

Newsbytes

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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

A Rabbi Looks at the Fall Feasts of Israel

By Jonathan Bernis

jewishvoice.org

As summer winds down and the autumn of the year approaches, we enter into an extremely important period in the Jewish calendar known as the Fall Feasts. In fact three significant biblical feasts occur in quick succession: Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement and holiest day of the year), and Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths). Prophetic in nature, all three remain to be fulfilled.

Personally, I absolutely love this time of year! In fact, autumn is my favorite of the four seasons. In many parts of America and even in some other regions of the world, fall ushers in a time of refreshing relief from the heat of summer. Vibrant shades of red and yellow assail our focus with a literal feast of color for the eyes. The days grow shorter and, for Jewish People around the world, autumn marks the beginning of the Fall Feasts—also my favorites, beginning with the Feast of Trumpets or Rosh Hashanah.

Leviticus 23 reveals God’s plan to meet with His People Israel and those who have been grafted in through faith in Israel’s Messiah. It tells of a time when Moses heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘the feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts’” (vv. 1-2).

Rosh Hashanah

A trumpet (or shofar) was blown for two important reasons in Israel. One was to announce an assembly of the people. The second was to sound an alarm and call the troops together to combat an enemy attack.

Rosh Hashanah or “head of the year” is also known as the Feast of Trumpets. The trumpet blown on this holy day represents the trumpet blast that will signify the end of the age. This feast is surrounded by a forty-day season of repentance known as Elul, during which the trumpet is blown each day to remind the people to repent.

The religious leaders read to the people during this time from Psalm 27 and Ezekiel 33. Psalm 27 encourages those who belong to God and are seeking to live in His will. “For in the day of trouble He will keep me safe in His dwelling; He will hide me in the shelter of His tabernacle and set me high upon a rock” (Psalm 27:5).

On the other hand, Ezekiel 33 warns those who do not heed the trumpet’s call: “Son of man, speak to your countrymen and say to them: ‘When I bring the sword against the land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head’” (Ezekiel 33:2-4).

I believe we are living in the time of Elul and God is calling us to repentance. The trumpet is about to sound, signifying our Messiah’s return. Those who are living for Him long for this day and will see it as a wonderful time of joy and triumph. But those who are not right with God will experience dread and destruction.

The prophet Zephaniah urges, “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what He commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord’s anger” (2:3).

The Old Testament Prophet is talking about the same event to which Paul refers in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: “*For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*”

Are your ears attuned for the trumpet blast? Mine are. Not that I think anyone will have to strain to hear it. No person alive (or dead) will be able to avoid hearing it. Of course, there will still be an element of surprise when the trumpet blasts. For some, it will be a surprise filled with terror and regret. For others, it will be a surprise of unimaginable joy.

Alas for that day! For the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on My holy hill. Let all who live in the Land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand. Joel 1:15, 2:1

Second Peter 3:10-12 describes it this way, “*The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.*”

How do you see this day? With terror or exhilaration? If you aren’t sure, you need to turn away from your sins and surrender your life to Yeshua. Just a simple prayer of repentance is required. You can pray that prayer right now, wherever you are. Just tell God that you realize you are a sinner and deserve punishment. Tell Him that you accept Yeshua’s sacrifice for your sins, knowing that He paid the penalty when He was crucified on your behalf. Ask Him to forgive and cleanse you, and help you to walk in righteousness for the rest of your life.

God’s grace is freely available to all who ask. And once you have stepped into His grace, you will be ready for the trumpet blast that is about to shake the entire world.

Yom Kippur

The holiest day of the Jewish Year is Yom Kippur—a solemn time of acknowledging sins and seeking God’s forgiveness and mercy. In Hebrew, the word Yom means “day” and Kippur means “covering or atonement.”

Also known as the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur was the one time of the year when the High Priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place of the Temple to atone for sin—his own as well as those of his family and the entire Nation. Further, he was required to sacrifice both a bull and a goat and then sprinkle the blood of these animals on the mercy seat. Next, a scapegoat was brought to the leaders of Israel. They were to lay hands on the animal, symbolically placing the sins of the Nation on it and then drive it into the wilderness, where it carried the Nation’s sins.

Why two goats? The first one was to atone (pay) for the People’s sins. The second was to remove those sins from their presence. The blood of the first goat brought forgiveness. The second goat brought temporary cleansing and righteousness. As another year drew to its conclusion and the People reached another Day of Atonement, they once again needed a sacrifice as they were covered in the filth and grime of their sinful nature and desperately in need of another sacrifice.

Yom Kippur anticipates the day prophesied in Isaiah 59:20. Perhaps the greatest of all the ancient prophets, Isaiah expected the Yom Kippur to end all Yom Kippurs, when “the Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins.” On that day all of Israel’s sins will be forgiven for all time and no further animal sacrifices will be required.

We who embrace New Covenant truth understand that Yeshua fulfills this requirement for blood atonement. He is the final sacrifice for us and there is no more need for blood atonement outside of His work of redemption. We need to understand that without Messiah, no one, the Jewish People included, have atonement for sin.

I believe this day is nearly here. The People of Israel—and, in fact, the people of every nation, tribe and culture will come face to face with the Lord Yeshua Himself. Jesus is our High Priest, the sacrifice for the atonement of our sins, and our scapegoat—all three in one.

“Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one,” according to Hebrews 9:24, “He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.” Verse 28 says Jesus did not have to make an annual sacrifice as the High Priest did with blood that is not his own. Instead, “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.”

Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus the Messiah), will soon return to earth, bringing lasting peace and freedom from the effects of sin to all who have accepted His sacrifice.

Sukkot

Otherwise known as the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Ingathering, or the Feast of Booths, Sukkot begins just five days after Yom Kippur. It is a seven-day period when the Jewish People recall God’s faithfulness and provision through their forty-year period of wandering in the wilderness.

They remember God’s provision of food, water, shelter, clothing, guidance, light, and heat during the wilderness years. During this week, each Jewish family lives in a small temporary dwelling (or booth) made of branches. At night, they look up at the stars and recall God’s promise to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens.

For me, this festival points directly to Yeshua. First, just as God provided for their physical needs in the wilderness, Yeshua is spiritual bread and water for all who believe in Him.

*“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty.”
John 6:35*

Yeshua identified Himself as “the bread of life” and then pointed out, “Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I give for the life of the world” (John 6:48-51).

A ceremony called Nissuch Ha Mayim (drawing of water) was carried out every day during Sukkot. The High Priest and his assistant drew water from the Pool of Siloam and poured out water and wine onto the altar of the Temple as the People sang “with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3).

God said to the Prophet Zechariah, “Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and He will branch out from His place and build the temple of the Lord. It is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on His throne. And He will be a priest on His throne. And there will be harmony between the two” (Zechariah 6:12-13).

Jeremiah also anticipated this day:

In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; He will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.

Jeremiah 33:15-16

Clearly, these Prophets looked expectantly to the day when Yeshua our Messiah takes His throne in Jerusalem and assumes His position as Priest and King.

I am convinced this wonderful and glorious day is near.

Push to Sanction Syria for Using Chemical Weapons Hits Russian Resistance

The United States, Britain, and France want to punish Assad's use of chemical weapons. But Moscow won't play ball.

BY COLUM LYNCH SEPTEMBER 27

Push to Sanction Syria for Using Chemical Weapons Hits Russian Resistance

Russian airstrikes helped scupper the cease-fire in Syria. Now, Russian foot-dragging threatens to derail another diplomatic effort by the United States and its allies: sanctioning Damascus for using chemical weapons against its own people.

Although the “Dresden-esque” bombardment this past week of the besieged city of Aleppo by Russian and Syrian aircraft has dominated discussions about Syria, diplomats in New York are still grappling with recent U.N. findings that President Bashar al-Assad’s regime used chlorine bombs in attacks on northwestern Syrian towns in 2014 and 2015. Meanwhile, the world’s chemical weapons watchdog in The Hague, Netherlands, recently raised suspicions that Syria may not have destroyed all its stocks of nerve agents, mustard gas, and other chemical weapons.

On Aug. 24, a U.N.-mandated team of chemical weapons experts concluded that Syrian air force helicopters dropped chlorine barrel bombs on the towns of Talmenes and Sarmin in Idlib governorate between April 2014 and March 2015. The team — officially known as the Joint Investigative Mechanism, or JIM — offered the strongest evidence to date of Syrian complicity in chemical weapons attacks, handing the United States and its European allies ammunition to pursue penalties against the regime.

“The report confirms that the Syrian regime is responsible for the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria,” Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said last month, shortly after the report was presented to the Security Council.

Britain and France pressed last month for immediate sanctions, including a possible asset freeze on officials linked to Syria’s chemical weapons program, in the wake of the revelations. Although the United States seems to agree, Washington also wanted to wait until the end of October — when the U.N. chemical weapons team will present another report documenting three more cases of alleged Syrian chemical weapons use — before deciding on a response.

In the meantime, the United States has poured its diplomatic energy into forging, and then trying to salvage, the Syria cease-fire agreement. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry did not raise the matter of Syrian chemical weapons in lengthy discussions last week with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the top Russian diplomat said Friday. But with the cease-fire in tatters, the United States and its allies are now weighing whether and when to mount a push for a resolution sanctioning Syria at the Security Council, according to a senior European diplomat.

But a U.S. official said any action would have to wait. “As you know, the JIM’s work is not yet complete,” he said. “At the JIM’s request, the council extended its mandate to Oct. 31 so they could continue their work on the report, and we hope that in this additional time the JIM will be able to provide as much additional information as possible.”

The biggest potential obstacle to getting Security Council agreement for any sanctions seems to be Russia, which is pouring blood and treasure into the civil war in Syria to prop up Assad and his regime.

Russia is seizing on the thinnest shred of ambiguity in the mechanism’s findings to challenge efforts to sanction the Syrian government, according to Security Council diplomats and outside experts. Chief among them is the fact that the report never directly attributes the attacks to Assad’s regime; instead, it simply says Syrian government helicopters dropped the chemical bombs. That appears to be a smoking gun to most observers, but not for Russia.

Lavrov insisted Friday that the JIM never in fact accused Syria of using chemical weapons. “It is a good report, good quality,” he said at a press conference in response to a question by Foreign Policy. “It does not say that they confirm that the government and ISIL [the Islamic State] used the chemical weapons. They present evidence, which is not conclusive, and they recognize this.”

Behind closed doors, Russia’s U.N. ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, has proceeded to poke holes in the report, expressing apprehension over the experts’ methodology, according to diplomats. Russia has also raised concern that the JIM’s findings have been based, in part, on assessments from Western intelligence agencies, which Moscow views as biased.

That makes it unlikely the U.N. will be able to cobble together truly biting sanctions on Damascus, even as evidence mounts that the regime has unleashed prohibited weapons on its own people as the five-year civil war further intensifies.

One Security Council diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity given the sensitivity of the issues, said countries supporting a tough response “should not hold back in putting a strong response down out of anticipation of the difficulties” they may face with the Russians. “If the Russians want to block it, they will have to be the ones to block it.”

Diplomats said the United States and its European allies are expected to resume discussions on a resolution in the coming weeks.

The United States and its allies have accused Syria of using chemical weapons since December 2012, when seven people died in Homs following an alleged government attack using Agent 15, a poisonous gas. Several months earlier, Syria acknowledged that it had possessed a secret chemical weapons program for decades and subsequently agreed to join the Chemical Weapons Convention and eliminate its program under international supervision. But even after its declared program was largely destroyed, reports continued to emerge indicating Syria had weaponized chlorine — a legal industrial cleaner — and used it multiple times in attacks on opposition-controlled towns.

In April 2014, the world’s chemical weapons watchdog — the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons — set up a fact-finding mission to determine whether or not chlorine was being used as a weapon. The mission found “compelling” evidence that chlorine had been used in multiple occasions. But it had no mandate to identify who used it.

That was the responsibility of a new team, the JIM, created by the Security Council in August 2015. The team examined nine cases, including eight alleged chlorine attacks by the government and one alleged use of mustard gas by the Islamic State.

Last month, the team announced it had collected “sufficient information” to conclude that on March 16, 2015, Syrian air force helicopters dumped a barrel bomb that released a “toxic substance, which match[ed] the characteristics of chlorine” on a home in Sarmin, killing all six members of the family residing there. It also concluded that a Syrian air force helicopter dropped a barrel bomb on a concrete building in Talmenes on April 21, 2014, that emitted a “toxic substance,” sickening hundreds of people. In addition, the team concluded that the Islamic State used mustard gas in an artillery attack on the opposition-held town of Marea.

Damascus claimed that opposition fighters in Talmenes had fired a “land-based projectile” that struck the building. But the report found that the extent of the damage and munition fragments were consistent with a barrel bomb attack.

Russia has also tried to discredit the inspectors’ report, suggesting that Islamist groups may have gotten their hands on Syrian helicopters. On Jan. 11, 2013, three different Islamist factions, including the al Qaeda affiliate formerly known as the Nusra Front, captured the Taftanaz air base in northern Idlib. Fleeing Syrian forces left behind 15 helicopters, including nine that were fully operational. Russian officials insist opposition pilots may have commandeered the Syrian aircraft. “They are saying it’s entirely possible that there were plenty of people who defected who could fly helicopters,” the council diplomat said. “It’s a ridiculous point. There have never been any

reports of the opposition flying helicopters.”

But the JIM team shot down those arguments as well, arguing that opposition forces would likely be unable to fly helicopters long in the face of sophisticated Syrian air defenses.

“The modern air defence capabilities of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces make it very unlikely that an aircraft could take off and operate in the western Syrian Arab Republic without being detected and/or destroyed,” the JIM report stated. “After reviewing all the information gathered, the [JIM] found no evidence that armed opposition groups had been operating helicopters at the time and location of the cases investigated.”

The U.N. team also obtained a radio intercept of Syrian air force communications detailing the flight of a government helicopter over the site of the chemical weapons attacks in Talmenes and Sarmin. After dropping a barrel bomb on Qmenas, near Sarmin, the Syrian helicopter dropped “two items” on Sarmin itself before returning to base at Latakia, according to the JIM report.

“The pilot informed the base and said ‘Sir, the barrels are at the terrorist area,’” it added.

The JIM team also cited unidentified sources claiming that a Syrian helicopter operating out of Hama had dropped two devices on Talmenes at about the time witnesses saw the chemical weapon explode there.

There is “sufficient information” to conclude the impact was caused by a Syrian air force “helicopter dropping a device causing damage to the structure of a concrete block building house and was followed by the release of a toxic substance which affected the population,” the report concluded.

The United States is gambling that next month’s JIM report will strengthen the international case for holding Syria accountable for its use of chemical weapons. But other diplomats say they anticipate a diplomatic brawl between Russia and the West.

“I’m not sure the Russians would have any difficulty vetoing anything presented to the council,” the Security Council diplomat said. “It looks like they are in total regime protection mode.”

US suspends talks with Russia over Syria

By Ryan Browne cnn.com

Washington (CNN)The US announced Monday it is "suspending its participation in bilateral channels with Russia" that had come about as part of the short-lived cessation of hostilities in Syria.

"This is not a decision that was taken lightly," State Department spokesman John Kirby said in a statement announcing the suspension.

"Everybody's patience with Russia has run out," White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest told reporters Monday while addressing the decision.

Earnest said Russia had lost credibility by "making a series of commitments without any indication they were committed to following them," accusing Russia and its Syrian regime allies of trying "to bomb civilian populations into submission."

Secretary of State John Kerry last week had threatened to call off bilateral talks with Russia unless Moscow took immediate steps to end the assault on Aleppo and restore a ceasefire.

The statement added that the Russian and the Syrian regime's unwillingness to uphold the cease-fire accord was "demonstrated by their intensified attacks against civilian areas, targeting of critical infrastructure such as hospitals, and preventing humanitarian aid from reaching civilians in need."

US military and civilian personnel that were sent to Geneva, Switzerland, to work with the Russians on the Joint Implementation Center will now be withdrawn home, according to the statement and US defense officials.

The Joint Implementation Center was a key element of the negotiated accord and was intended to facilitate collaboration between the American and Russian militaries in targeting ISIS and al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, the al Nusra front. The center was never launched because the agreement had required that the cease-fire hold and aid deliveries must be allowed for at least seven days prior to the center's starting work.

Officials said the US and Russia will continue to communicate via previously established direct military-to-military channels as part of a safety effort to "de-conflict" Syrian airspace and allow for coalition and Russian warplanes to avoid dangerous accidental incidents.

State Department spokesperson Elizabeth Trudeau told reporters Monday that US and Russian officials had met through the weekend to discuss Syria. The suspension "does not preclude multi-lateral dialogue" with Russia regarding Syria, Trudeau added.

When asked if the US had lived up to its end of the cease-fire deal, Trudeau said, "We believe we did." For its part, Moscow announced Monday that it was suspending an arms reduction agreement with the US in which both countries agreed to dispose of 34 tons of plutonium, enough for thousands of nuclear bombs, over what it called Washington's "unfriendly actions" toward Russia, state news agency TASS reported.

In a statement published on the Russian Foreign Ministry's website, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said: "The decision we have made is a signal to Washington: attempts at talking to Russia from the position of strength, in a language of sanctions and ultimatums while continuing selective cooperation with our country ... where this cooperation benefits the United States will not succeed."

Asked if the Russian announcement was linked to the recent US decision regarding the suspension of bilateral Syria talks, Trudeau said, "I would not link those at all."

"We believe it would be a shame if this important agreement was put aside because of an unrelated issue," she added.

Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova expressed regret over Washington's decision Monday to stop participating in the bilateral channels with Russia.

Shortly after Zakharova's response, Konstantin Kosachev, head of Russia's Foreign Affairs Committee, criticized the decision by the US.

"Russia has striven for continuing dialogue with the US on Syria until the last moment, and only our position was keeping the chance to launch a stable peace process alive," he said, according to Russian state-owned Sputnik News. He also accused Washington of making the decision because of campaign politics, saying it was based "to a great extent on subjective factors linked with the current presidential election cycle."

Oh to be uber-rich, what with an apocalypse breathing down our necks and all:

Panic, anxiety sparks rush to build luxury bunkers for Los Angeles's super rich

Posted on September 29 hollywoodreporter.com

September 2016 – PREPPING – Oscar winners, sports stars and Bill Gates are building lavish bunkers — with amenities ranging from a swimming pool to a bowling alley — as global anxiety fuels sales and owners “could be the next Adam and Eve.” Given the increased frequency of terrorist bombings and mass shootings and an under-lying sense of havoc fed by divisive election politics, it’s no surprise that home security is going over the top and hitting luxurious new heights. Or, rather, new lows, as the

average depth of a new breed of safe haven that occupies thousands of square feet is 10 feet under or more. Those who can afford to pull out all the stops for so-called self-preservation are doing so — in a fashion that goes way beyond the submerged corrugated metal units adopted by reality show “preppers” — to prepare for anything from nuclear bombings to drastic climate-change events.

Gary Lynch, GM at Rising S Bunkers, a Texas-based company that specializes in underground bunkers and services scores of Los Angeles residences, says that sales at the most upscale end of the market — mainly to actors, pro athletes and politicians (who require signed NDAs) — have increased 700 percent this year compared with 2015, and overall sales have risen 150 percent. “Any time there is a turbulent political landscape, we see a spike in our sales. Given this election is as turbulent as it is, we are gearing up for an even bigger spike,” says marketing director Brad Roberson of sales of bunkers that start at \$39,000 and can run \$8.35 million or more (FYI, a 12-stall horse shelter is \$98,500).

Adds Mike Peters, owner of Utah-based Ultimate Bunker, which builds high-end versions in California, Texas and Minnesota: “People are going for luxury [to] live underground because they see the future is going to be rough. Everyone I’ve talked to thinks we are doomed, no matter who is elected.” Robert Vicino, founder of Del Mar, Calif.-based Vivos, which constructs upscale community bunkers in Indiana (he believes coastal flooding scenarios preclude bunkers being safely built west of the Rockies), says, “Bill Gates has huge shelters under every one of his homes, in Rancho Santa Fe and Washington. His head of security visited with us a couple years ago, and for these multibillionaires, a few million is nothing. It’s really just the newest form of insurance.”

Rising S Bunkers installed a 37-room, 9,000-square-foot complex in Napa Valley for an Academy Award-winning client that rang in at \$10.28 million, with a bowling alley, sauna, jacuzzi, shooting range and an ultra-large home theater. Swimming pools, greenhouses, game rooms and gyms are other amenities offered. This year, on another Napa Valley property, the company constructed a \$9 million, 7,600-square-foot compound with horse stables and accommodations for 12, along with four escape tunnels leading to outlets on the estate, multiple hidden rooms — in case “you let someone in whom you do not fully trust,” says Lynch — and an above ground safe house “disguised as a horse barn.” The company also is designing a \$3 million bunker for “a major sports figure from Southern California.”

The company’s best-selling bunkers for L.A. are 10 by 50 feet, start at \$112,000 and have their own power sources, water supplies and air-filtration systems: “These complexes accommodate families of four or five and are self-sustaining,” says Roberson, adding: “You can pretty much put a palace underground anywhere there is physically enough room.” Regardless, Ellia Thompson, chair of land use practice at Ervin Cohen & Jessup in Beverly Hills, notes that zoning guidelines vary throughout L.A., so one should check with the city department of building and safety about permits: “A special permit may be required if you are digging out more dirt than certain basement quantities.” Business has doubled in the past year at Ultimate Bunker, which just built a \$10 million complex on a 700-acre property a few hours north of Minneapolis for a client “known for television, who has his own show,” says Peters.