



# Caspari Center NEWS

June 2014

"Equipping His people  
for works of service,  
so that the body of  
Messiah may be built up"  
Ephesians 4:12



**The first fruits were especially  
significant as a promise of  
the future harvest.**

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## The Reason for the Season

What are the Jewish holidays all about? The old joke has it this way: "They tried to destroy us; they failed; let's eat." Hanukkah, Purim, and Passover fit this description perfectly well: they—the idolatrous Greeks, Haman, and Pharaoh with his army—did try to destroy us, each in their own time, place, and way. And fail they did as well, thank God, giving us wonderful occasions to commemorate God's victories over his people's enemies and our continued survival. The old joke also got it right about eating—food is an important element in all celebrations, so why should Jewish ones be an exception?

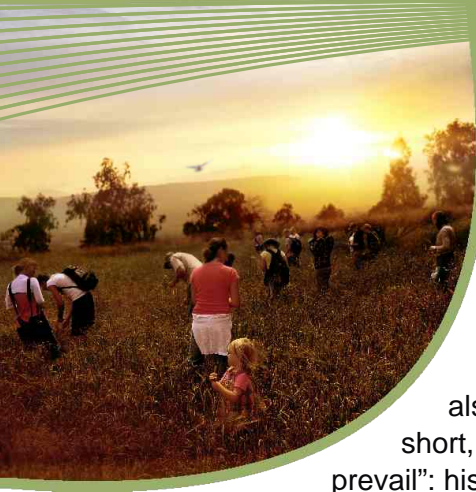
Still, some of the holidays have a different story behind them, and Shavuot (the Hebrew name for Pentecost) is a case in point. So what's the story of this feast, or, as they say, "the reason for the season"?

Turning to the Torah, we find the commandment to celebrate the "Feast of Weeks," but no particular story attached to it. Leviticus 23:15–21 simply commands the Israelites to count 50 days "from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering" and then to "offer a new grain offering to the LORD." That offering was special: "You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the first fruits to the LORD."

The origin of Pentecost is, thus, purely agricultural: it was the feast of the first fruits, which are important in two ways. First, all fruit is the result of hard labor coupled with prayer for God's blessing, and as such brings nurturing, satisfaction, and joy. Second, the first fruits were especially significant as a promise of the future harvest—sort of a down payment. Having reaped the first fruit, the farmer knew that more was to come—the fullness of the harvest, to be gathered in during the fall. And the Feast of Tabernacles, which is celebrated in the fall, is actually the feast of the final harvest. Together with Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, Shavuot is one of the "shalosh regalim"—the three yearly pilgrimage feasts for which all Israeli men were commanded to go up to Jerusalem and worship at the temple.

By the times of Jesus, the tradition had been in existence for centuries, but that Day of Pentecost was unique. The very same Spirit that previously rested only on priests, kings, and prophets was now given to simple people—men and women, young and old. Their only distinction from the rest of Israel was their faith in Jesus the Messiah. They saw him not only crucified, but also raised





immortal, and now their task was to be his witnesses to the world. It is in this context that the Spirit was poured on these disciples—to empower them to bear witness, usually in the face of fierce opposition. The change in them was amazing: the same people who deserted Jesus in Gethsemane just two months earlier were now boldly proclaiming him; they accepted persecution for their faith as the norm and the corresponding suffering as a privilege to rejoice about. And their preaching was not in vain—the very first sermon spoken by Peter resulted in explosive growth right there and then, with 3,000 people heeding his call to repent, be baptized, and receive the Spirit! These people also lived together in amazing unity, sharing deeply and taking care of the needy. In short, they became the community against which Jesus said “the gates of hell will not prevail”: his church.

Since Passover was, obviously, a prophetic type fulfilled on Calvary when Jesus, the Lamb of God, took away the sin of the world, let’s take a moment to see if Pentecost also bears marks of prophetic fulfillment. Is it mere coincidence that Paul says we have “the first fruit of the Spirit,” longing for the fullness of our redemption? What if those 3,000 were the first fruit of Messianic Israel that the Lord of the harvest graciously gave, thereby promising that one day “all Israel will be saved”? And if the answer to these two questions is yes, is it possible that today we are closer to the final harvest ingathering than ever before?

I am just asking questions, you know. Happy Pentecost!

Alec Goldberg

**Is it possible that today we are closer to the final harvest ingathering than ever before?**

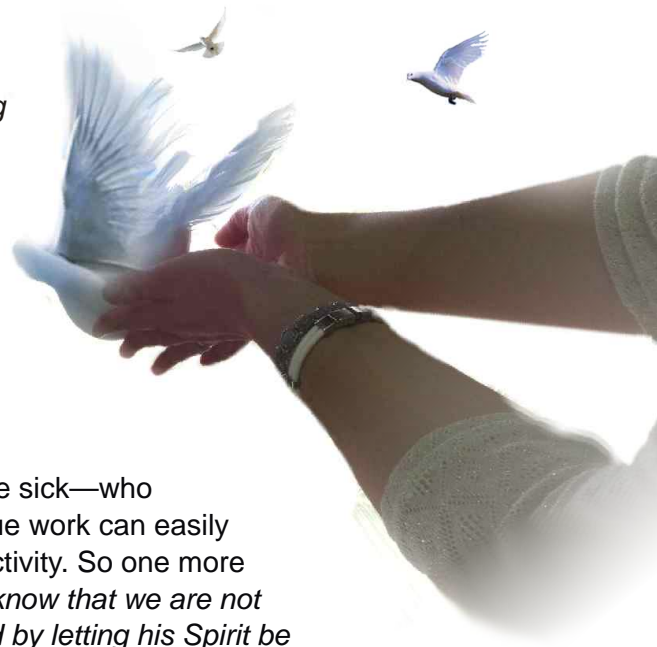
## The Work of the Holy Spirit

As we approach the Feast of Shavuot, or Pentecost, I find myself once again asking these questions: *What was God’s purpose in sending the Spirit? Do we have his power—the very same supernatural power that the early church received on that day? And if we do, how exactly does the Spirit manifest himself through the ministry of Caspari?*

I believe in the Holy Spirit, pray in tongues, and lay my hands on the sick—who sometimes actually get healed. And yet it often seems like his unique work can easily go unnoticed or even be mistaken for ordinary human gifting and activity. So one more question must be asked: *How do we discern the Spirit’s work, and know that we are not wasting resources on mere human endeavors but are pleasing God by letting his Spirit be our divine Helper?*

If Caspari was, say, an evangelistic ministry, the job of discernment would be easier. A genuine conversion from unbelief to faith in Jesus would be a wonderful proof, since only the Spirit can accomplish this. The same would go for a deliverance from demonic oppression: in Matthew 12:28 Jesus said it was by the Spirit of God that he was casting out demons. But Caspari’s main thrust is neither evangelism nor exorcism, but teaching. We teach and train believers, usually with no dramatic manifestations taking place, because in a teaching ministry the Spirit transforms hearts and minds, quietly working in the invisible realm. But since in the Messiah God became man, the fruit of the Spirit’s work is visible—as in the case of G., the mother of Yael and a participant of our Shabbat school seminars. She says:

*I was at the main lecture, listening to Pastor Daniel Yahav’s message about loving the kids who are different. As he shared about his personal struggle to be patient with his adopted son, who has Down syndrome, I kept thinking of my own struggle with my daughter’s ADHD. Even after I understood the syndrome and realized that Yael is not ill-willed, my temper was often still too quick and I lashed out at her. As I was listening to Daniel, he shared a scripture I knew, but never heard with my heart: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6).*





*When he read it, I felt like God himself spoke to me, warning of the serious danger that my daughter and I were in. The fear of the Lord hit me as I realized that my unjust anger could become a stumbling block for Yael, leading to disastrous consequences. Right there and then, in the middle of the lecture, I began to inwardly pray with a passion I never knew before. I cried out for the grace to overcome my impatience, and continued in this prayer for several months. Looking back today, I can see that Daniel's message was a turning point in my long struggle. I am still far from perfect, which keeps me on my knees, but there is a definite change in my communication with Yael, and she sees it too.*

If that is not a testimony to the work of the Spirit, then the earth is flat, you come from the moon, and I am a grizzly bear. Please keep praying for G., her ministry in her congregation's Shabbat school, and our seminars. The Holy Spirit is not a solution, but the *only* solution to many of our problems!

Alec Goldberg

## media review



Caspari Center publishes a weekly review of material from the Israeli press documenting attitudes toward Messianic Jews, the mission, and the Christian faith. To receive the Media Review free of charge by email, sign up on our website at [www.caspari.com](http://www.caspari.com).



### Christians in Israel

**BaMachane, April 24, 2014**

In 1963, a group of German Christians arrived in Zichron Yaakov, wanting to build a community in the town. The group believes that they are called to serve the Jewish people "in order to ensure their place in the world to come." They were received with suspicion, because of the Holocaust and the Eichmann trial, and also because elements in the town feared missionary activity. Now, slightly more than 50 years later, the community, called "Bethel," lives in an urban kibbutz numbering around 500 families.

The group owns "Bethel Industries," which consists of factories for air filters against chemical weapons, airplane parts, and various food items. The factories employ around 250 Israelis, who are intrigued by the group's unique lifestyle, particularly the absence of television and Internet. Yossi Garibi, a department manager at Bethel Industries, says, "They look like you and me, but in fact they are much stronger believers and more 'Orthodox' than others who wear black and a shtreimel. . . . Because of them we sometimes say, 'I wish I could make my kids watch less TV.'" The group is also determined to not enter into competition with Israeli companies. Garibi gives the example of Major General Yair Naveh, head of the Home Front Command in 2003, who came to the CEO of Bethel in that year offering a 70 million dollar contract for a substitute for gas masks. The CEO, in turn, told him, "There is a gas mask factory in Kiryat Gat, and the workers there suffer from unemployment. I don't want to take away their livelihood. Go to them!"

The town has since recognized that members of the community are genuine Christian Zionists, and has given them an award of appreciation. Eli Abutbul, head of the Zichron Yaakov municipality, says, "They have a modesty, an education, and a way of behaving that makes you say, 'Would that we had another thousand communities like them in the country.'"

### Status of Holy Places

**Sha'a Tova, April 24, 2014**

Rumors continue to rage about David's tomb on Mount Zion – which some also see as the site of the Last Supper – concerning whether or not the government agreed to release control of the structure to the Vatican. The issue is also unique because the building remained under Israeli control between 1948 and 1967. The Vatican Insider recently published an article saying that Israel agreed to stop taxing churches and Christian cemeteries, and also to give control over David's tomb to the Vatican. Zeev Elkin, the vice-minister of Foreign Affairs, said in response that there is no basis for this claim regarding David's tomb, although negotiations regarding the status of the churches have been in progress for a long time and should be concluded in the next few years.

If you would like to know more about the Caspari Center and its activities, write to [caspari@caspari.com](mailto:caspari@caspari.com) or visit our website, [www.caspari.com](http://www.caspari.com). You can support our work by prayer, volunteering, or financial gifts to help with individual projects or the general work of the center.

## Alarms and Shalom: The Parable of the Fig Tree

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree:  
As soon as its twigs get tender and its  
leaves come out, you know that summer  
is near. Even so, when you see all these  
things, you know that it is near, right at the  
door. I tell you the truth, this generation will  
certainly not pass away until all these things  
have happened. Heaven and earth will pass  
away, but my words will never pass away.  
(Matt. 24:32–35; Mark 13:28–31; Luke 21:29–33)

Imagine with me the stunned silence that gripped the disciples as Jesus spoke about the future. He'd been speaking reality-changing truth as long as they'd all known him. I'm sure none of those listening to him doubted for a moment that he was telling them the truth as he painted a picture of a very difficult future. His words had the urgency of an air raid siren. But he tucked the siren in the seeming simplicity of a sun-warmed fig branch.

His alarming words focused on specific warnings about the end of days. These warnings included some detail: The beautiful temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. Many deceivers would come in his name, and a false Messiah would proclaim himself the true king. The world would be rocked by wars, confusion, and unnatural natural disasters. Those who followed him would be persecuted by even their own families and punished by government and religious officials. But through all of this, the good news would go forth to the ends of the earth.

A natural human response to this information would be to prepare: find a hiding place; stock it with a supply of food, water, and weapons; and wait out the chaos in relative security. Jesus emphasized that there wouldn't be a safe place except in him. To emphasize the point, he tells his followers the parable about the fig tree about to explode into bloom. It's there in the open, for everyone to see, as familiar as blue sky and bleak desert to his hearers. Yet he tells them that the only way they'll hear the alarm sounding is to pay close attention to what is happening around them in the same way a farmer might watch his old fig tree for signs of life.

Just a few days later, Jesus again emphasized that his disciples would not be left to face the future alone: *"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid"* (John 14:26–27).

The Holy Spirit not only helps us recognize the signs of the times, but teaches us what we need to know to live faithfully as followers of our Messiah. The sound of the alarm does not need to alarm us as he brings us into his shalom—a shalom as sure as the greening of the fig tree as summer approaches.

Michelle Van Loon

### Prayer Requests

Please pray for:



- **Our publications: the Fear of God activity book, to be completed in the coming weeks; completion of the Hebrew translation of Chosen to Follow; and the re-launching of Mishkan, which Caspari has repurchased.**
- **Singles' ministry - for a new approach to implementing our vision.**
- **Missiology course - for more participants and content planning.**
- **Translating the Caspari website into Hebrew.**
- **Hebrew dubbing of Russian-language teachings by Alec Goldberg.**