

Is South Africa's Drought a Spiritual Result of Genesis 12:3?

We live in a very modern world so much so that the mere ability to read this article is the result of a sophisticated electric grid, an internet that's turned the world into a virtual community and any number of devices on which this can be read. Innovation and technology has abounded more in the past generation than perhaps any before. Nevertheless, there are things we cannot control or innovate, such as the elements. Whether the destruction of a hurricane or tornado or the need for rain to quench a parched land and its people, these acts of nature are not only not in our direct control, but many of us turn to faith and God for answers and protection.

In the Jewish tradition, the calendar of our lives and liturgy fluctuates greatly throughout the course of the year. Jews just celebrated Tu B'Shvat, known as the new year of the trees, during which it's customary to plant new trees and eat the fruit of mature ones. We are in the season now when following the winter rains, trees are in bloom, and shortly we will enter the season during which a special blessing is made on blossoming fruit trees. No small gift from God goes without recognition and gratitude to the Creator.

We may not be able to control the elements, but we surely invoke prayer and thanksgiving for the blessings that we do have, particularly of rain and particularly in the Land of Israel, which is largely desert and dry most of the year.

There are many other instances where the Jewish calendar and the seasons overlay our experiences. However, it's important to note that all of these experiences are based on the

calendar in the land of Israel. So a Jew praying in Australia, America, Argentina, or Azerbaijan is praying based on the calendar, not where they are, but in Israel.

One of the things that is most meaningful and even emotional for me about living in Israel is our seasonal prayer for rain. Albeit that today even our desert is cultivated, and magnificent fields, hothouses and orchards abound, exporting some of the finest flowers and produce throughout the world, Israel only has one main fresh water source, the Sea of Galilee. As a result, most newspapers and television weather broadcasts provide statistics on the relative level of the Sea of Galilee, noting how many centimeters it went up following a particularly strong rain, how many meters below the designated redline we are and how many meters above the designated black line we are, after which pumping water from the Sea will become dangerous.

Consequently, we beseech God three times a day to fill the sea, our aquifers and rivers with abundant rain in its (winter) season. And in dry winters as this one has been, special national prayers are offered because we know we are unlikely to receive any rain from the early spring until the late fall.

Rain in Israel in its season is considered a national blessing, and we each have a role to play in prayer and through our actions, so that God will answer our prayers. That's why when I'm praying for rain, I find that to be especially meaningful because my individual prayers have a national consequence.

At the end of Passover in several weeks, we will cease prayers for rain because we know that it is not the rainy season, and we also know that in a society that still exists largely on agriculture, rain in the wrong season can be bad and damaging for crops. Biblically, the tradition not to pray for rain until after the Passover and Sukkot (Tabernacles) festivals,

once people had returned home from pilgrimage to Jerusalem, also had an additional practical consequence.

The truth is, in modern Israel, even in years like this when Israel is suffering a drought and there's not enough natural rainfall to fill the sea, rivers and aquifers, God blesses us in another way. Statistically, Israel has been recorded as among largest wastewater recyclers in the world, using treated wastewater even for such high-water crops as cotton, which otherwise a country as arid as Israel should probably never cultivate.

Also, in the last generation, Israel has innovated with an aggressive desalination program, taking dirty salt water from the Mediterranean and making it potable. It's not the same as praying for rain, which is the product of the elements, but God has surely gifted the ingenuity to make all this possible, and make Israel among the world leaders. In so doing, God blesses Israel, and Israel blesses the nations of the world with its innovative water technologies.

I was reminded of all this in an article I read about a very severe water crisis in Cape Town, South Africa. According to reports, Cape Town is down to a precious several weeks of water, and at risk of being the first major city ever to effectively run out of water. It's unthinkable that a city of 4 million would actually completely run out of water. But what is unthinkable there today is possible tomorrow.

In reading about the water crisis there, I noted that the date by which they will run out of water, "Day Zero," corresponds closely with the date that Jews around the world will stop praying for rain. Albeit that this date on which we stop praying for rain is about the welfare of the land of Israel, the coincidence of dates intersecting and the possible scenario is too great not to note.

And then I realized just as much as we pray for rain as a

blessing in its season, a lack of rain or a lack of water may be a curse. It didn't take too much imagination to realize that though I'm not God and can't speak on His behalf as to how He blesses and curses a person or an entire people, I do know that He does promise in Genesis 12:3 that He will bless those who bless Israel, and curse those who curse Israel.

Unfortunately, for the past decades South Africa has become one of the leading nations outside the Arab and Muslim world that actively engages in cursing Israel. This is seen in many ways including hosting of representatives of terrorist organizations as statesmen, being among the first countries to allege that Israel is an apartheid country (something South Africans know more about than anyone else, and should know better than anyone else to make such a ridiculous and outrageous claim), the reduction of Israel's diplomatic status there, and hosting a conference that essentially conceived and gave birth to the BDS movement.

I'm not God, and I don't know how He thinks, and I certainly don't know all the ways in which He acts. However there are too many coincidences in this to be just coincidences. I look at other countries that have chosen the path of cursing Israel, and I noticed that it's very hard to find one blessed by the gift of democracy, or not being overrun by unchecked and extremist wave of immigration that makes it dangerous for citizens to be able to walk freely in neighborhoods of their own towns and cities. I see economic crisis and instability in other places where cursing Israel is as common as the sunrise in the morning. And I look at all of this and wonder how is it part of God's promise and design. I wonder what will it take for people of the world who curse Israel to realize that when God makes such a promise it's serious and they need to listen and behave accordingly.

I certainly don't pray for anything bad in South Africa, and do pray for the well-being of all its citizens. But by the same way my prayers for rain in Israel have a national

consequence, I do believe that they have a role and responsibility, including reverence for God through their individual prayers and actions that will trickle up to benefit, and bless, the country as a whole. They need to take personal responsibility, and prayer and blessing Israel is a good start.

Living in Israel, the presence or lack of abundant rain is something that I've learned not to take for granted. I've begun to write a book for children on how to save water because I believe that it's through our actions as well as our prayers that God will see our sincerity and answer us with blessing. I pray that as a nation, South Africa will repent from its anti-Israel positions, and pray fervently for God to bestow his blessing upon the country that's about to have one of its major cities dry out. {eoa}

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