

## Keep Moving Up

*And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.”* — Numbers 13:32

As the children of Israel were poised to enter the Promised land, they first sent out spies ahead of them to see what the land was like. When ten out of the 12 spies brought back a bad report about the land of Canaan, they reported, *“The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.”* Many of us are so familiar with this story that we read right over those lines. But if you stop and think about it, the phrases make no sense at all. In fact, they are an outright contradiction! Either the land devours its people *or* the people living there are of great size and not swallowed up. Which is it?

On the surface, the Jewish sages explain the contradiction by pointing out that God had caused many people to die during the time the spies were in Canaan. The spies noticed an unusual amount of funerals, which is why they brought back a report that said the land kills its people. The sages also point out that God caused these deaths in order to protect the spies by distracting the locals. Moreover, the people who the spies saw in the land happened to be larger in size. Perhaps the spies were saying that only such mighty people could escape the plague of a land that killed so many.

But let’s take a deeper look at this phrase, where we can find a message for us today living in our materially focused world. Literally, the Hebrew verse translates as, *“The land we explored consumes those who sit in it.”* The sages give the following explanation based on this translation: In the land of Israel, one must be growing spiritually constantly. Those who “sit in the land” – in other words, those who remain stagnant, complacent, and unchanging – would be consumed. Earthly materialism would take over their lives, and they would become completely enveloped in it.

The message for us wherever we live is that life is like walking up a down escalator. If you aren’t moving upward, you are automatically falling backward.

When a Jewish family moves to Israel, we refer to it in Hebrew as “making *aliyah*.” *Aliyah* means “ascent.” Moving to Israel is seen as ascending spiritually. I have a friend who once said, “It’s not enough to make *aliyah* once. We have to make *aliyah* every day – even outside Israel.”

It’s the same message as above. We have to actively ascend spiritually every day. Can we trust God a little more today? Can we be a better person today than we were yesterday? We must not make the

mistake of getting so busy with the material life that we stop living and growing spiritually. Keep moving upward, one day at a time.

## Step Up in Faith

*. . . like an eagle that stirs up its nest  
and hovers over its young,  
that spreads its wings to catch them  
and carries them aloft. — Deuteronomy 32:11*

I don't know what your next step is in life, but I do know that you have to be willing to take it if you are going to progress on your spiritual journey. God helps us in all our well-intentioned endeavors, but we need to be willing to take the first step. Faith is more than just believing. Faith is putting belief into action by making decisions, taking risks, and doing what God has laid on our hearts to do.

This idea is alluded to in this verse when Moses described how God took His people out of Egypt. In Exodus 19:4 we read, *"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."* It's a beautiful image of how God lovingly carried His people like an eagle to where they needed to be.

In this verse in Deuteronomy, we read a similar word picture: *"like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft."* Here, too, Moses was referring to how God carried the Israelites through the desert. However, looking at the detailed description in this passage, the Jewish sages teach that God spread out His wings so that the children of Israel might climb aboard, but it was up to the Israelites to take that first step up.

In other words, God is ready to carry us and be with us in our challenges and spiritual pursuits, but we are the ones who need to make the initial move.

Consider the following: According to Jewish tradition, four-fifths of the Israelites did not leave Egypt. Only one-fifth had enough faith to follow God out of Egypt and into the unknown. After the destruction of the First Temple when the Persian emperor, Cyrus the Great, announced that the Jewish people could return to Israel — even offering to help foot the bill — only a handful of the exiled Jews returned to their homeland. Most Jews chose to remain in the comfortable life they had built abroad.

Today, once again, the Jewish people have the opportunity to return to Israel — to be carried on wings of eagles back to their homeland through the modern-day miracle of flight. And for the first time in history, most Jews have chosen to do so. The majority of Jews reside in Israel today. I call that progress.

Friends, whatever your next step may be, I hope that you take it. No matter how uncomfortable or worrisome it may seem, know that when you step out in faith, you step into God's protection. God will carry us and bring us to where we need to be.

## Partners with Zion

*“And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.” — Ezra 1:4*

Theodor Herzl was the father of the modern State of Israel. Like many great men, he kept a diary. Herzl recorded the journey that he underwent trying to birth the State of Israel into being, and he spoke about those who helped him along the way. One name, in particular, is mentioned more than any other in the entire account.

That name is Reverend William Henry Hechler. The greatest ally of the Jewish journalist from Vienna was an English priest. Hechler’s partnership with Herzl played a fundamental role in the re-establishment of the State of Israel and the return of the Jews to their homeland.

Partnership between Jews and Gentiles for the sake of Israel goes back thousands of years to biblical times. The book of Ezra opens with a monumental declaration by Cyrus, King of Persia. Seventy years after the Jewish nation had been exiled from their homeland by the Babylonians, the Persians had taken control and initiated the Jewish return to their land. Not only did Cyrus grant permission for the Jews to return to their homeland and to rebuild the Temple, he also urged local residents to donate to the cause.

It was with the help of these Gentile friends that the Jewish people were able to return to their homeland. Sound familiar?

The time that we are living in today shares many similarities with the time period in which Ezra lived. While his generation saw the first people in history to re-establish a homeland after being exiled from it, today’s generation is witnessing the only nation in history to return to its homeland twice! And just as the initial return to Israel was only possible because of the partnership between Jews, Gentiles and Christians alike, today’s return to Zion is the product of a Jewish and non-Jewish alliance once again.

I don’t think that’s an accident. God wants to give all people a chance to be involved in the rebuilding of the Holy Land. Israel may be the homeland of the Jewish people, but Israel is for everyone.

The Holy Land contains everyone’s past, and his or her future. The Scripture tells us that the third and final temple will be a house of prayer for all nations. So it is only fitting that every nation should have the opportunity to contribute to its making.

## Aliyah Devotions

We are witnessing the fulfillment of ancient prophecies before our very eyes! The children of Israel are returning to their land, and we invite you to become a part of it through prayer, through visits, through your voice, and your support of *The Fellowship's* many programs and ministries.

## Jerusalem, Our Eternal Home

*If I forget you, Jerusalem,  
may my right hand forget its skill.  
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth  
if I do not remember you,  
if I do not consider Jerusalem  
my highest joy. — Psalm 137:5–6*

In 1903, Joseph Chamberlain, the British Colonial Secretary, made an offer to Theodore Herzl and his Zionist group. The British were prepared to give the Jews 5,000-square miles in Uganda, Africa to serve as a Jewish homeland. The proposal evoked a fierce debate. On one hand, the land would provide the Jews with a homeland where they would be free to live in peace and protect themselves from danger.

On the other hand, it fell far short of the Zionist dream to return to the ancient homeland of the Jews — Israel. Thankfully, the offer was declined because the land was deemed unsuitable. However, the question remained: Even though the historical homeland of the Jews is Israel, does it really matter where the Jewish homeland is today?

Psalm 137 answers that question with an emphatic “Yes!” For 2,000 years, Psalm 137:5 has been a cornerstone of Jewish worship and devotion: *“If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.”* For centuries, we longed for, prayed for, and worked for the Jewish return to Jerusalem. At times of joy, this verse was read as we remembered Jerusalem. A small part of every Jewish home was left unfinished to remember the destruction of Jerusalem. Every year on the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, we spend the day fasting and crying over Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. Not Poland, not America, and not Uganda. Jerusalem is the only capital the Jews have ever had, and Israel is the only Jewish homeland that will ever be!

This is because Israel is where the Jews belong. In Deuteronomy 1:8, God says, *“See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land the LORD swore he would give to your fathers . . . and to their descendants after them.”*

Guess which land God was talking about? Not Uganda! The land of Israel was promised to the children of Israel and their descendants for all eternity!

In Jeremiah 50:19, God says, *“But I will bring Israel back to their own pasture, and they will graze on Carmel and Bashan; their appetite will be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead.”* Even though the

## Aliyah Devotions

Israelites would go into exile, God would bring them back. Not to New York and California, but to Carmel and Bashan in Israel. Israel is our eternal homeland.

Over the years, *The Fellowship* has been blessed to participate in helping Jews from around the world return home to Israel through our *On Wings of Eagles* ministry. We invite you to join us in this holy work bringing the Jewish people back to their God-given home.



## One by One

*In that day the LORD will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, Israel, will be gathered up one by one. — Isaiah 27:12*

In 1939, at the dawn of World War II, there were almost 17 million Jews in the world. In 1945, that number had shrunk to 11 million. Today, the Jewish people have rebuilt and grown, yet the number of Jews worldwide stands between 13 and 14 million, not even close to the Jewish population before its decimation at the hands of the Nazis.

However, not all the news is bleak. In the 1920s, less than 100,000 Jews lived in Israel, then called Palestine. The Jewish state was not yet recognized and the Jews who lived there were subject to oppression. Today, there are almost six million Jews living and thriving in Israel, where they are free to worship as they please and are defended by one of the world's greatest armies.

The fact that there are so many Jews living in Israel today is the fulfillment of ancient biblical prophecies. God promised that the day would come when His people would return home. However, this is only the beginning. Most Jews, more than seven million of them, still live outside of Israel. Many live in places like the former Soviet Union, where they live in poverty, or in Middle Eastern countries, where they live under oppression.

God gives us the opportunity to play a role in fulfilling His purposes, and today, we are able to help bring His people home.

This reminds me of the story about a young starfish-thrower. One day, a man was walking along a beach at dawn when he noticed a boy picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea. "Why are you doing this?" he asked. "Because if they aren't back in the sea when the sun comes up, they'll die," the boy answered. "Don't you realize that the beach goes on for miles?" the man said. "How will your efforts make any difference?" The boy looked at the starfish in his hand and threw it into the sea. Then he said, "It made a difference to that one."

This verse from the book of Isaiah is one of the many prophecies about the Jews returning to their homeland. The prophet Isaiah emphasized that the Jewish people will come back *"one by one."* This teaches us that we don't have to throw our hands up in despair when we take on the giant task of helping *all* the Jewish people return home.

We just need to help them one by one, until every one is home.

## Aliyah Devotions

We invite you to join us at *The Fellowship* where we help fulfill God's purposes through our program, *On Wings of Eagles*, which helps bring needy and oppressed Jews from around the world home to Israel.

Together, we can make a difference and bring God's people home, one person at a time.

## Never Forgotten

*But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me,  
the LORD has forgotten me."*

*"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast  
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?  
Though she may forget,  
I will not forget you!" — Isaiah 49:14–15*

Imagine being a young Jew in Europe during the late 1800s. The Holocaust has not happened yet, but pogroms, blood libels, and poverty abound. Life is tough for the Jewish people without a secure homeland. You have read the Bible and learned with the rabbis. You are told that somewhere in the Middle East there is a place for the Jews. You are told about how the Jews once flourished there until they were exiled.

You are promised that someday the Jews will return, and you pray daily for redemption. But it has been 2,000 years. For two millennia Jews have been asking to return to their homeland, and yet, they still are in exile. Is there hope? Will it ever happen? In your darkest hours, you wonder, "Has God forgotten us?"

This passage from Isaiah is one of the seven Scriptures that are read between *Tisha B'av*, the day that commemorates a series of tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people throughout history, and the High Holy Days, beginning with *Rosh Hashanah*. Appropriately, these readings are called "The Seven Comforts." They are selections from the prophets that speak about better times for the Jewish people, and they are designed to bring the people from the despair of *Tisha B'av* to the salvation and redemption of *Yom Kippur*.

In the opening verse of this passage, we read, *"The LORD has forsaken me, the LORD has forgotten me."* Just as the Jews must have wondered during the long exile before the miraculous rebirth of Israel, they then wondered if God had forgotten them.

Can you relate? Sometimes we pray and pray for something, and our prayers seem unanswered. When will I find a job? When will we be blessed with children? Sometimes the wait is so long that we feel forgotten. But our Father in Heaven never forgets.

The very next verse reads, *"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast?"* It's almost impossible for a mother to forget about her dear, precious child. God is just as attentive to us and more so: *"Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"* Even if those closest to us abandon us, God will never forget us. We are His children, His loved ones. We are never forgotten!

Next time you or someone you know thinks that God has forgotten them, read Isaiah 51:3, *“Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.”* After 2,000 years of waiting, God’s promises have been fulfilled in our times. There is joy and singing in Jerusalem once again, just as the prophets promised. Though their wait was long, God never forgot His children, the Jewish people, and He will never, ever forget you.

## As Miracles Take Flight

*“Who are these that fly along like clouds,  
like doves to their nests?” — Isaiah 60:8*

Nearly 800 years ago, the Jewish commentator Rabbi David Kimhi explained that this verse written by Isaiah nearly 3,000 years ago referred to the Jewish people who had been exiled from the land of Israel, but who would one day return to their homeland in the future. They would come swiftly like clouds in the sky and fly like birds returning to their nest. Three thousand years ago, Isaiah essentially prophesied the invention of flight!

I often wonder how people understood these verses for thousands of years. I wonder how Jews interpreted Rabbi Kimhi’s comments for centuries. Today, we can understand clearly – we can see with our very eyes – how Jews around the world are literally flying home. And continue to do so from the four corners of the world.

What’s even more amazing is how the invention of flight parallels modern-day Zionism. As a friend of mine once put it, the Wright brothers came at the right time. In the year 1896 Theodore Herzl, regarded as the father of modern Zionism, published his book *Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State)*, in which he called for Jews to leave Europe and return to their ancestral homeland. In that very same year, there was a breakthrough in the world of aviation.

Smithsonian Institution Secretary Samuel Langley successfully flew an unmanned steam-powered fixed-wing model aircraft. His success caught the attention of two brothers from Ohio, Orville and Wilbur, who subsequently requested any aviation-related information from the Smithsonian. Just as Herzl’s book paved the way for the miraculous re-birth of Israel, the information that the Wright brothers received led to the world-changing invention of flight.

We live in a very well-ordered world. God has been and continues to pave the way toward the final redemption. While Jews and Christians may differ on what that final era will look like, we can all agree that better times are on the way. We must appreciate the miraculous times that we live in and the opportunities available to us.

Join us at *The Fellowship* as we participate in the fulfillment of biblical prophecies daily, helping Jews from around the world return to Israel through our *On Wings of Eagles* ministry. We are fortunate to be alive at this point in history, and we have a responsibility to do our part in creating a better future.

## An Eternal Bond

*“This is what the LORD says: ‘If I have not made my covenant with day and night and established the laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will bring them back from captivity and have compassion on them.’” — Jeremiah 33:25–26*

Several years ago, on the seventh day of *Hanukkah*, a modern-day miracle took place — 226 Jews from Ukraine came home to Israel. It was the first of many *Fellowship*-sponsored flights that have brought, and will continue to bring, Jews in need home to Israel.

For the passengers on board that plane, young and old, this was a dream come true. They were saved from a war-torn country where many had been displaced from their homes and thrust into poverty. However, more importantly, they have returned to the Jewish homeland with a promise of a brighter tomorrow. It is the fulfillment of the biblical promise in Isaiah 11:12 in which God vowed to *“assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.”*

In Exodus 24:7–8, we read about the covenant between Israel and God. Moses oversaw the sealing of the covenant: *“Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, ‘We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.’ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you . . .’”*

The passage in Jeremiah 33 concludes with the confirmation that this is an *eternal* covenant. This wasn’t a deal that could be broken. This wasn’t an arrangement where God might change His mind about it at some later date in time. God’s covenant with the children of Israel is binding forever.

We read, *“If I have not made my covenant with day and night and established the laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David . . .”* What’s God saying? That just as there will always be day and night, heaven and earth, there will always be God and the children of Israel.

God established physical laws in the world and He also created spiritual laws in the world. One of those laws is that the children of Israel will always be God’s chosen people, and when the time is right, God *“will bring them back from captivity and have compassion on them.”*

God promises to bring His children home no matter what. It doesn’t say that God will bring them back to Israel when they deserve it; it says that God will bring them back out of compassion for them.

We are the generation that is privileged to witness God's biblical promises come to fruition. We are also the generation that has the opportunity to be a part of it. Join us at *The Fellowship* as we help fulfill God's eternal promise to bring His children home.