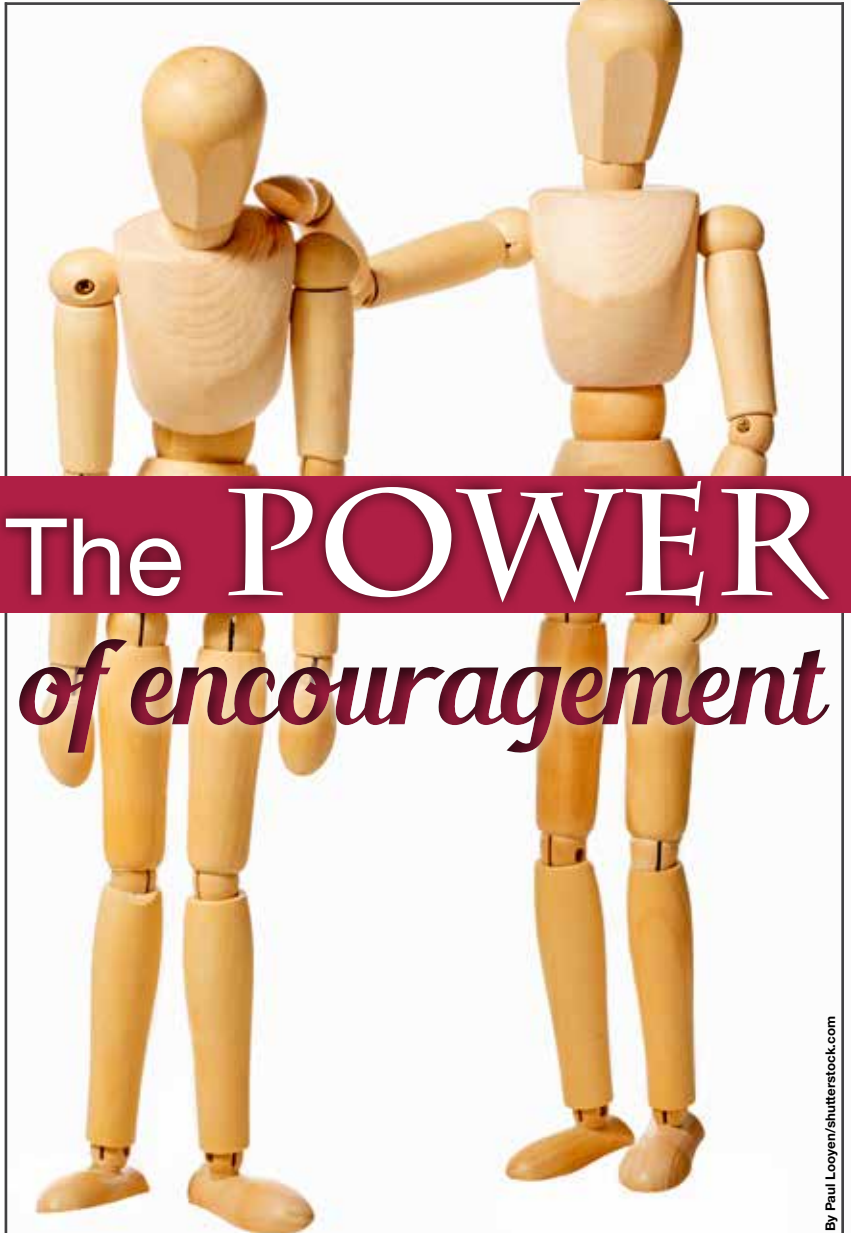


# ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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## The POWER *of encouragement*

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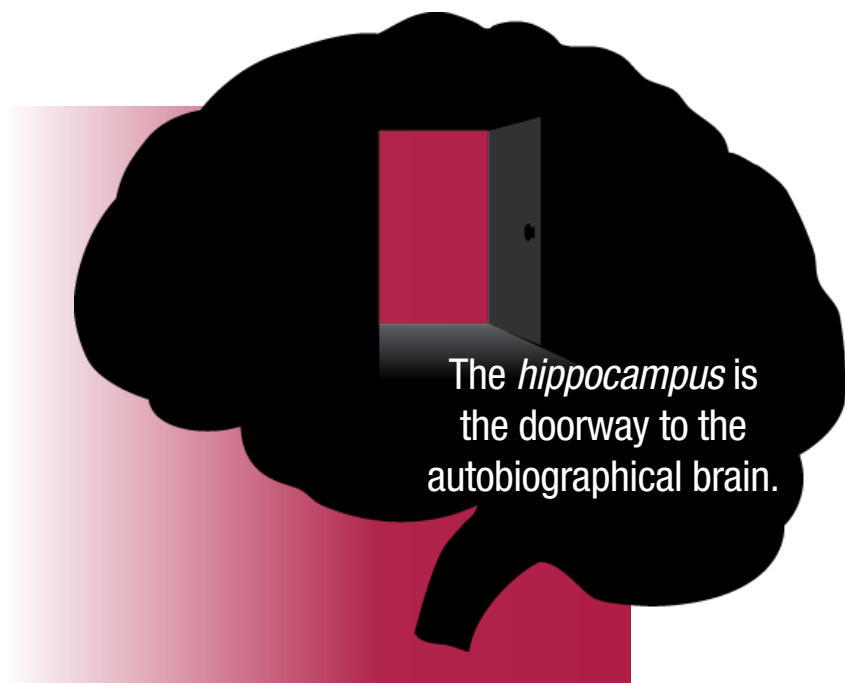
WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT SUPERPOWERS you might think of a science fiction movie, cartoon character or fictional superhero. The last thing you might think of is a Bible-believing Christian. The Word of the Lord is filled with power and we have been given authority, through the Holy Spirit, to move and work in the power of God. So, as believers in the one true God we have various powers at our disposal. We may have even heard or read teachings on these powers—the power of faith or the power of prayer may jump to mind. In my opinion, one power that is

often not given enough recognition is the power of encouragement. In a world filled with discouraging events and news, encouragement is, more and more, becoming an important power in which every believer can move and flourish. The Scriptures are filled with examples of not only the importance of encouragement, but also its ability to affect the future and the destiny of individuals.

## Affecting the Brain

Researchers have investigated the phenomena of how encouragement affects the development of the brain. Their findings show that encouragement, in spoken word and even facial expression, has a significant effect on the development of the brain. Children who are supported, praised and encouraged by their parents have brains that are better structured for learning and handling the stressful situations which they will encounter later on in their lives. The brain scans show significant effect in the *hippocampus*, the part of the brain which affects the emotional response and behavioral inhibitions of the individual. The *hippocampi* of highly encouraged children developed faster with better emotional responses and control over their behavior. According to the authors of the study, it is essential for children to receive special attention and encouragement.

Further research has been conducted into how you, as an individual, can “exercise” the *hippocampus* into changing the way you think about yourself and how you behave in certain circumstances. The *hippocampus* is the doorway to the autobiographical brain, transferring information about who you are, or at least who you perceive yourself to be, into your long-term memory. If you feel



discouraged and unsuccessful, the *hippocampus* will transfer these feelings into your long-term memory, eventually forming a belief about who you are. However, research shows that through regular encouragement one can develop neural networks of positive emotional affect and optimism (Matheson). This in turn will affect how you think about yourself and how you interact with the world around you.

Science confirms what the Lord already knew, that humans need encouragement in order to fully develop. Hearing continued encouragement from those closest to us produces a response in our brains which gives us the ability not only to handle difficult situations, but also to have the correct emotional response to these events. The power of encouragement lies in this—that it can change the way we think about ourselves, our circumstances and even increase our trust in God. The Scriptures exhort us to love the Lord with all our hearts, soul, strength and entire mind (Matt. 22:37). This means our brains should be integrated with God’s created reality. If the Bible tells us one thing and our brains another, we should revert to the truth of the Word. What God has said and spoken should be the basis of our belief about who we are.

## God of Encouragement

The character of the Lord is so vast that we struggle with our human minds to fully comprehend each of His characteristics at once. In the Bible we can find different poets, prophets and kings reflecting upon the awesome character of God. To get to the root of the character of the Lord, we can look to no more infallible source than God Himself. What Jewish sages call the “Thirteen Attributes of Mercy” can be found in Exodus 34:6–7, where we read how the Lord describes Himself:

*“The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and*



Children  
who are  
encouraged by  
their parents  
are better  
equipped for  
their lives.



*sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."*

While not explicitly mentioned in the above passage, hidden within the Lord's character is the trait of encouragement. The word rendered in the above verse as merciful in the Hebrew text is the word "*rachum*" (רחום). *Rachum* is defined in the *Strong's Hebrew Concordance* as compassionate or merciful. One broader meaning of *rachum* is: "to have tender affection." This is much like a mother or father would cherish or show tender affection to their child. So then the Hebrew word "*rachum*" can be closely related to the English word cherish, which is defined by *Webster's Dictionary* as "to treat in a manner to encourage growth, by protection, aid, attendance or supplying nourishment."

Consequently, we find that in the Lord's compassionate character there is the desire to encourage us to grow. From this deduction we see that encouragement is an outworking of God's mercy and graciousness. Through mercy and compassion the Lord, like a doting parent, encourages us to grow into His plans and purposes for our lives. He lovingly seeks to inspire His people to put their confidence and hope in Him, and this gives us the courage to move ahead into His plans and purposes.

## Encouraging a Nation

Throughout Scripture, but specifically in the prophets of the *Tanakh* (Old Testament), the Lord's encouragement is inherent and apparent in His dealings with His children. Each year the Jewish people mourn and fast on the day known as *Tisha B'Av*. This is not a holiday but rather a solemn remembrance of the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple and the exile of the Jewish nation to Babylon for 70 years. It was a very traumatic time in biblical history. The people that the Lord had chosen, saved by a mighty outstretched arm and established in their promised homeland, were now led away captive by their enemies and seemingly forsaken by their God. After the time of captivity had ended,



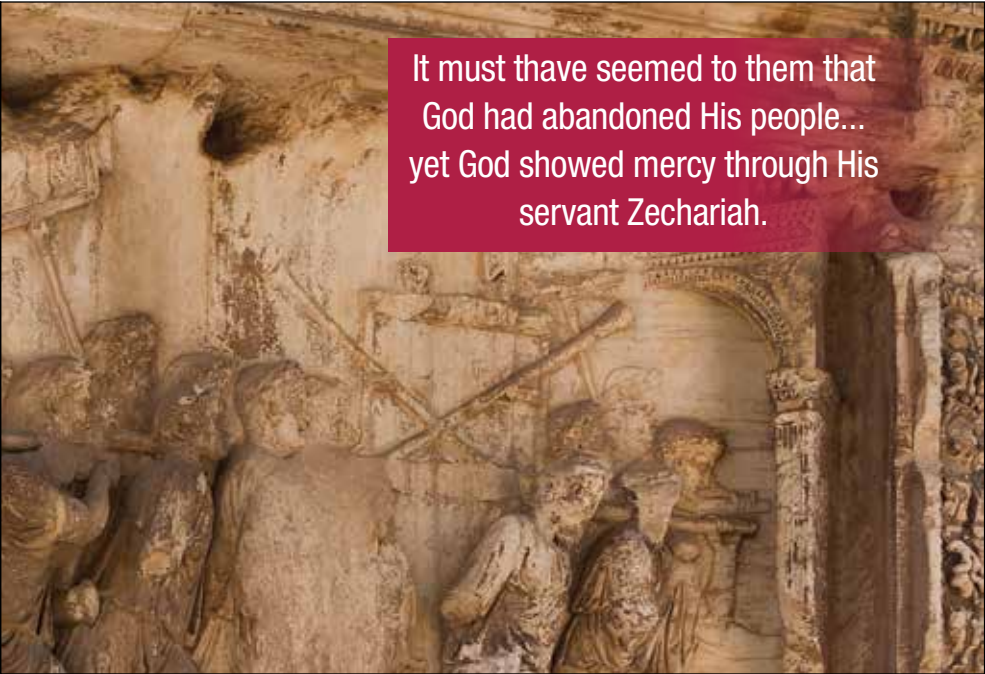


a remnant returned to Jerusalem to resettle the land and rebuild their Temple. Many of these people who returned from Babylon may have wondered if the Lord still had a purpose for them and whether Jerusalem would ever be restored again.

Jerusalem was a shambles. The Temple destroyed. The palaces, the walls—everything they had known and loved was gone. The land to which they returned was barren. It must have seemed to them that God had abandoned His people in favor of another plan, or another chosen people. Yet, in this desolate place the God of encouragement showed His mercy through His servant Zechariah who came to the people with a message of comfort and hope. In Zechariah 2:10–12 we read:

*“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,” says the LORD. ‘Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. And the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem.’”*

It was the encouragement of the Lord through the prophet Zechariah that gave the people the will to complete the rebuilding project. Zechariah gave the Israelites a vision of the Messiah who would one day not only come to this Temple, but also would bring salvation to the people. The Lord reassured the remnant that He had brought them back to Jerusalem, to their land for a purpose and that His covenant promises to them would be fulfilled. God had not abandoned His people or His promise and encouraged them to forge ahead with expectation in their hearts and minds for the future fulfillment of His promises.



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## Disappointed Disciples

Perhaps some of the most poignant examples of discouragement came from the disciples of Jesus (Yeshua). Similar to this example of the nation of Israel, the disciples must have wondered if the Lord was going to abandon them and the promised redemption when Jesus told them of His death and eventual return to His Father. After all, had the disciples not invested years of their lives into Jesus' ministry? They left behind careers and families in order to follow and serve with a miracle-working rabbi. And now all He could offer them was the unfolding revelation of His demise and impending departure.

This is something that we all can relate to. In our walk as believers there are sacrifices that must be made, tough times and seasons without any seemingly hopeful outcome. We would not survive these times without the encouragement of God. So we should take heart that in these times of trials and testing, the God of encouragement is ever mindful of our need to hear from above. Even so, when Jesus was about to die He chose to comfort and encourage His friends. As Jesus stood, about to be betrayed and bear the sin of world upon Himself, He turned to His friends and said: *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you; not as the world gives do I give you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"* (John 14:27).

The character of the Lord abounds in goodness and truth and so does Jesus's. In the moments when you experience absolute despair, consider that the ruler of the universe cares about encouraging you. He makes it His business



The Lord gives  
encouragement  
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through His  
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to provide His people a sense of comfort and peace—even in the midst of fear and uncertainty. But we would be mistaken to overlook the vital role that each of us has to play in the powerful outworking of the encouragement of God. The Lord gives encouragement **to** His people **through** His people. This is a power which we should move and operate in and use to encourage others to walk in their God-given destinies.

## Encouraging Destiny

Do you think encouragement from men can affect the destiny of a person or a group of people? That it can really change their lives? Well I do. I believe encouragement can actually change the course of another person's day, week or life. When someone encourages you, that person helps you over a threshold you might otherwise never have crossed on your own. When I think of the biblical character Joshua, I always imagine a warrior, brave and strong. I always choose to focus on the battles that Joshua had to face and the fact that he needed the courage to go to war—to fight against the inhabitants of the land. If you are unfamiliar with the great military exploits of Joshua, I refer you to the October 2017 Israel Teaching Letter, "Joshua Faithful Warrior," where Dr. Bill Adams details the amazing story of this exemplary leader.

Think about the children of Israel who came out from Egypt, the generation that went into the wilderness and who died there. They were discouraged, disillusioned. They really had an encouragement problem. They could not get confident in and hope in the Lord. Yet, among them was Joshua, handpicked by the Lord to become Israel's new leader, to follow in the footsteps of Moses, the greatest prophet in the Bible.

Joshua received the prophecy to enter and inherit the land. He knew his destiny and he was different in that he believed the Lord, trusted God's promises and had hope. Yet, God still gave instruction to Moses to have the people encourage Joshua: "*Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit*" (Deut. 1:38). Why did God



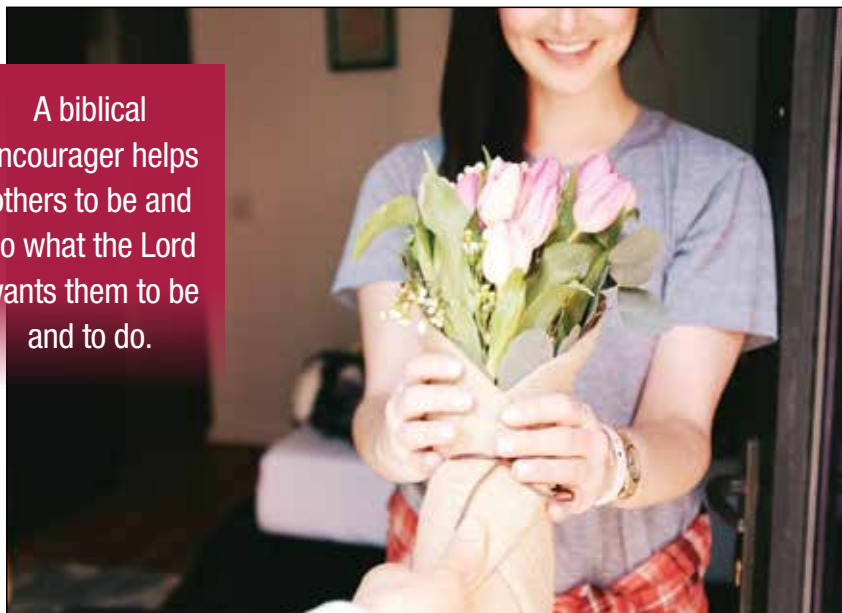
give this instruction to Moses? It was because the encouragement from the people had a part to play in Joshua's destiny. The people around Joshua were commissioned to encourage the fulfillment of Joshua's call and thereby also fulfill their own destiny to enter into the Promised Land.

## Being an Encourager

Let's define an encourager as the Bible would have us understand the word. A biblical encourager helps others to have the courage to be and to do what the Lord wants them to be and to do. Let me say it again, **a biblical encourager helps others to have the courage to be and to do what the Lord wants them to be and to do.** It should be our passion in life to encourage our fellow man to walk in their God-given destiny. There is nothing more special than to witness the gifts and talents buried inside each person come to life when they are encouraged and walking in the plans that the Lord has for them. In the same way it is one of my greatest challenges to watch the enemy of our souls mislead and discourage believers in such a way that they become disillusioned and dissatisfied in waiting on and trusting in the Lord. Too often, in our relationships, we tend to look for faults and weaknesses. We do the direct opposite of what would bring change and instill confidence in others to fulfill and walk in their destiny.

Being an encourager does not have to be a difficult, heavy burden to bear. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit it is easy to identify the traits in others which can be amplified and promoted. The more you work at looking at others through God's encouraging eye, the better you become at being His vessel of encouraging destiny in others. It is a need that all human beings share and we, as believers, are instructed to give encouragement unto others.

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## You have the Power

If you ever find yourself in the position in your life where you think you have nothing to offer or nothing to give, remember that being an encourager to someone is something that every one of us can do. Young or old, rich or poor, sick or healthy—we can all use the power of encouragement if we chose to.

Encouraging others can also be a tonic for your soul. If you are discouraged or feeling down or alone—the choice to give someone else encouragement will also lift you up. When you receive encouragement you are uplifted, and by giving encouragement to another you are also uplifted.

In all honesty, encouraging someone on a regular basis does not come naturally to most of us. In a world of selfies and smartphones we are surrounded by forces which drive us to become more inwardly focused. It takes dedication and intent to develop an ongoing encouraging manner with others. We need to make an effort to say something good, to encourage and build somebody up. It is not simply a compliment about their dress or tie but rather to affirm a person's character or spiritual gifting. Therein lies the power of encouragement—to confirm their talents in such a way that makes a positive difference in their lives. So that their brain will translate the encouragement into a change in the way they feel, and thus, the way that they think about themselves. We can afford to do that more.

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## Closing Thought

If you think back on your life, no matter how long or short it has been, you will find that the people who influence you are the people who believe in you most, the ones who use the power of encouragement to propel you forward in life. It does not matter how great, how famous or successful a man or woman may be, each hungers for encouragement. One of the most beautiful gifts in the world is the gift of encouragement. Correction does much, but encouragement does even more. As you strive to become more like Jesus, you must make it your business to provide encouragement to the people around you.

Maybe you could just use a push—the Lord wants to be your encourager and give you that push. Maybe you are here to use your power, and the Lord can use you to give someone else a gentle push. You can be an encourager!



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

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### TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (*Yeshua*)
- *Tankh* (Old Testament or O.T.) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or N.T.)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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