

On the Ground: Jerusalem Is on Fire and the City Needs Your Prayers

Jerusalem needs your prayers.

This week, Jerusalem has been blanketed in smoke from wildfires that appear to have been started by terrorist arsonists. Because Israel is enduring a prolonged heatwave amid the dry summer, it has suffered an unprecedented and dangerous number of fires.

Most recently, Jerusalem and the surrounding area have been the victim of the blazes, with as many as 6,000 acres burned, Israel's largest fire. As of this writing, it seems that the blaze is under control. Since it typically doesn't rain in Israel between May and October, sometimes for longer, the potential remains for the Jerusalem fires to reignite or for other fires to start. Igniting flames west of the city to be aided by the natural wind that blows in from the west of Israel's largest city is an arsonist's dream and a firefighter's nightmare.

For three days straight, more than a million Jerusalem residents and people living in suburbs endured choking smoke. There was a huge danger to people, wildlife and property. Homes and landmark businesses have burned down.

Entire communities were evacuated as the fires raged ever closer. There was even a threat, somewhat unimaginable, that Jerusalem's largest hospital in the historic Ein Kerem neighborhood was at risk of being evacuated. Because of fierce determination and heroism of firefighters and security personnel, there was no loss of human life.

There's never been a time in recent memory that Jerusalem and

its residents have been threatened like this. During Israel's War of Independence (1947-1949) and the Six Day War (1967), Jerusalem and its residents were under siege and suffered tremendously. This week, as some flames were put under control, new fires ignited.

The important thing was to put out the fires and protect people and property. In Judaism, protection of and saving lives is the most important injunction. However, burning along with the land and the trees is the suspicion that terrorist arson may be involved. That was also suspected in fires that took place earlier in the summer.

It will no doubt be investigated, but it's hard to prevent when a Palestinian Arab terrorist looks for new ways to cause harm. Other fires in northern Israel this summer also threatened life and property. These were caused by Hezbollah's terrorist rockets fired from Lebanon landing in open areas.

Fires in Israel caused by people who want to destroy us are not new. In fact, there's a biblical precedent. Other than the 1948 and 1967 wars where Israelis came under fire as the Arab armies tried to extinguish Israel, there's not been an actual burning of Jerusalem, with smoke blanketing the skies for miles like we've seen this week, since the Romans destroyed and burned the second temple in the year 70. Thinking of the destruction of Jerusalem invokes the book of Lamentations. Thankfully, it's not the same or as bad now as it was then. However, especially given the season preceding *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* are coming, a time of repentance requiring deep introspection, it's a good time to underscore our faith and hearken the final words of Lamentations (5:19-21) "Thou, O Lord, remain forever; thy throne from generation to generation. Wherefore dost thou forget us forever, and forsake us so long time? Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old."

Prevention of the loss of life is paramount, but Israel has a

unique attachment to trees as well. In the 1860s, Mark Twain visited Israel and wrote of how the land was barren. Indeed, it was. Around that same time, Jews around the world started saving and donating pennies to plant trees, to plant roots and invest in the prophetic vision that, upon their return, the land would blossom again. Reclaiming the land was a pillar of the early Zionist movement, and Israel has the distinction of being the only country that ended the 20th century with more trees than its start. Planting trees is still something that's done, more than symbolically. It is a daily realization of biblical prophecy and underscores the connection between the people of Israel and the land of Israel.

Compounding the recovery is that in just weeks, the Jewish New Year is beginning with *Rosh Hashanah* 5782. The New Year and other Jewish/biblical holidays are not the challenge, but the fact that the new year is a *Shmita* (sabbatical) year is. Throughout Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, God instructs the Jewish people how to relate to and respect the land, a deep expression of faith, through letting the land lie fallow for a whole year. (You can learn more about the *Shmita* year and what that means on the Aug. 26 episode of the *Inspiration from Zion* podcast.) As it relates to the recent fires, it means that Israel will not be able to begin to replant the trees that have gone up in flames for a whole year.

To help with the recovery, replanting and trauma, the Genesis 123 Foundation set up a fund for people to be part of the rebuilding based on the most urgent needs, along with some prominent international partners.

God says to be watchmen on the walls, to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Today, Jerusalem needs your prayers of compassion, that the fires will not ignite again and that those who suffered loss and trauma will find strength and healing.

"If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember you, let my tongue cleave to the

roof of my mouth; if I keep not Jerusalem above my chief joy”
(Ps. 137:5-6). {eoa}

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has become a respected bridge between Jews and Christians and serves as president of the Genesis 123 Foundation. He writes regularly on major Christian websites about Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He can be reached at firstpersonisrael@.

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.