

Prophetic Renewal for God's Chosen People

In that day the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people, who shall be left, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. –Isaiah 11:11

The collapse of the Soviet Union's suffocating curtain of terror brought astounding transformations that still affect that region and the world at large. Most significantly, from the moment the Iron Curtain began to unravel, the number of Jewish immigrants making "aliyah" to their biblical homeland increased dramatically.

Before the beginning of the end, Russian Jews were rarely allowed to emigrate, even though the former communist government of the Soviet Union was historically hostile toward them and openly treated them as second-class citizens. Just before the fall, as few as one hundred Jewish people were allowed to leave the Soviet Union annually. The collapse of the Iron Curtain completely changed the situation.

In the thirteen months after December 1989, almost 200,000 *olim* ("those going up") flooded out of the former Soviet Union to Israel. By June 2000, 1 million Jewish people had arrived in Israel from the land of the north. They fled for freedom in automobiles, airplanes, trains, buses, and ships. Most were assisted by Jewish or Christian agencies, individuals and groups. It amounts to the emancipation and transportation of an entire people group from one part of the world to another. In missions language, this is referred to as a "people movement." Nothing like it has ever happened on such a massive scale! But many more Jews still need to be reached and rescued.

***Refuseniks* Finally Leave**

When the walls came down, a large number of “*refuseniks*” (persecuted Jewish people who were not allowed to leave the Soviet Union) were ready to go. Most of these people of conscience lost their jobs and endured years of persecution simply because they had at one time applied for permission to emigrate to Israel. Year after year, the Soviet bureaucrats denied their requests. In most cases the persecution extended into their places of employment and the local communities. Nevertheless, for years the *refuseniks* stood against oppression under the communist regime. Many of them spent time in prison; most of them were Jewish.

When the Iron Curtain finally dropped, these Jewish survivors were eager to leave. The first to leave had prepared their official papers many years in advance and had lived “ready” for years. These people, for the most part, were clearly Jewish in their culture, bloodlines and religious belief.

Many “second-round” Jewish immigrants, however, were barely identifiable as people of Jewish descent or faith. Some could not tell you who Abraham or Moses was. These descendants of Abraham were the product of a secular and anti-religious culture in which “being Jewish” evoked images of tattooed numbers on the skin. Since the era of the Russian tsars, many families had changed their Jewish-sounding names or hidden their Jewishness to avoid exile to the Pale of Settlement, an old tsarist community of isolation that segregated Jewish people from the mainstream population.

In many cases it was difficult for these “hidden Jews” to prove their Jewish heritage. Corruption and organized crime in the former Soviet Union—particularly the forging of false identification and immigration papers—led to an unwillingness on the part of Israeli officials to accept many of the new identity papers held by Jewish people wanting to make aliyah.

Jewish Immigrants: An Unreached People Group

Some have estimated that nearly 90 percent of the Jewish immigrants entering Israel are totally unreached by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many are almost as ignorant of their Jewish heritage and religion. Christian ministries that work closely with Israel to help transport Russian Jewish immigrants to their homeland are careful not to evangelize the *olim*. But the ministries working inside the former Soviet Union among the Russian Jews have had more freedom.

In 1990, before the collapse of the communist government, Jonathan Bernis led a fact-finding mission to Saint Petersburg (then called Leningrad). The American Messianic pastor wanted to assess the condition of the Jewish people in the Soviet Union. During his visit, Bernis was struck by the spiritual hunger of the people he encountered. By May 1993, he had founded **Hear O Israel Ministries (HOIM)** and conducted the first Messianic music festival in Saint Petersburg at the Oktobersky Concert Hall. No one was prepared for what happened there. Bernis stated, "We had no idea what the results would be or how many people would come. So we were all shocked on opening night to find the 4,000-seat hall filled to overflowing."

Even more stunning was the scene following Bernis's short message and altar call. Over 50 percent of the crowd—half of them Jewish—rushed to the front of the concert hall to pray. Many on Bernis's team began to weep as they witnessed an outpouring of the Spirit not often matched in two thousand years since Jewish people became the first Christians in Jesus's day.

HOIM, renamed the **International Festivals of Jewish Worship and Dance**, subsequently conducted twenty festivals and reached more than 500,000 people in the former Soviet Union. Nearly half of those who attended the festivals were Jewish. The largest festival drew more than 60,000 people to the central

football stadium in Odessa, Ukraine, in 1995. More than 200,000 people (approximately 80,000 of them Jewish) responded to altar calls at the festivals. In an email correspondence Bernis wrote, "God is at work among the Jewish people in a way that we have not witnessed since the first century." While Bernis still continues his outreach to the Jewish people in diaspora around the globe, today he is the director of the Jewish Voice ministry, which has a widely watched television broadcast.

Prayer Assignment: Go to Russia

In the summer of 1994, some of my close friends and I participated in Bernis' third festival, which was convened in Minsk, the capital city of Belarus (White Russia). We each had been involved in different prayer groups that conducted prophetic intercession for Israel and the Jewish people. For a season though we would be a team with specific prayer assignments. Working hand in hand with Bernis and the festivals, we set out on a prophetic journey that crisscrossed Russia.

Our assignment was to pray that God would open a way for Jewish people to exit from the land of the north and return to Israel. Belarus, and the capital city of Minsk in particular, marked part of the path leading from Russia to Israel through the great seaport of Odessa.

Most of the other routes required Jewish immigrants to take long detours or pass through nations and regions dominated by fundamentalist Muslims. Since ancient times, the path from the Black Sea through Ukraine and Belarus has been recognized as the southern gateway to Europe, a fact that was not overlooked by the Nazis during World War II. We learned that a lot of atrocities had been inflicted upon the Jewish people of Belarus and beyond. In preparation for the festival, we visited some of the sites.

Preparing the Way in Minsk

We wanted to find a high place in the city where we could pray. A non-religious gentleman in Belarus suggested the Mound of Glory. We did not know what it was, but it seemed to make sense.

The Mound of Glory, we discovered, was really a massive hill created by people who carried dirt one handful at a time in processions from their villages all over Belarus. The members of our prayer group walked up on this Mound of Glory and prayed for Jewish people to be able to escape the land of the north.

The day before the festival in Minsk was to begin, Bernis encountered significant resistance from local authorities. Intercessory prayer by the entire festival team played a key role in the crisis, and God made a way where there was no way! In the end, local authorities asked if the festival could be extended another day to accommodate people who had been turned away from overflow crowds!

Minsk was just the beginning of our prayer team's intercessory cycle. During the next three years, we lifted up specific prayers for a variety of locations as God gave them to us.

A Messianic Congregation in Kishinev

Several festivals later, in 1996, we embarked upon another strategic prayer assignment in Kishinev, Moldavia, the city where nearly a hundred years earlier Joseph Rabinowitz had established the first Messianic synagogue since the first century. It would mark the culmination of our prophetic intercession efforts for that season of the Spirit, and it was to be one of our most significant prayer assignments.

Throughout our time in Kishinev, the heart of our prayer was that God would anoint the Messianic Jews of this generation with the same radicalism and fire evident in the lives and

ministry of Paul, Peter and the other first-century Jewish leaders. We prayed that Jewish people in the land of the north would come back into their full heritage, just as Joseph Rabinowitz did. The contagious devoted zeal that surfaces in certain Jewish followers of Yeshua is amazing.

Once again we were involved in the intercessory and outreach aspects of each festival but spent a few days scouting around and just listening, as God led us to key points of information and directed us to the exact place we were to launch our prophetic prayer.

Our first goal was to locate the place where Rabinowitz and the Israelites of the New Covenant had worshiped. That was difficult because nearly a century had passed. Many landmarks were destroyed during the pogroms against Jewish citizens of Kishinev in 1903 and 1905, and during the Nazi murder of 53,000 of the city's estimated 65,000 Jews in 1941.

As we walked around, we prayed for discernment and crucial information to guide our intercession in Kishinev. After praying and asking questions, we were ready for the next step in our journey: We had an address!

A Message in a Hole in the Wall

As we entered the neighborhood where we believed Rabinowitz's congregation may have met, we immediately noticed that most of the buildings were relatively new. We knew that meant that the original structures had been bombed during the war. Only one block of older buildings had somehow escaped destruction or extreme damage.

We parked the car in the old section. As we climbed out of the vehicle, we all were struck by the same sight: An old, 10-foot-high concrete wall stretched along the full length of the block, except for one place where a hole had been created. The buildings were perched on top of this foundation.

Our guide led us around to the back of the buildings where a number of doors led to apartments. We made our way to the door of the building we believed was built just above that hole in the foundation wall.

Since we looked like foreigners, we decided to play the part. It would have been unwise and virtually impossible to explain our prayer, so we entered what I call our “dumb, naive American tourist mode.” (This comes under the “Be wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove” principle.)

When we knocked on the door the building owners answered. Through our guide we said, “Hello, we are visitors from America. Could we tour your building?” For emphasis, we added that we had heard it had been used for something or other a long time ago.

The owners were very gracious, and the couple invited us in to examine their apartment building. We looked around, but we did not initially see anything that stood out. Then just as we were about to leave we noticed a door leading to a stairwell to what appeared to be a cellar.

We had already established our identity as dumb American tourists, so we had nothing to lose. We asked, “What’s down there? This might be silly as can be, but can we go down in the cellar?” The couple quickly nodded and motioned for us to freely explore the passageway. They must have been thinking, Those crazy Americans! What will they want to see next?

Fresh Oil of Anointing and Fresh Wine of God’s Spirit

The stairway was nearly blocked by various items that had been stored for a long time. Nonetheless, we made our way down the stairs and turned right. When we entered the cellar, we looked at each other, amazed. We could see daylight streaming into the room through the hole in the wall we had seen from the street. Old bottles of wine, still packed in their cases, were stacked on a pallet, and empty bottles of olive oil were

scattered about on the shelves in the room.

The prophetic symbolism of the scene was almost overwhelming. Immediately we knew this was the place where we would complete our assignment and release “fresh oil of the anointing” and “fresh wine of God’s Spirit” into the Jewish people.

Re-digging the Wells

Just as Isaac had his men re-dig the wells of his father, Abraham (see Gen. 26); there is a spiritual concept of re-digging the ancient wells of the anointing of those who walked with God in earlier generations, even in the face of opposition (see Gen. 26:18–22). It was therefore part of our assignment to issue a prophetic on-site prayer to release God’s high anointing on His ancient people and to urge them to escape the old walls that were closing in upon them. We were to call forth the apostolic grace of church planting that had originated and rested on that location. We were to call forth the new wine and the fresh oil of the Holy Spirit.

This is why the hole in the wall was significant. It was time for God’s ancient covenant people to return from the land of captivity to their land of promise with the help of the Gentiles who received the New Covenant through the Jewish people. Perhaps it also indicated there was an opening to pray.

The Lord had led us to the exact place where He birthed the first Messianic Jewish congregation nearly a century earlier. He took us to their very foundations, to a place still containing prophetic signs of empty olive oil bottles and old wine bottles.

By that time we knew the research portion of our journey was over. We had the information we needed, but we agreed that we were not to pray overtly in this couple’s basement. After thanking our bewildered hosts for their hospitality, we returned to the front of the building where the hole breached

the old wall. We were in total agreement that this was the spot where the Lord wanted us to pray. Together we released the prayer that we had come to deliver to the city of Kishinev. Out of death and decay would arise a new anointing and fiery zeal to restore the Jews of the diaspora to the God of Israel and to their long-awaited Messiah, Yeshua.

God's Purpose Continue to Proceed

Teachers of Bible prophecy have speculated for years about various end-time scenarios, but I find it quite amazing that virtually no one fully foresaw the radical changes in Russia preceding the end of the second millennium. Could it be that the biblical predictions of conflict between God and Magog (understood to be the region of the former Soviet Union) might be triggered by divinely engineered jealousy?

What does the future hold? 1 Corinthians 13 say that we each prophesy in part. Yes, the Lord Himself has a grand scheme of parallel restoration of the church and Israel in the last days. Remember, Israel is God's time piece and His clock is ticking every so quickly in these days!