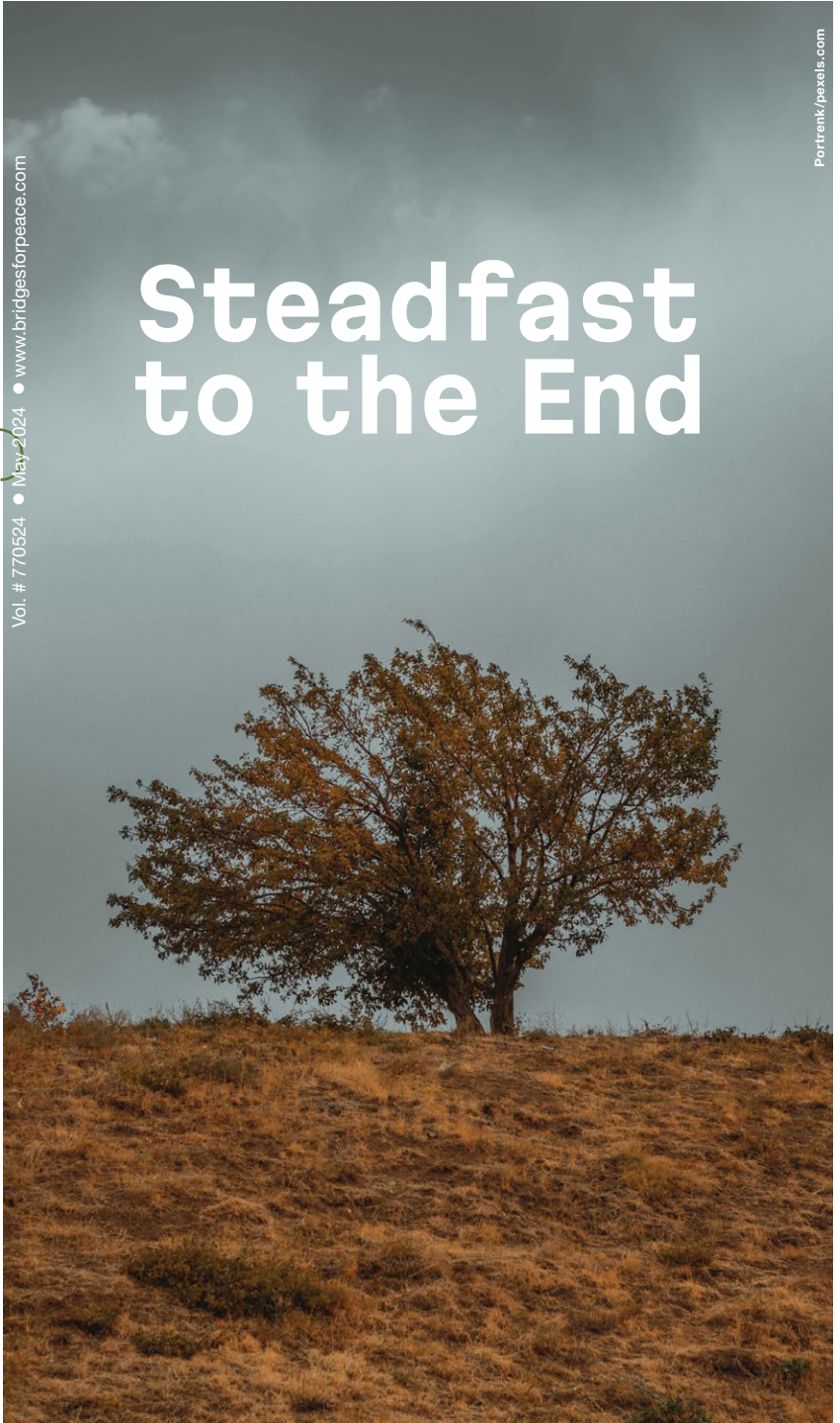


ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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Steadfast to the End



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“THEREFORE, MY BELOVED BRETHREN, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). This sage advice from the apostle Paul applies to each of us today. We live in perilous times of world history. Is your faith and walk with the Lord ready to withstand whatever may come? Are you steadfast, immovable and abounding in the work of the Lord?

Trees

Have you ever tried to move a tree? Trees give us a word picture of an immovable force. One Biblical example is in Isaiah 61:3, *“To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”*

When a tree is young, the sapling is easy to uproot and move, but once the tree has firmly taken root, it is very difficult to move. In fact, if you try, you may just end up hurting yourself in the

process. Some of the most difficult work that I have ever done was trying to dig out a mature tree. Finding and cutting through the roots—well below ground level—is not for the weak of heart. It requires real determination.

Pastor Mark Witte recounted a literal run-in he had with a tree. He learned firsthand just how strong and immovable a tree can be. As a young boy, he was in his grandparents' yard playing ball when a ball was hit in his direction. He kept his eyes on the ball as he moved to intercept it—without realizing that the trajectory he was on led him directly into a large old tree. Ouch! His small stature was not enough to move the tree. His subsequent bruises reminded him of the strength of that tree.

Most trees are solid. They withstand violent storms and all kinds of weather. God called the nation of Israel an olive tree. The olive tree was an integral part of the Jewish peoples' lives during biblical times. When God used the olive tree as an image for Israel, they knew immediately what He was saying to them—that they would be strong and hearty; that regardless of the enemies that came against them, they would be virtually indestructible, outliving their enemies; and that they would always bear fruit and be a light to the nations.

We should seek to make our lives more like the trees around us. They are strong, resilient and full of life due to their deep roots. We also need deep foundations. I am reminded of Jesus' (Yeshua's) teaching in Matthew 7:24–27 about building a house on firm foundations, the bedrock of His teachings. He said that if we obey His teachings, the storms of life could blow against our lives, but we would not fall. However, those who hear His words and do not do them are like a house built on the sand, which will fall when life's storms come against it. The enduring truths of God's Word will guide and strengthen us for life if we hold fast to them.

Perilous Times

God's Word makes it clear that in the latter days, as mankind's history nears its end, life will become increasingly difficult. Those who believe in the one, true and living God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and try to live by His guidelines, will experience significant opposition.

In 2 Timothy 3:1–5, Paul warned his protégé, *“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”*

Sadly, that list sounds all too familiar in our day, even at times from within the Church. Verse 4 says that in the last days, some will hold to a form of godliness, although they will deny its power. We need to be on guard and keep our own faith strong and steadfast.

In Matthew 24:5–7, Jesus (Yeshua) warned His disciples that at the end of the age there would be false prophets, wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes around the world. Yet these would only be signs of the beginning of the end. He warned that we should not be deceived.

Falling Away

Jesus (Yeshua) continued in Matthew 24 to warn that many would fall away because of the intense persecution of those days. The love of many will grow cold as lawlessness increases. Then in verse 13, Jesus taught that the one who endures (is steadfast and immovable) until the end will be saved.

Paul also wrote about this falling away or apostasy near the end of the age. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3a, he admonished, *“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first.”* And to Timothy he wrote, *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron”* (1 Tim. 4:1–2).

The Last Days

In our Christian understanding, the end of the age or the great day of the Lord is drawing ever closer. We see the signs of the times happening at an increasing pace. Can you feel the



pressure rising daily? Jewish commentators speak of this time as the Final Redemption, when Messiah will come and put all things right in the world to the glory of God. All nations will stream up to Jerusalem to serve the living God. Many in the Jewish community see what is happening in the world and also acknowledge that time is short.

We read about this time in Isaiah 2:1–4, *“The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their*

spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

With this approaching time in mind, how should we live our lives? Many Christians long for this time to come so that they can leave this godless earth and go to heaven. However, a Hebraic mindset views it very differently. Dwight A. Pryor, of blessed memory, explained in his book, *A Continuing Quest*, “Greek thought stresses an other-worldly spirituality, with our ‘true home’ in heaven...We are not saved just to be taken out of this world but to help bring God in the world, to extend His redemption and advance His kingdom in the earth—a goal that one day shall be consummated in Zion.”

Strong to the End

As we remain in the world while sin and lawlessness increase, how can we continue strong in our faith, faithful to the end? Here are some reminders from the Scriptures to meditate on and put into practice.

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” 1 Corinthians 10:12

“You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked.” 2 Peter 3:17

“With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” Psalms 119:10–11

“The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You.” Isaiah 26:3 NASB

“If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from



the hope of the gospel which you heard..." Colossians 1:23a

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."
2 Timothy 2:15

In 2 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul admonishes the Thessalonian believers that they should not be quickly shaken from their composure or be disturbed. Also, in Philippians 2:12b, 14–15, Paul tells them to *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling... Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."*

In Hebrews 3:12–14, the author warns, *"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."*

In 1 Timothy 4:13–16, Paul gives wise advice that is relevant for all of us today. *"Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things;*

give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”

As we ground ourselves in reading, exhortation and sound doctrine, as we meditate on these things, giving ourselves entirely to them, we will stand firm, immovable, abounding in the work of the Lord no matter what may lie ahead.

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Witte, M. “Pastor Mark: Trees Can Be a Reflection of Life.” *The Monroe News*. <https://www.monroenews.com/stor/opinion/columns/2020/03/06/pastor-mark-trees-can-be/1573884007/>

Scripture from the New King James Version

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.
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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