

The Shalom Shofar

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain” —Joel 2:1
The Newsletter of Craig Hartman and Shalom Ministries Inc. • Third Quarter 2023

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Initial Thoughts

Friends, it is around this time that we normally send out our quarterly newsletter, *The Shalom Shofar*, but we felt it would be inappropriate to send a typical newsletter under the current circumstances. War is raging in the Middle East, and many are wondering whether we are rapidly heading to the end of this age. Therefore, I have decided instead to briefly share some thoughts about the events unfolding before our eyes, followed by some firsthand accounts and reflections from Grant. Then I would like to challenge our readers with an important plea and then close with information about giving to the war effort.

I would first like to take this opportunity to thank the many people who are praying for us. Though we may not be able to respond directly to all the well-wishers, we

want all of you to know how much our family and the Shalom team appreciate the supplications lifted to the throne on our behalf.

What on Earth Is Going On?

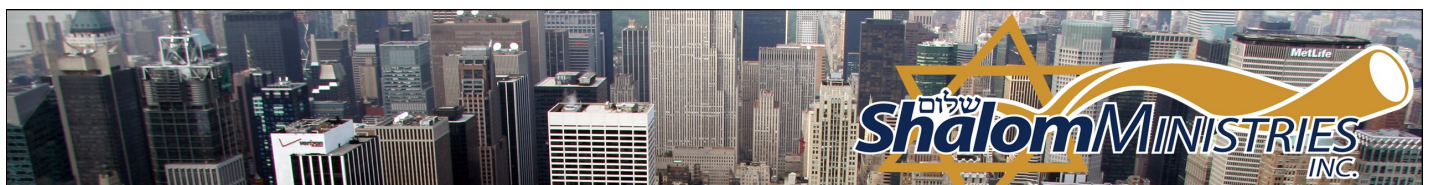
At the outset, we must acknowledge the absolute horror of the Hamas attack against Israel, in which they specifically targeted civilians, including (and especially) women, children, and the elderly. These barbaric acts recall atrocities that have happened throughout history and are certainly related to those perpetrated during the Holocaust of World War II, but with the use of social media and video, the barbarism has been brought into our homes as never before, and the world has been disrupted. Further detailing of these atrocities is unnecessary, but it's important to note that by doing these acts, Hamas

has shown itself to be exactly what it is—a blood-thirsty terrorist organization. It isn't a movement of rebellion against a so-called occupying entity; instead, it's a murderous gang of thugs bent only on the elimination of Israel with absolutely no desire for peace.

Hamas isn't alone in its evil. It stands alongside many other groups who want the destruction of Israel along with their common master and financier—Iran. Many of us have known and acknowledged this truth for a long time, but now some on the world stage are finally doing so as well. Time will likely show that many of the world's agents are strong only in words and will falter if pressed to prove their sentiments with action.

As you might imagine, right from the start we have been very engaged in following these events and maintaining contact with family, friends, ministry

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“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” —Isaiah 26:3

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partners, and so forth throughout Israel. These terrible events have affected everyone in Israel in some way, and there is much heartache in the land. Rachel is indeed weeping (Matt. 2:18). The hostage situation complicates matters to a large extent, and it will be challenging for Israel to respond as it wants to.

A ground offensive has begun, and the US government is flexing its muscles and issuing warnings to a group that laughs at us, largely because as soon as the current administration took office, it showed weakness in dealing with Hamas and, more tragically, Iran. The Middle East players don't understand nuance. They understand only force and might, and our country doesn't seem to understand this.

Israel is saying what it needs to in public but believes it stands alone and is accordingly preparing for the next steps. While all this is happening, China is advancing its relationship with Russia, and Iran is salivating at the prospect of using this time to take preeminence in the world. To make matters worse, we are subjected to daily displays of applause for the beheading of infants in the name of freeing a place called Palestine that few joining the harangues truly understand. Instead, they

enthusiastically speed toward conformity with the fad of death like reliable followers who seem to have lost all sense and refuse to use whatever intellect their Creator has given to them.

It seems as if the entire world is in chaos and about to explode. From minute to minute, we don't know whether to be sick about the atrocities or furious about the lies or weakness leadership has shown around the world—or even worse, frustrated by the reality that we have funded and facilitated some of what we are seeing as the world collapses. With whatever energy remains in us after all that, we try to muster the strength to remind ourselves that we can rest in perfect peace if we trust in God (Isa. 26:3), because He saw all this, even the atrocities, before the earth was created. This glorious truth transcends all the chaos, of course, but the challenges to our faith and the potential realities of the moment are sobering and new territory for many indeed. While all this is happening, we see remarkable displays of anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism within our own country. What is going on?

On a personal note, I would like to briefly inter-

ject praise to God for a couple of things that directly affected our family. In Grant's remarks below, he shares exciting news about the new addition to our tribe. Praise the Lord! Lauri traveled to Israel to assist the family with the various details involved, and she was even able to stay for several days after Ardis's return home from the hospital. Some changes took place along the way in planning that trip, but well over a month before the baby was born, the flights were finalized, with Lauri's return to America to begin just before midnight Israel time on the night of October 6. In other words, my wife was en route home and somewhere over the Atlantic when the war began. She learned the sad news upon landing in New York. It's difficult enough to be separated from our family in Israel at this time, but it would have been even more difficult if Lauri and I were separated had she been scheduled to leave even one day later and therefore became stuck in Israel for the first phase of the war. We are thankful to God that she is home. We have been able to encourage each other and hold each other up as we deal with all this.

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What the Bible Has to Say

We must now take a step back and consider what is happening from the perspective of scripture. As most, if not all, of our followers know, we believe the Bible must be interpreted literally as opposed to figuratively to properly discern God's revelation. As such, we would view eschatology from that perspective and therefore can draw certain conclusions from the events unfolding before us.

Scripture teaches that the next event on God's prophetic calendar is what is typically referred to as the Rapture, when the church will be suddenly removed from the earth. Sometime shortly after that, the Antichrist will enter a peace treaty with Israel, which will begin the period known as the seventieth week of Daniel. This seven-year period is often called the Tribulation. During this time, there will be great upheaval on earth, and the second half of this seven-year period will be a terrible time known as the Great Tribulation.

During the Great Tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble, Israel will be put through the greatest fire she will ever en-

dure on earth. The end of this purging will coincide with the glorious Second Coming of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah of Israel! Much more could be said, but this will suffice as we consider current events.

You see, some have conjectured that the end is upon us, but we know that cannot yet be, since the Rapture hasn't yet occurred. If the Rapture hasn't taken place, then the seventieth week of Daniel cannot have begun. However, when we consider many details in the Bible about Daniel's seventieth week, we cannot help but notice that the geopolitical environment and alignment of nations that will be present at that time bear a striking resemblance to what we see today. Consider Iran and Russia being in league, along with countries in the Middle East, and against Israel's border; the people of the East being on the move; and America becoming irrelevant. These events are represented in scripture, in the very last moments of this age, so we can clearly see the Bible unfolding before our eyes.

What Should Be Our Response?

While we are not in the seventieth week, this

war could be the beginning of events that lead to it, so believers must take note. Even if not, we are certainly seeing clear pictures of what the days preceding that time might be like. My friends, this is the time to really examine our faith. If we truly believe the Bible, we should examine ourselves to make sure we understand what the end will mean for the unsaved and what the lateness of the hour means to those of us who might be removed from the earth in the twinkling of an eye, with no further opportunity to reach the lost.

This is the time to share the Gospel and pray. Prayer for Israel and the lost among the nations, including Palestinians—even Hamas, though that might be viscerally difficult. Time will tell if the tumult continues in biblical ways, and we who believe may soon truly be face-to-face with our Messiah and Lord!

A Word from Grant in Israel

Shalom from Jerusalem. As you are aware if you have kept up with *The Shalom Shofar* in the past, this is generally the place in the update where I describe what my family and I have been up to during the last quarter and what

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God is doing here in Jerusalem. Believe me, He is doing a lot. However, considering the circumstances, we wanted to break tradition a little bit and give you an update on the current situation instead of waiting another three months to share our thoughts on the war in Israel.

However, before getting to what is going on right now, I wanted to share one important and very positive event that happened during this last quarter, and that was the birth of our daughter on September 29. Her birth date on the Hebrew calendar is very special because she was born on the fifteenth day of Tishri, the tenth month of the Hebrew calendar, the day marking the beginning of Sukkot or the Feast of Tabernacles. Sukkot commemorates the way God dwelled with the people of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years during the time of Moses. In Jesus's time, it

was also a holiday when the nation looked forward to the kingdom.

In light of those details, we named our daughter Eden Emanuel, which means "Paradise is God with us." Our prayer for her is that, as Jewish people worldwide celebrate the temporary dwelling with God in the wilderness on her Hebrew birthday, she will be able to give testimony that true paradise is the eternal presence of the living God, which is possible only by salvation through the true Messiah of Israel.

Growing up in the United States, I had thankfully never encountered war as a child. Sure, I learned a lot about war throughout US history courses, but I had never witnessed one with my own eyes. Living in New York on September 11, 2001, certainly sticks out as coming close to war, but even that event is nothing compared to what is going on in Israel right now.

On October 7, we

awoke to the sound of the bomb siren. In Jerusalem, this means we have approximately ninety seconds to get into our safe room since rockets are on the way from Gaza. People who live closer to Gaza have even less time to get to their shelters.

Since we live in a newer apartment building, it is equipped with a safe room inside each apartment. This is a blessing, because it means we don't need to get all the kids out of the house and go downstairs to a community bomb shelter. This would be particularly difficult for us to do during that ninety-second window with five kids under six years old. Having our own safe room means we can stock it with supplies like water, dry food goods, diapers, and so forth. This is helpful because, in the event of a drawn-out rocket barrage, we can spend as much time as needed in the shelter without having

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to leave our apartment.

On October 7, we had five or six trips to the bomb shelter. As we sat there during the first siren, I was able to catch up on what was going on in Gaza and the border communities in the south. We immediately realized the situation was serious and very different from previous conflicts. In fact, those in Israel who are not Holocaust survivors have never experienced an event of this scale before.

We were at war!

Immediately I began to reach out to friends in the south to check on them and make sure they were safe. Thankfully they were, though one had to stay inside all day because terrorists were holding hostages in a home in his town. In the ensuing days, a few of our close friends and some of my coworkers were called into reserve duty—some to the north, some to the West Bank, and others to the south. One was part of a unit that cleared civilian bodies from homes in one of the kibbutzim

(communal villages) very close to Gaza. Now, more than three weeks after the attacks, they are still finding bodies and trying to identify them.

As all these events were happening, I found myself wondering how I should think through all this. What should be the biblical way to process these horrifying events and extremely disturbing images? One thing I am sure you have all noticed is that when a war breaks out, people immediately take sides. The natural reaction is to join or identify with one side or the other. We see this taking place all over the news and social media; sadly, many in the church are also doing so.

As you know, our ministry in Israel is multifaceted, and the church here is mixed with Jewish people, Arab Israelis, and believing Palestinians of Muslim and nominal Christian backgrounds. This means it isn't healthy to take sides concerning a

conflict, since the most important thing as believers and a church remains the unity within the body of Christ here in Israel. That isn't to say, of course, that we don't stand united against the evil and murder taking place. In this case, we stand without compromise against Hamas and their disgusting and barbaric behavior. We do so, however, not in a political way but rather in a defense of truth. The characterization of Hamas's behavior as barbaric is an accurate description of what is happening despite what some in the world may say. At the same time, as servants of the Lord in Israel, we are committed even through this to work toward unity within the church and maintain close contact with our ministry friends and unbelieving contacts from all parts of Israel including the so-called disputed territories.

It is during times of conflict like this that our faith is tested the most.

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This is an opportunity for us to put into practice what the Lord has been teaching us all along. It is a chance for us to beg God to help us think biblically no matter what is going on around us. Early on in my time in Israel, the Lord taught me a lot about the concept of identity. Israel is a place where this word is used probably more than any other country in the world. You are defined here and placed into a group based on your identity, religion, and ethnic background. You are Jewish, Arab, Palestinian, Muslim, Christian, Druze, Bedouin, Messianic, Haredi—and the list goes on.

As a believer, my identity is solely in Christ. There is no other identity that has any meaningful value for us. Once we believe in Jesus of Nazareth as our Messiah, the Son of God, who was sent to the earth to die on the cross as the perfect atonement for the sins of mankind, we become part of the family of God, and this is our sole identity. We are immediately transformed from enemy combatants in the kingdom of the prince of this world to ransomed friends of the eternal King of the universe. His armies are unmatched, His reign is not subject to term limits, and His victory is guaranteed.

It is as soldiers in this army that we are called to

be here in Israel on the front lines of a conflict that isn't primarily a military one but a spiritual one. With the certainty of our identity in Him, we are continuing the fight for the salvation of souls here, both Jewish and non-Jewish. It is as soldiers in this army that we beg on our knees for the Word of God to go forth and the Gospel to be proclaimed in Israel more in the coming days than ever before; and for people to be open to the loving and comforting embrace only our Savior can bring. We pray the same for the churches in the West Bank and Gaza—that the Lord will protect them and help pastors to think and preach biblically during these times. It is our prayer that no one in the church would take sides so the army of God can be united as it marches into an unbelieving world with its only hope for eternal life.

We so much appreciate your prayers and are so grateful for the many of you who have been concerned about our well-being. Our hearts are broken for the lives lost and for the pain so many are experiencing around us. We are burdened for the precious souls we have been trying to reach but are now hard to visit due to the circumstances, yet we are resolved to never give up. I sent a message to our Bedouin village (with

help from a Palestinian believer, who translated the note to Arabic), assuring them that we love them and are praying for them.

Countless people have asked us whether we plan to leave and wait out the conflict in the United States. When I reply that we plan to stay, that we cannot leave and watch from afar as our friends here are under fire, they are immediately thankful and encouraged. More than ever, we feel certain that we are exactly where God wants us, and we are committed to fighting in the trenches in the war against the Accuser. We are thankful that you are all with us as well. Please continue to pray for the salvation of souls here, for the comfort of God to reach hearts, for the conflict to end soon, and for the church to demonstrate unity and strength, and even to grow through these difficult days.

A Vital Evangelistic Plea

If you skipped down to this section first, I would ask that you please at some point read Grant's word from Israel and heed his call to prayer at the end of that comment. I consider that part of our plea for sure, but we want to direct a call to our Gentile

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friends at this historic time. You see, right from the start, when I founded this ministry, I have traveled to churches, teaching that Gentile people are typically more effective at reaching Jews than Jews are. There are several reasons for this, but the primary one is due to the way so-called Christians have treated Jews throughout the existence of the Hebrew people. Since people claiming to be Christian have been so awful toward my people, Jews have become cautious and untrusting of Gentiles and, by extension, Christians. Therefore, Jews who become believers are viewed as traitors by our people, and that offense often stands in the way of them hearing from us. Therefore, since in the Jewish mind Gentiles are expected to believe in Christianity, Gentile believers have a starting point that isn't offensive to Jews, even if they personally want nothing to do with Christianity.

On the flip side of this, however, is that when Gentiles show sincere concern and love for Jewish people, the Jewish people are often so impacted and pleasantly surprised that they respond by becoming very endeared toward their Gen-

tile friends. In many cases, that results in the strongest friendships enjoyed by both sides. In light of this truth, my dear friends, I must beseech you to become involved in Jewish evangelism like you never have before. The war in Israel and blatant displays of disturbing anti-Semitism throughout the world have made many Jewish people leery and more uneasy in a Gentile-dominated world than they have been at any time perhaps since just before World War II. Certainly many sources have acknowledged the growth of anti-Semitism even before the current war in Israel and that it has reached heights not seen since just before the Holocaust. The current war leaves no doubt about this now.

In other words, the Jewish people feel alone, isolated, and in need of friends from the nations. This need presents an opportunity for everyone to reach out and reassure them. Therefore, I am asking all of you, our friends and followers, to contact all the Jewish people you know and offer them words of comfort. Tell them you love them and are praying for them. Offer them refuge or some kind of help. Tell them you are praying for Israel. Let them know you are

with them and are aching because of this terrible situation. Your words may not seem like much, but they are enormous to the ears of persecuted Jews. This is a moment I am asking you not to let pass. Be like those among the nations whom Jesus refers to in Matthew 25. Care for and love the least of these, His brethren.

Often people are hesitant to speak to Jewish people about their faith. For some this witness is intimidating, and people don't know where to begin. Well, now it's simple. Just tell them how you feel and that you are concerned about them and the people in Israel; be prepared to testify to your faith and the Messiah and let them sense your love. You will be amazed by what will happen now or in the future.

I'm aware of social media posts in which Christians express that they are standing with Israel. These are all great; please keep doing so if you are led to, but I'm asking everyone to go beyond those and reach out directly to individuals. The personal touch is always best. If you do, God will bless you (Gen. 12:3), and once the discussions and follow-ups begin, please feel free to ask us to help in any way you may desire as you

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interact with these needy souls.

Lending a Helping Hand

As I indicated in a recent email, a number of our followers have asked us to please facilitate giving to help Israelis affected by the war. As a result, we have been actively engaged in discussions with a variety of outlets and friends, finding ways to accomplish that goal. Israel doesn't have the same needs some countries might in these circumstances, but we are aware of believers, churches, and Christian-led initiatives that are addressing needs the Israeli government hasn't yet completely dealt with. These situations are constantly changing, so the specific recipients may change as well, but we have decided to focus on assisting with three initiatives in particular:

- ✧ Displaced persons, whose homes were destroyed or who had to evacuate
- ✧ Soldiers in active duty
- ✧ Efforts to push for the release of hostages

More than two hundred and fifty thousand Israelis have been displaced. At this point, we believe all these have found shelter in other

homes, hotels, and so forth. The additional costs to feed, clothe, and care for these dear people are falling on them and their hosts. In the case of individuals from the kibbutzim, which were destroyed or shut down, their livelihood depended on the products and services the kibbutz provided, so they are now without income. Some others have had their income sources impacted as well. These are examples of assistance for displaced individuals we are participating in.

Efforts made on behalf of soldiers include providing care packages, additional supplies, assistance to their families, and other means of encouragement while they serve, many on the front lines, and when they are on leave.

Efforts on behalf of the hostages vary as well but include pressuring Hamas and governments in the region for their release and encouraging their families. Our focus is on activities and partners who have approaches that allow a Gospel testimony. Shalom Ministries isn't involved in this venture to raise money for our ministry, so we will not keep any donated funds. We are endeavoring to give directly where the need exists. We are a small ministry, but whatever comes in can be a blessing, and our ministry is

thankful to be able to assist in these ways.

The overwhelming majority of funds will go directly to where they are needed through our contacts and partners. In a few cases, those providing assistance may incur administrative expenses, but we are dealing only with those we know or have vetted and those whose costs are necessary, minimal, and justified.

Any of our friends and followers who wish to give to the war effort at this time may do so by sending a check, made payable to Shalom Ministries Inc., to 2429 Coyle Street, Brooklyn, NY 11235. Please indicate on the memo line that your gift is for the "war effort." If you want to further specify the gift to one of the three categories described above (i.e., displaced persons, active-duty soldiers, and efforts to release hostages), you may indicate that on the memo line as well. Any gift to the war effort that doesn't specify one of these categories will be given to the greatest need at the time we transfer the money. Please remember that for any money to go to the war effort, the memo line must at least indicate that it is for the war effort. Thank you.