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BRIDGES FOR PEACE

Israel Teaching Letter

Vol. # 771211

December 2011

The Lord Our
REFUGE



The Lord Our REFUGE

2011 HAS BEEN A YEAR when the world has experienced great difficulties in many spheres—from natural disasters, to wars, to financial instability. World leaders are clearly confused in this time of instability, and even chaos, around the world. Natural disasters alone have been devastating.

In New Zealand, there have been earthquakes; Australia, floods, which were described as apocalyptic; South Africa, floods; the US, tornados on a much larger scale than normal; and in Japan, a nine-point earthquake and subsequent tsunami, which continues to greatly effect the nation with daily aftershocks. As an international organization with offices in Canada, the United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, we have been in a unique position to see and hear first-hand accounts of these events.

My husband, Tom, and I live in Israel, which is situated in a very dangerous neighborhood. This year, the Middle East has been rocking with turmoil, chaos, war, and uprisings in many locales. Israel has been assailed on every side with the Palestinians rejecting negotiation and unilaterally attempting to achieve statehood at the UN, without recognition of the Jewish state or turning away from terrorism.

Devastation

Iran, Syria, Hizbullah, and Hamas are all threatening to destroy Israel. If that weren't enough, there have been flotillas attempting to gain access to the Gaza Strip without coordinating with Israel. Turkey, a former friend, has been turning against Israel. The Arab Spring has created increased instability in the region, leaving Israeli analysts jumping to try and keep up with the latest uprising with its resulting leadership changes and trying to determine what impact these facts will have on Israel and her security.

Nations are struggling financially with several European states on the verge of total financial collapse. Our TV screens are filled with images of violent demonstrations in Greece, rioting in London, and protests against Wall Street in the United States. World financial leaders are scratching their heads as they endeavor to find solutions to the financial problems facing the world.

While all this is going on, biblical values are increasingly irrelevant in today's world. The balance that following God's way provides has been skewed. There are so many examples that it's difficult to know where to start. We didn't suddenly cease to value godly principles. A shift has happened gradually over the past several decades, which is bearing fruit in today's world.

Consider the fact that in 1979 China limited childbearing to one child per couple. As a result, many couples aborted their female children in order to ensure that their

only child would be a son who would support them in their old age, as is the Chinese custom. Today, 32 years later, there are 30–40 million more young Chinese men than women. These young men have no one to marry. God's balance has been destroyed by man's solutions to overpopulation.

In the United States, there is difficulty with the Social Security system. The facts are that we have an aging population and with the large baby-boomer generation (following World War II) entering retirement, the system of old-age benefits is at risk. There simply aren't enough people of working age to support the number who will be entering the system.

Consider the fact that, since 1973, there have been more than 53 million babies aborted in the USA. This represents a population greater than any state—greater than California (37 million), greater than the next two largest states (Texas and New York) combined (25 million and 19 million, respectively). If the US had not legalized abortion, those people would have been part of the support system. Our shortsighted desire to have pleasure without consequences has led to an unbalanced society.

Our world today is characterized by immorality of every kind, lawlessness, and violence. The Apostle Paul described end-time morality in 2 Timothy 3, a list that fills four verses! I don't see anything in his list that is not a reality in today's world. Yes, we are living in sobering times.



Our world today is characterized by immorality of every kind, lawlessness, and violence.... Yes, we are living in sobering times.

Attention!

Pay Attention!

As Bible-believing Christians, we shouldn't just look at these facts and wring our hands in fear and consternation. We shouldn't be like the proverbial ostrich with his head in the sand, pretending that nothing is wrong. In His discourse on the end times (Matt. 24–25), Yeshua (Jesus) told of difficult times that would come. But, He didn't tell us so that we would be afraid! Read these chapters again. Notice that we are also told how to act or react in these difficult times. We are to be alert, watchful, and faithful, using our talents wisely and trusting in Him.

I believe that God is calling all true believers to attention. Like a sergeant in the military, He is calling out with a clarion ring to His voice: "Attention!" But, how many of us are standing up tall, listening to His voice, and preparing ourselves to obey His words?

In October, during the Feast of Trumpets, also called *Rosh HaShanah*, the sound of the *shofar* (ram's horn) was sounded all over Israel. To me, it was the sound of God calling His people to pay attention to His ways. In these serious days we are living in, we cannot afford to be lazy, ignorant, or complacent. The time of playing is over. It is time to get serious. It is time to shake off our drowsiness. It is time we stand to attention and salute our King and ask for our orders.

In the book of Ephesians, we are exhorted to live in the light of God's kingdom and ways: *"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord... 'Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ [Messiah] will give you light.' See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is"* (5:8–10, 14–17). It is time to wake up, believer! It is time to pay attention! It is time for action.

During the Feast of Trumpets...the sound of the shofar was sounded all over Israel—it was the sound of God calling His people to pay attention to His ways.

Direction

Seeking His Direction

At Bridges for Peace, in addition to regular devotions with our whole staff, our management team gathers once a week early in the morning for a prayer meeting. For an hour-and-a-half, we share with each other revelations and insights we have had from our personal Bible reading and prayer time and prayer concerns. Then we join together to seek God in prayer. Those times are precious to me. Many have been powerful times of unified prayer for Israel and the Church worldwide.


Over the past year, on several occasions, Psalm 46 has been cited. When the earthquake hit Japan, we read, *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling”* (vv. 1–3). When the nations around Israel erupted in violent demonstrations, we read, *“God is in the midst of her [Israel], she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The*

LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge (vv. 5–7).

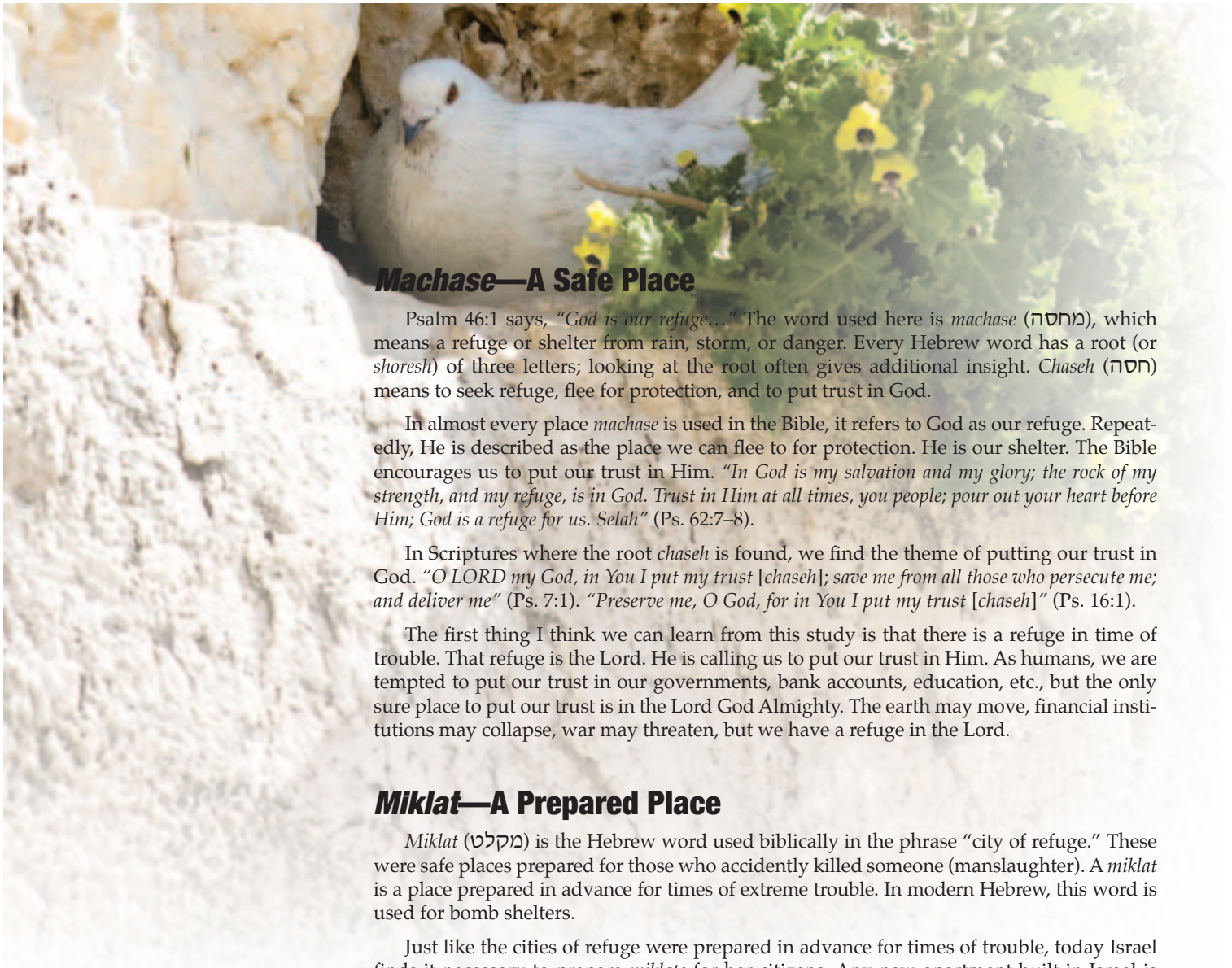
In this psalm, we see a vivid picture of the times we are living in and our constant need of the Lord. As I have been reading commentaries on this psalm, I have noted that many Jewish and Christian commentators believe this to be a prophetic psalm. In the Art Scroll commentary on the book of Psalm, the concepts of Gog and Magog and *chavlei mashiach* (birth pangs of Messiah) are repeatedly referred to in connection to this psalm.

We know that there will be troubles or sorrows in this world. Many are currently suffering with financial difficulty, illness, or various kinds of trials. Perhaps you are nodding your head as you read this. There *will* be wars to come. The earth *will* shake. But, God will be there as well. I am encouraged to see that not only does Psalm 46 talk about difficult times, but three times, God is referred to as our refuge (vv. 1, 7, 11).

In this teaching letter, I want to look at the concept of refuge using three Hebrew words that are translated “refuge” in our English Bibles.



**“God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, even
though the earth be removed...”**



Machase—A Safe Place

Psalm 46:1 says, “*God is our refuge...*” The word used here is *machase* (מַחֲסֵה), which means a refuge or shelter from rain, storm, or danger. Every Hebrew word has a root (or *shoresh*) of three letters; looking at the root often gives additional insight. *Chaseh* (חָסֵה) means to seek refuge, flee for protection, and to put trust in God.

In almost every place *machase* is used in the Bible, it refers to God as our refuge. Repeatedly, He is described as the place we can flee to for protection. He is our shelter. The Bible encourages us to put our trust in Him. “*In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah*” (Ps. 62:7–8).

In Scriptures where the root *chaseh* is found, we find the theme of putting our trust in God. “*O LORD my God, in You I put my trust [chaseh]; save me from all those who persecute me; and deliver me*” (Ps. 7:1). “*Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust [chaseh]*” (Ps. 16:1).

The first thing I think we can learn from this study is that there is a refuge in time of trouble. That refuge is the Lord. He is calling us to put our trust in Him. As humans, we are tempted to put our trust in our governments, bank accounts, education, etc., but the only sure place to put our trust is in the Lord God Almighty. The earth may move, financial institutions may collapse, war may threaten, but we have a refuge in the Lord.

Miklat—A Prepared Place

Miklat (מִקְלָט) is the Hebrew word used biblically in the phrase “city of refuge.” These were safe places prepared for those who accidentally killed someone (manslaughter). A *miklat* is a place prepared in advance for times of extreme trouble. In modern Hebrew, this word is used for bomb shelters.

Just like the cities of refuge were prepared in advance for times of trouble, today Israel finds it necessary to prepare *miklats* for her citizens. Any new apartment built in Israel is required by law to have a *miklat*. Older buildings have larger shelters designed for all the building’s residents to share. Cities prepare public shelters, so citizens can run into a safe place even when out in public. Hospitals have secured areas.

In our apartment, we use the *miklat* as Tom’s study. It has reinforced concrete walls, a strong metal window cover, and a heavy, thick metal door. There have been times in the 22 years we have lived in Israel when we have heard emergency sirens and have had to run into the shelter where we stayed until the all-clear sound was given. During a recent conflict in Gaza, while delivering food and goods, we ran with hundreds of Israelis to the city shelter when sirens giving a 15-second warning screamed overhead telling of incoming rockets.

The second lesson we can learn from looking at the Hebrew words for “refuge” is that we should prepare in advance for times of trouble or need. Noah prepared the ark so that there would be a refuge in the time of the flood. Joseph prepared a food storage facility to provide for the people during seven years of famine. God told the Children of Israel to prepare cities of refuge. In Matthew 25, Yeshua tells of the ten virgins who were invited to a wedding. Five were prepared with their lamps full of oil, while the other five had not filled their lamps. It is important to remain ready—spiritually and physically.

It is not enough to have a *miklat*. You must keep it ready for use. Many in Israel have used their shelters for storage. When a time of trouble comes, they will find it difficult to avail themselves of the safety it offers if it’s cluttered with boxes and excess furniture. However, it is also not enough to have a *miklat* that is ready for use. We must avail ourselves of the shelter in the time of trouble. Those who delay or choose not to enter the shelter can find that destruction comes quickly.



Misgav—A High Place

Misgav (מישגב) means a height or high place, refuge, secure height, retreat, and stronghold. This is a safe place because it is high and inaccessible. Masada rising high above the desert plain of the Dead Sea would be a great example of a natural *misgav* that was used in ancient times as a stronghold. This word seems to have military or strategic implications. It can be translated “high tower” (2 Sam. 22:3, Ps. 18:2; 144:2), “defense” (Ps. 59:9, 16, 17; 62:2, 6; 94:22; Isa. 33:16), and “high fort” (Isa. 25:12).

“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust [chaseh], my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold [misgav]” (Ps. 18:2). *“But the LORD has been my defense [misgav], and my God the rock of my refuge [machase]”* (Ps. 94:22).

It is extremely important in time of war to have a strategy. Location often is the deciding factor in a conflict. Armies must be in constant communication with their leaders who are planning the strategy. They must be ready to move to high ground or retreat to a stronghold as necessary. They must be ready to fight.

We are also involved in conflict today. It is a spiritual conflict, which has many ramifications in the natural world. We see the evidence of this struggle between God and evil all around us. How important it is for us to be listening to the voice of our Lord, discerning His strategies and obeying His commands.

A Refuge for the Poor

At Bridges for Peace, we believe that God has raised us up for this time in history to be part of God’s end-time strategy. As I was reading all the Scriptures containing the word “refuge,” I was blessed to see a couple that referred to God being a refuge to the poor and needy. *“You shame the counsel of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge [machase]”* (Ps. 14:6). *“For You have been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge [machase] from the storm, a shade from the heat, for the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall”* (Isa. 25:4).

In God’s providence, we are alive today in these tumultuous times. We were chosen for this time when God is fulfilling His prophetic word. We are privileged to be some who God has called to minister to the needs of the poor and needy in Israel. Many of them are new immigrants whom God has called home over the past few decades. God is allowing Christian volunteers to provide a place of refuge for them.

In Matthew 24, when Yeshua speaks about these times, He says, *“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing”* (vv. 45–46). Feeding the people of Israel is part of the calling God has given to Bridges for Peace, and we will be faithful to continue to provide a place of refuge in the time of special need.

A few years ago, we felt like the Lord showed us that we would be helping Israel in a time of crisis. Since then, we have opened a second food distribution center in Karmiel, just a few miles south of the Lebanon border. We now have about 500 tons of food stored for times of crisis. The city of Karmiel has made us a part of their emergency planning team. Of course, we are careful, through inventory rotation, to ensure that food does not go bad.



Action

Action Time!

God is sounding the trumpet—calling His people to attention. It isn't just a practice on a military parade ground. It is the real thing. Are you ready to be an active part of His team? Let's quickly summarize what we have learned.

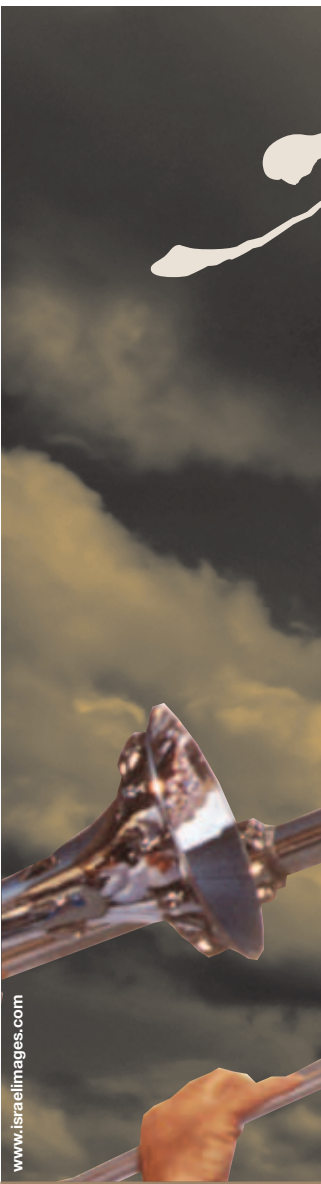
First, from *machase*—know Who the refuge is and trust in Him. We need to constantly look to the Lord for His direction. He is our refuge. We must put our trust in Him.

Second, from *miklat*—prepare in advance a place of refuge. We need to prepare in the natural just like the Israelites prepared cities of refuge. We should prayerfully seek guidance in how to prepare. I know some who feel led to plant gardens and can the food for times of emergency. Many are preparing financially by getting out of debt and saving for future needs. Others are preparing shelters, particularly in Israel where war is a constant threat. We need to seek the Lord, our refuge (*machase*) and trust (*chaseh*) in Him to show us the preparation (*miklat*).

Third, from *misgav*—strategy, warfare, and location are all important. We know that we are in the midst of a spiritual battle. Satan is trying to destroy the Jewish people. We need to fight against anti-Semitism. He is also attacking God's moral code. We need to be ready to fight against the power and force of evil. We must have spiritual strategies in place. We must use the strategies and weapons that the Lord, our Commander in Chief, gives us, at His direction.

I encourage you to go to the Lord in prayer. Draw near to Him. It is vital that we be in right relationship with the Lord, our refuge. Don't miss out on His direction. The time is now to put your trust in Him.

By Rev. Rebecca J. Brimmer
International President and CEO



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Psalm 46

*God is our **refuge** [machase] and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah*

*There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our **refuge** [misgav]. Selah*

*Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our **refuge** [misgav]. Selah*



All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.