

A photograph of two people sitting on a stone wall, looking out over a city. The person on the left is wearing a dark jacket and a cap, and the person on the right is wearing a light-colored dress and a headscarf. The city in the background is built on a hillside with many buildings. The sky is blue with some clouds.

Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant

By Ilse Strauss, *News Bureau Chief*
Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection®

ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD, we watched in horror as the simmering tensions in Ukraine erupted into the most brutal ground battle in Europe since World War II. We've agonized over the news of civilians perishing as missiles strike apartment buildings and prayed for a swift end to the violence.

Here in Israel, the events in Ukraine are particularly close to home. The Promised Land has a significant population of Ukrainian Jews who have immigrated here, with some 500,000 now calling Israel home. Many of them have mothers, fathers, sons and daughters still living in Ukraine who are now facing the Russian onslaught.

Three of our colleagues are Ukrainian-born Jews. When they came to Israel, they left pieces of their heart in Ukraine, bidding farewell to family, friends and neighbors. They've remained close to many of them. And now, as the Russians advance, the ones they hold close to their hearts are the ones stuck in congested traffic, trying to flee the besieged cities, or huddled in underground metro stations as the Russian bombs fall. Worse still, uncles, cousins and nephews who were lawyers, teachers and farmers before the Russians came are now the soldiers facing the Red army.

At Bridges for Peace, this situation is particularly close to our hearts. Over the years, we've helped thousands of Ukrainian Jews come home to Israel, and then supported them with food and other necessities as they learn the language, find a job and settle into their new home country. In 2021 alone, we've welcomed 1,446 Ukrainian Jews home. Now we stand with them as they mourn the fate of their motherland and fret over loved ones in the crosshairs.



Even as Russian troops amassed on the border, our team in Ukraine continued working tirelessly to help as many Jewish people as possible come to Israel. Now, we have stepped up our efforts, putting our resources at the disposal of organizations launching rescue efforts in the war-torn country.

The images of families torn apart, heart-wrenching goodbyes on train stations and desperate parents sending their children away to safety as they remain behind to face whatever comes also bring back horrific memories for many Holocaust survivors. My friend Daniel is one of them.

The Scars They Carry

Daniel is a remarkably young 99-year-old and only notices his age, he loves to joke, when he happens to pass a mirror. Days before World War II erupted, Daniel was selected for the *Kindertransport* (Children's Transport), a rescue effort snatching Jewish children out of Nazi Germany to safety in Britain. While the children were offered a chance to live, parents faced the agony of putting their little ones on a train and waving goodbye, probably forever.

“Our mothers and fathers were the heroes,” Daniel remembers. “We expected our parents to follow. But the grown-ups knew they might never see their children again. Most were right. Yet as the train pulled away, none of them cried. They were strong for us. They did not want weeping to be the last memory we had of them.”

As the invasion of Ukraine raged, dominating newspapers and television channels with images of despair and destruction, my nine-month-old daughter, Lily, and I visited Daniel to see how he's coping. It was late Friday afternoon, an hour before the start of *Shabbat* (Sabbath), and the afternoon sun was already dipping



A child at the *Kindertransport* monument in London, England

toward the hills surrounding Jerusalem. Daniel sat on the couch with a babbling Lily tucked under his arm. I was on the floor next to his feet, and as I looked up at him, I felt such a surge of tenderness.

“Were you scared?” I asked, my heart contracting at the thought of compartments filled with abandoned babies weeping in those moments after the train pulled out of the station, leaving everything familiar behind. He was silent for a moment, as if chewing on my question. Then he shook his head. “Not scared, no. The Nazis had already taken my father. I had already suffered. I was a bit hard already, you know. But as I looked around at the little children, some of them no more than four or five, crying, ‘Mama, mama,’ I was sad. And now, today, I’m sad as I see it happening again.”

We sat there until the sunset signaled the start of *Shabbat*, Daniel and Lily, old and young, snuggled on the couch, and me at his feet on the floor, mourning a fallen world where trainloads of babies once again cry for their mothers.

The Question of the Hour

Ever since the drums of war started beating in Eastern Europe, we’ve received a number of queries about the implications. Are we seeing a fulfillment of Ezekiel 38 and 39? Should we expect an alliance between Russia and Iran that will ultimately come against Israel? Could we be witnessing the opening shots of World War III? Is this the rise of Gog from Magog, which Ezekiel foretold will come “*out of the far north...a great company and a mighty army*” to descend on “*Israel like a*



cloud, to cover the land” (38:15–16)? The answer to all these questions is the same: possibly, maybe, perhaps.

Relevant as they are, I wonder if these are the pertinent questions of the hour. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is filled with prophecies about the things God will do and bring to pass. All too often—particularly when we’re plagued by a global pandemic or the threat of another world war—it’s tempting to look at the news headlines and role-players like puzzle pieces to see if they fit together to form one of the things He said are still to come. However, could it be that biblical prophecy was given as landmarks bearing witness to the faithfulness and might of God after the fact—thus, after they have been fulfilled? Is it possible that God wants us to take note of the things He said He would do, but leave the way in which they will come to pass to Him? Could it be that He wants to keep the details of the who, what and how to Himself until He brings His plan to fulfillment? Is it possible that only once the event takes place, we will look back in awe and wonder, gasping, “Yes! God has done it again! He said He would do it and He has. This stands as proof of His existence. Come see what He’s done.”

The Old Testament prophets foretold of a coming Messiah. Speculation, arguments and theories were rife as to how, when and where He would come. But God’s thoughts are not ours, and His ways are so much higher than ours (Isa. 55:8–9). So when the Messiah finally came, it happened in such an unexpected way that everyone was baffled. Who could have predicted or fit the puzzle pieces



together before the miraculous event took place? Only afterward could we look back in awe at the landmark bearing witness to His faithfulness and might.

The Old Testament prophets also foretold of a homecoming for the Jewish people after God had scattered them to the four corners of the earth. Speculation, arguments and theories were rife as to how and when the homecoming would take place. But yet again, God's thoughts are not ours, and His ways are so much higher than ours (Isa. 55:8–9). So when that homecoming finally happened, it was in such an unexpected way that the world is still baffled. Again, who could have predicted or fit the puzzle pieces together before the miraculous event took place? And once again we could only look back afterward in awe at the landmark bearing witness to His faithfulness and might.

Could this be the pattern for the unfolding of biblical prophecies? Does God want us to be aware of what is to come—but rather than focus on the what, how and where of how it will take place, does He want us to concentrate on something else instead?

Answering His Clarion Call

Matthew 24 and 25 are known as the Olivet Discourse, a passage where Jesus' (Yeshua's) disciples asked Him about the end times—and He answered. It was right before Jesus faced the cross, and the group of followers was gathered around their Rabbi on the slopes of the Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple. In answer, Jesus listed a series of birth pangs, starting with nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famine, pestilence, false prophets, apostasy and persecution. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? But then He moves on. After giving us a brief glimpse of the difficult times preceding His coming, He spends the lion's share of this crucial passage describing how He wants us to live and act in the midst of the troubling times.

As we see nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom, as the worst land battle since World War II rages in Europe, as Russia and Iran become increasingly chummy and as earthquakes, pestilence, apostasy and persecution tear across the earth, I believe the pertinent question of the hour is

this: How does God want us to live to shine His light in a world increasingly filled with darkness?

Thankfully, He answers in great detail in the Olivet Discourse itself. He gives us the parable of the faithful and evil servants, teaching us to stay the course as His representatives on earth serving others, even if He tarries (Matt. 24:36–44). Then there’s the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, teaching us to keep our lamps filled with oil (Matt. 25:1–13). Then comes the parable of the talents, exhorting us to spend the resources He entrusted to us to build His Kingdom (Matt. 25:14–30). Finally, He gives a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the Son of Man judging the nations (Matt. 25:31–46). His yardstick? Feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty a drink, taking in the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting those in chains. Why? *“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me”* (Matt. 25:40).



As I watch the troubling times unfold on the world stage, I feel such an urgent clarion call in my heart. Suffering and heartbreak are everywhere and will only increase. We—you and I—have the answer, the only answer. And He’s already told us how He wants us to act and what He wants us to do. What a comfort! What a privilege! We have the honor of building His Kingdom together. And as we—you and I—labor together to feed the hungry, give the thirsty a drink, take in the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit those in

chains, it is my earnest desire that we will hear Him say: “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21, 23).



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

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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