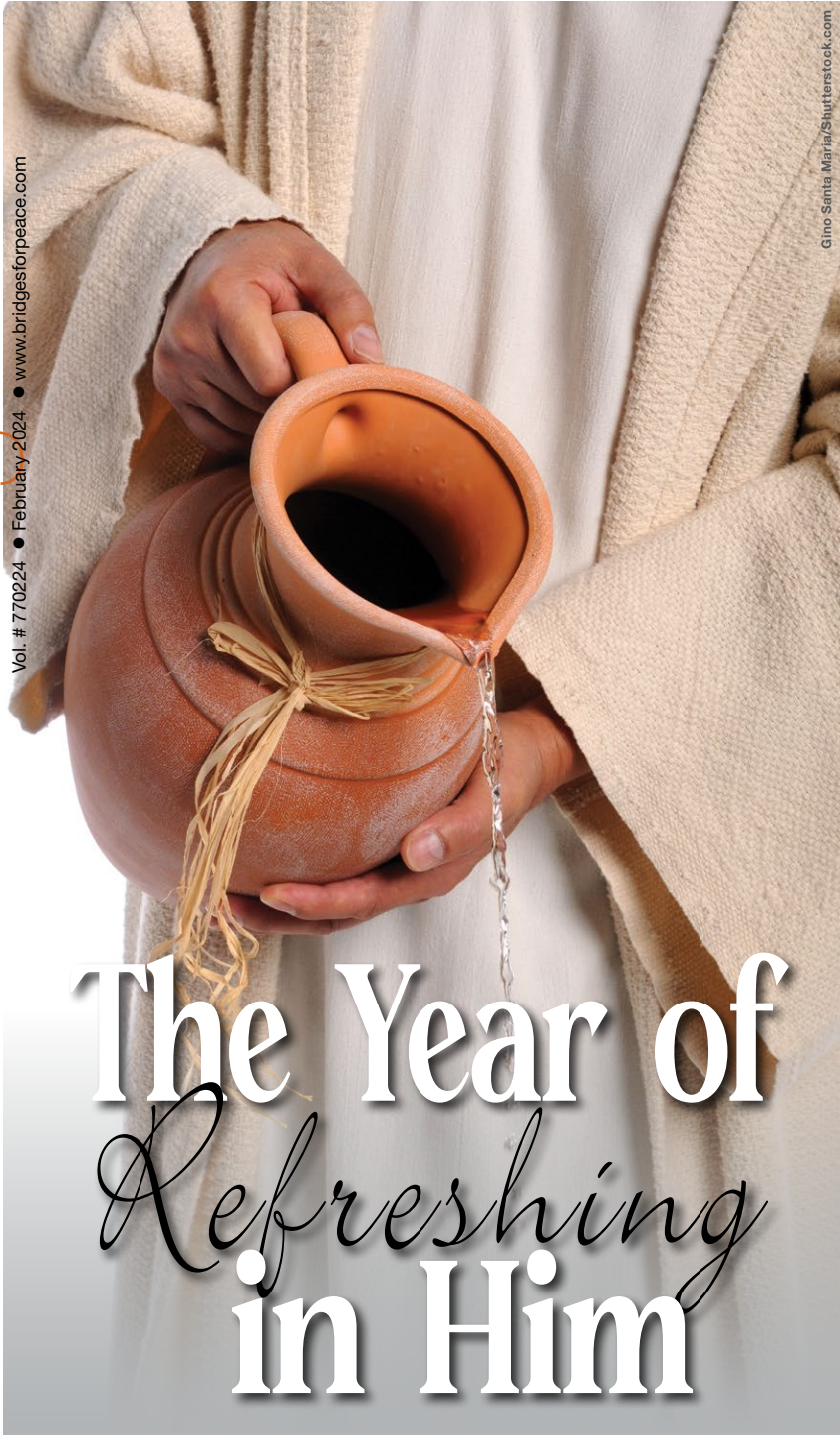


ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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The Year of *Refreshing* in Him

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ON OUR GREGORIAN CALENDARS, another new year is upon us, a leap year this time. That means 2024 brings one additional opportunity to enjoy God’s mercies, which are fresh and new every morning. Like other new years, many of us have taken the time to audit our lives a bit, looking back on 2023 and planning for a 2024 with fewer mistakes, more focus, more exercise and fewer pounds—all those good intentions that seem to magically disappear by the end of February.

But this year was different. For millions of Christians around the world, the new year wasn’t as meaningful this time, as we thought less of the 365 days since the last new year and more about the 86 days since the world was forever changed on October 7. Our celebrations felt hollow as we thought of those Israelis who were ringing in the new year in captivity under horrific circumstances; of thousands of young men and women on the battlefield, fighting and dying in a war against incomprehensible evil; of an entire country devastated and in mourning for their sons and daughters, husbands and friends. And we wept for the Israel that we once knew, for the death of innocence and the rise of hatred so vile, it defies imagination.

As I have spoken with pastors and leaders as well as the non-clergy who fill the pews on Sunday morning, I have realized that what is happening in Israel is having a profound effect on many Christians. Those believers who love and support Israel feel a deep and inexplicable connection to that land. Israel is in their hearts and the love they feel is there because the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob put it there. Often, they can’t explain why they feel the way they do, but they know as they find God’s eternal covenant with Israel on page after page in the Bible, that today’s Israel is the fulfillment of countless prophecies found in His word. And as Israel faces a horror unknown to the modern state, they, like many Jewish people in the Diaspora (the Jewish population outside Israel), are devastated. They too find themselves sleepless or with sleep plagued by nightmares of atrocities. And they feel helpless, wanting desperately to be an instrument of consolation to those who mourn, to help, to be a light of hope to their Jewish friends who are facing a darkness unknown since the Holocaust.

A Need for Refreshing

That desire, I believe, is one of the highest callings on the Church today. The Bible makes it clear that it is God’s will that His chosen people find true friends and partners in the Gentile Church. But in order for believers to bring consolation and encouragement to a devastated Jewish community, we need to be refreshed ourselves. However, many have told me they struggle with this idea, finding it difficult—even wrong somehow—to seek refreshment for themselves when others are in such pain. But I believe refreshing and being revitalized is critical for the Church to fulfil its calling as a supporter of Israel, and the Bible has much to tell us about its importance.

The concept is more prevalent in the Scriptures than you might realize. God speaks of it in Genesis; Moses talks about it in Exodus; we find it in 1 Samuel; David highlights it often in the Psalms; Isaiah and Jeremiah address it, as do other prophets; Jesus discusses it in the Gospels; and Paul mentions it often in the Epistles. It is an important concept!

As we explore it, we discover that there are several different words—both in Hebrew and Greek—that are translated “refresh” or “refreshing” that actually have different meanings. I would like to look at three of those words that I believe are a window into our Father’s heart, words that offer deeper meanings He wants us to understand as we enter a new year with heavy hearts and a desire to show His love to those He says are the apple of His eye (Zech. 2:8).



Stop Doing

Through Moses, God tells us in Exodus 31:17, *“It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.”* The Hebrew word for “refreshed” in this instance means to breathe or to be breathed upon. And the word for rested is *shabbat*, which means to cease from any movement or labor in order to recover and collect your strength, to keep quiet, to cease from doing. That’s what God did. He didn’t “do rested.” Instead, He stopped doing. He kept quiet and as he did, he was refreshed. He could breathe.

Have you ever faced a deadline, a time when you had to have a project done or an assignment completed, and it worried you constantly until, at last, it was done? You could finally *breathe*! That sense of relief, of relaxation, of freedom from the pressures of life is summed up in this concept.

Unfortunately, however, we live in a world that puts great emphasis on doing. Many of us have fallen into the trap of finding our value in how busy we are. The answer to the question, “How are you doing?” often goes something like, “Doing very well. Crazy busy, of course, but doing well.” And that plays right into the hand of the enemy of our souls. He wants us to be busy, to never cease doing, never resting, never being refreshed.

God, however, would have us cease and desist, to stop our constant “doing-doing” and rest in His presence, being bathed in His extravagant love, hearing His voice, *breathing*. Our answer to, “How are you doing?” should be, “Great! I am resting! Being refreshed in the presence of the Lord.”



Never again should we believe that we are too busy to spend time in God’s presence, being strengthened and renewed so that we can reenter the battle. Our Father wants us to *breathe*.

We should also remember that the same word means to be breathed upon. When we read of God creating Adam, we sometimes imagine a man that God had just shaped from the clay of the earth standing before God, waiting patiently for the next step in the process. But until God breathed His life into him, Adam was nothing but a pile of mud. It was God’s breath that gave him life, that invigorated him, refreshed him and sent him forth to tend the garden. As we cease from doing and spend time resting in God’s presence, He breathes life upon us, reinvigorating us as He did Adam, preparing us for whatever the future holds.

Lift Your Voice

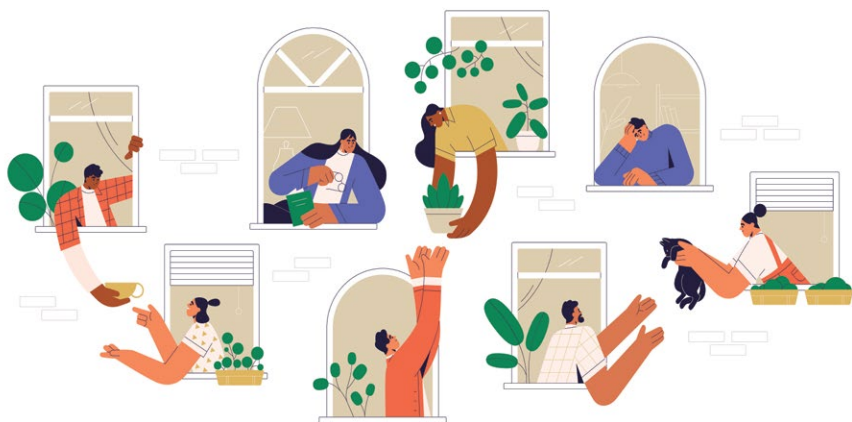
In 1 Samuel 16:23, we read that King Saul was plagued by a “*harmful spirit*” that kept him from sleeping, relaxing or resting and even threw him into fits of manic depression. Here we find our second Hebrew word translated as refresh. It means to be cool again, to cool off, recover from the effects of heat, to take in air, to be revived. When David, the shepherd son of Jesse, made music for the king, that harmful spirit had to flee and Saul could at last rest, to be cool again, to recover from the effects of oppression. Of course, the only music Da-

vid ever made was worship music, lifting his voice in praises of the God of Israel. Those “*harmful spirits*” that plague us, that cause us to worry, doubt or be anxious will only flee as we lift our voices in praise of the Lord.

Praising God doesn’t stop with worship music, however. The rabbis teach that we should find at least 100 reasons to bless the Lord every day, expressing our gratitude to Him and thanking Him for His love and leading in our lives. Are we thankers or are we grumblers? Are we intentional in our speech, giving glory to the Lord for all that is good in our lives, or do we give in to the temptation to complain, expressing our dissatisfaction with our current lot?

Recently, I ran into a Christian friend whom I hadn’t seen in some time. In response to my question as to how she was doing, I was shocked by her response. “I am in a really good place,” she said. She then explained all of the amazing things God had done for her to bring her to that place. I had expected the typical litany of all the things that were wrong in her life, but I was delighted by her response. Through her testimony, I was refreshed.

The Refreshment of Community



That leads me to our third word. In the Christian Scriptures, one of the Greek words translated as refresh actually means to be refreshed with another, to take rest together or to give and get refreshment by mutual interaction. We find it in verses such as:

1 Corinthians 16:18: *“For they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such men.”*

Philemon 1:7: *“For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.”*

Romans 15:32: *“So that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.”*

Our Year of Victory

So what is God telling us for 2024? There is no way that we can know what this year holds. The predictions are that the war with Hamas will continue for the coming 12 months. If the confrontations on the northern border increase, the situation will worsen. But one thing we can know for sure. Never has it been more important for believers to take the concept of refreshing more seriously. Scripturally, it’s not really a choice; it’s an instruction. And if we as Christian partners with Israel are going to fulfil our mandate to bring consolation and encouragement to a beleaguered nation, we must be refreshed and reinvigorated by the Lord.

We must put aside everything else and prioritize resting in His presence, listening to the Holy Spirit and understanding how deep and wide, how extravagant is His love. We must be washed in it and bathed in that love every day.

We have to prioritize worship, making it a constant part of our lives, singing and praising the Lord. And we have to remember to be intentional in our speech, expressing our gratitude to the Lord, being thankers and not complainers.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we must think more about refreshing others than being refreshed ourselves. As we join our voices with others, speaking out in support of Israel and standing against the multitudes who are blindly standing with Hamas, we will be refreshed and so will countless others who will be refreshed by our testimony.

As dire as the projections for 2024 might be, I believe God is calling us as believers in His word and in His faithfulness to make 2024 our year of victory. Let this be the year that we get our priorities straight, that we stop with needless doing and make time with Him the most important thing in our lives. Let this be the year that we learn to truly listen to His Holy Spirit and respond with joyful obedience, loving His people and supporting them in every way that we can. Let this be the year of the power of God overwhelming evil, of the deliverance of the captives and the restoration of their lives. Let this be the year that history declares the year of miracles, the year of God's faithfulness to His people and the coming together of Jews and Christians in celebration of the God we serve. Let this be the year of refreshing.



WE STAND WITH ISRAEL

Scripture from the English Standard Version

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)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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