

The Chosen People



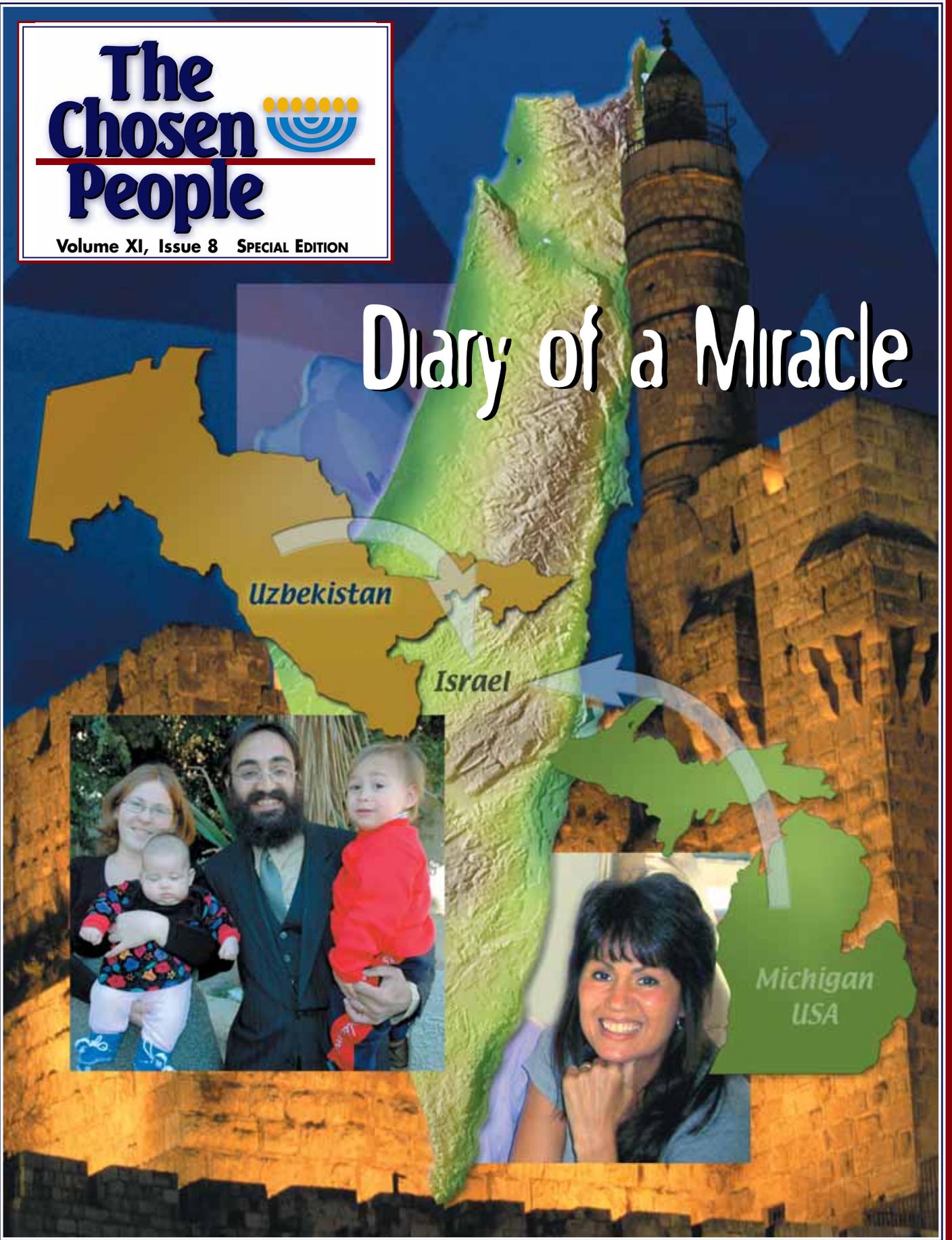
Volume XI, Issue 8 SPECIAL EDITION

Diary of a Miracle

Uzbekistan

Israel

Michigan
USA





Diary of a Miracle

When the Bible speaks of miracles, it often means

miracles of nature. Joshua's prayer made the sun stop. Through Moses, God parted the Red Sea. Daniel survived the lions' den.

But there are miracles of another sort—miracles of sacrificial love that seem to come from nowhere other than the transforming power of God working through the life of an obedient believer.

The tale began over a year ago. That was when Neriya, a gifted young Israeli and the father of two young children, began to lose his battle against chronic kidney disease. Twenty-eight years old and already on the transplant list, his need for a new kidney became dire. Waiting for a suitable organ could take years—a luxury Neriya did not have, particularly knowing that his brother had died of the same kidney ailment. Time sped by, and Neriya's situation grew worse. But where would a suitable donor be found? Neriya's employer, Mitch, sent emails and letters to friends, asking for prayer.

Thousands of miles away, in Michigan, a pastor's wife, mother of six children, was alone in her kitchen, opening mail. Though Cyndi was not Jewish, her love for Israel and the Jewish people had grown and blossomed since meeting her first Messianic Jew some time before. She had been following Neriya's story through Mitch's correspondence, feeling somehow strangely drawn to the plight of this young Uzbeki Jew who lay gravely ill halfway around the globe. She opened Mitch's letter and spied the picture of Neriya and his family.

It was an update. Neriya's kidneys had stopped functioning. He was on dialysis nine to ten hours a day, every single day. Although there were smiles on the faces in the picture, Cyndi's heart sank within her and she began praying. All she could think to say was, "Lord, here is this Israeli man, so young, so sick, and yet serving You so faithfully..." but that was about as far as she got, because in mid-sentence of her thoughts, the Lord spoke to her:

I don't quite know how to explain that. And I don't know where it started and I don't exactly know how, but it was as if "something" moved upwards, taking my breath along with it in one swift movement. And instantly I knew what God was saying to me.

"You are asking me to do this?!"

I am not sure if I said it out loud or not. My heart was skipping beats and I didn't feel like I was breathing. I had never, ever considered donating an organ and I was surprised now, in wonderment, that the thought had never occurred to me concerning Neriya—but here it was!

Slowly I moved a few steps over to the kitchen sink. I looked unseeingly out of the window and set the newsletter down. Then I cried a little—it was a bit overwhelming! But I answered what my heart already knew, "Yes! Yes!"

I was ecstatic with joy! I am a reserved person, but I could not help but jump

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around the kitchen, laughing! Then I stopped and said to myself, “Wait a minute! What are you so happy about? You might be having surgery, you nut!” I laughed at my own joke. Then I kind of wandered around the house, trying to keep my mind on the housework. But all I could think was, “What do I do now?” Soon, the busyness of my family coming home from school, from work, brought me back to earth and I went on “auto-pilot”—a little distracted, but functioning!

The next day I tried to go about my normal routines, and at dinner, only my husband and youngest daughter were home. I really didn’t plan on it, but as we were eating, I rather nonchalantly asked what they thought of “donating organs” (not your normal dinner time talk!). Then I asked, “Um.... what would you think of ME donating an organ?”

I was getting some puzzled looks of disbelief and I stumbled around for a bit before I just kind of spilled it all out. The reaction was, well, cautious, as you might well expect! My husband the pastor said, “Well...let’s just be praying about it.”

It occurred to me the next day that I knew nothing about transplants at all. So I began spending any free moment I could looking up transplants on the Internet. It also

dawned on me that I did not even know my own blood type! Having had surgery three years ago, I called to inquire. I felt triumphant that I was armed with this beginning bit of knowledge.

Soberly, it then began to occur to me what Neriya and his family would be feeling if they knew what I knew! I didn’t want to get anybody excited, so I thought it might be a good idea to just “go in the back door” and perhaps ask if anyone knew what blood type Neriya was.

I called New York to talk to Mitch, but he wasn’t in. I asked Marcie, the receptionist, if she knew Neriya’s blood type. Well, that turned into quite a conversation—but she didn’t know the answer to my question. “Why don’t you email Mitch?” she suggested. I did. And I held my breath.

The Process Begins

When Neriya’s illness grew worse, Mitch flew to Israel to see what, if anything, could be done. Neriya, who was raised in a traditional Bukharan Jewish family in the former Soviet Union, had immigrated to Israel as a child and fell in love with his new country. One day, after serving in the Army like other young men his age, he met a young Russian man who asked him, “Have you read the Bible?”

“Of course not!” Neriya answered. He hadn’t seen any need to, since he attended synagogue and observed all the Jewish holidays.

His friend began to talk to him about the Messiah who was foretold in the Jewish Bible. Neriya knew the Messiah was supposed to bring world peace, but when he read some of the passages in the Hebrew Scriptures, such as Isaiah 53, he began to see a picture of a Messiah who would be rejected and despised by his people. The many Bible passages he read convinced him that Yeshua (Jesus) was indeed the Messiah of Israel. Yet Neriya was afraid to be different. He didn’t know how his family would react. But he didn’t want to deny his newly-found belief in the One who fulfilled the Messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Neriya began attending a congregation of Messianic Jews in Israel, and confided his dilemma to the congregational leader. “Why don’t you ask God?” the leader said. “He’s alive! Just talk to him in prayer.”

So for the first time in his life, Neriya prayed to God, and sensed that God actually answered him. From that moment, Neriya came to believe in Yeshua. He began to attend a Messianic congregation in Israel, and there he met Anna, a fellow believer. They married and have two small children, both under the age of three.

...to use a child in a... to us, a...



Not long after the wedding, Neriyah's health began to wane, and quickly deteriorated. The kidney malfunction that took the life of his older brother soon became an ever-present threat to Neriyah as well:

My disease had progressed to the point where I had to have dialysis every night. I couldn't travel or do anything, and I even had to take a two-hour nap in the daytime. I was tired all the time. I felt so bad for my new bride, Anna, and for the two little babies that God had given us. My name had been on the transplant list, but there was not a lot of hope of my receiving a kidney before my illness progressed too far to be reversed.

I knew people had been praying for me, and I wanted to believe in a miracle, but it just did not seem possible.

As Mitch checked his email in Israel, he encountered a strange request:

Monday, March 7

Shalom Mitch,

My name is Cyndi. I am sure you would not remember me, but my husband and I met you a few years ago while we were in New York... When I received your recent letter, I felt moved to try to at least see if it is possible to donate a kidney... I have been researching about it and it seems almost

impossible—there are so many obstacles! But if it were God's will, then all those things are nothing... I feel I must at least try by inquiring; it is so heavy on my heart...

Humbled by His great mercy,

Cyndi

The first question Mitch had was, "Who is Cyndi?" And so began a lengthy process, with God's hand guiding through every twist and turn.

Tuesday, March 8

Dear Cyndi,

I am in Jerusalem and spending time with Neriyah. He really does need the transplant. I take you seriously and will discuss this with him this week. I don't know what to say... your offer is simply incredible and I know you do this because of the Lord.

Your brother,

Mitch

Cyndi recalls the moment when Mitch's email arrived at her home:

The next day I received an email from Mitch. He "just happened to be" IN Jerusalem WITH Neriyah! He said he would find out the blood type and get back to me. I was so excited—I checked my email about every half hour! I could hardly stand it; waiting has never been easy for me in the first place. With each passing day, my excitement to check

the email began to give way to dread. Six days later, in my inbox appeared what I had been waiting for. But now, I was afraid to open it. Was I going to be able to deal with it if the answer was "no"?

Words do little to describe the relief and joy that flooded me when I read that we were blood compatible! I remember calling my husband to the computer to read the email. He asked me, "Are you SURE you want to do this?" Tears began to roll down my cheeks as I assured him that if we began matching, that yes, I was going to do it.

Meanwhile, the situation for Neriyah began to intensify:

Thursday, March 31

Dear Mitch,

I spoke with Neriyah. He is in the hospital in pain, with a stomach infection caused by complications with his dialysis. He could not talk a lot, but said that the only thing that is needed is for Cyndi to come to Israel. Here she has to undergo a lot of tests, including conversations with social workers. Everything should take up to two months. This current infection lets us know that his case is really urgent. Complications may be very serious, to say the least.

Michael Z. (Neriyah's immediate supervisor in Israel)



Waiting in Israel

The weeks that followed were a roller coaster of “hurry-up and wait” as complicated international travel arrangements were set in place. Percy J., Neriya’s area supervisor in Canada, became overseer of the process.

Neriya reflects on this time of waiting:

When Mitch told me about Cyndi in March, quite honestly, I could not believe it. It seemed too good to be true! And then there were all the obstacles to overcome. But Cyndi went through the tests one at a time, and the other barriers just seemed to fall away. Then there she was, in Israel, and the surgery was scheduled.

When the time came for the surgery, all my family was deeply concerned—but my wife Anna prayed. She encouraged me all the time and reminded me that after all the Lord had done in my life to prepare me to be His servant, He would not forsake me now.

Week after tense week went by as Cyndi underwent tests to see if she was compatible. Her children and husband joined her in the apprehension of waiting for the results. Each time, the tests affirmed that she did indeed qualify. Finally, after many medical and bureaucratic hurdles had been cleared, Cyndi—accompanied by

Percy’s assistant Ruth*—arrived in Israel.

Ruth’s journal records their elation and anticipation as the day of the surgery approached.

Monday, June 27

After settling in, we went today to the first appointments at the Beilinson Hospital with the doctors and psychologists. It was hard for Cyndi to see Neriya so weak and ill. Everyone we talk to and tell why we are here gives us the opportunity to talk about how God led Cyndi to this point. The two of us are walking testimonies of His miraculous intervention.

Thursday, June 30

We had lunch with Neriya’s parents, where Cyndi was able to tell about her desire to donate her kidney. His parents listened attentively and then the mother looked at Cyndi close to tears and said that this was from God. We ate and laughed and all rejoiced together.

The Great Day Arrives

Several weeks later, the waiting was over and the surgery was scheduled to take place. Ruth wrote:

Sunday July 17

We arrived at the hospital at 9:00 AM and met Neriya, who

was having his blood taken. We went into the room where he was and soon a young Muslim woman came in to take Cyndi’s blood pressure. Before we knew it, Neriya was telling her about Cyndi and the love that she had for our Messiah.

Monday, July 18

Today is the day. At 9:00 AM they came for Cyndi. I sat in the room with Neriya and Cyndi until they were taken in for the operation. The rest of the day was a matter of waiting. Finally, at 12:30 PM, they said that Cyndi was in recovery and the removal of her kidney had been a success. I rejoiced and phoned Percy right away—who had not slept at all waiting for news.

We sat together waiting for Cyndi to be brought back to her room, which happened shortly after 3:00 PM. When Neriya’s mother walked into her room, she just stood there with tears in her eyes, looking with love and confusion at this strange woman who had made this unbelievable sacrifice for her son. I went over and just held her and she wept under the weight of it all.

Then came the ordeal of waiting for news about the transplant—a much more complicated procedure.

Finally at 5:45 PM, the doctor emerged from the operating room.



Neriyah's surgery was a success! I looked at his mother and she laughed and cried while I danced around the room for sheer joy. Again I phoned Percy, who added his shouts of joy to ours.

A Dual Recovery

After the surgery, Neriyah and Cyndi would gingerly totter around the halls together, pulling along their little IV bags hung on wheeled poles. Cyndi reflects:

Neriyah recovered so quickly, I was a bit jealous! But sometimes he would have bad days and I would have good days or the other way around. I would watch as Neriyah interacted with people God put in his path right there in the hospital. Neriyah, doing what Neriyah does best—touching hearts, sharing calmly, gently, confidently his thankfulness to Yeshua. I watched as he talked with a man who was sitting in a little waiting area. I couldn't understand what was being said in Hebrew, but I understood the tears the man was crying!

Neriyah: An Israeli Miracle

Neriyah now looks forward to a healthy future:

Already the transplant has made such a difference in my health. I have so much energy! And this is very

important—my body has accepted the kidney so well that the doctors want to take me off the anti-rejection steroids which, as you probably know, can have some serious side effects.

This whole experience has taught me so much. No matter how difficult the situation that we are in, God is there with us. He cares. Everyone who in any way was involved in this transplant has heard Cyndi's amazing story. People in the bureaucracy, in taxicabs, in chance meetings, in churches and Messianic congregations—in all these and other places that we don't even know about—the story of Cyndi's love for God and her willingness to answer His call has become known. How can people deny that God is real when He has moved a complete stranger, an American woman who didn't even know me, to sacrifice a part of herself so that I might have life? She was truly a follower of the Messiah, who said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Cyndi: A Long Road and a Lasting Impression

When she recovered sufficient strength, Cyndi at last returned home and was reunited with her loving family. She later wrote,

People always asked me if I was nervous, or scared, or worried about the surgery. I never was. I had such perfect peace. God had been behind this thing from the beginning and we were in His hands completely. To see Neriyah walking around, looking so healthy, free from dialysis, full of energy, being with his family, being at the congregation, well...a lump always comes to my throat. I wish I could say that I have always obeyed God. But I cannot. But this was one time that I was so glad that I had!

I can't end this without saying how grateful I am to those of you who prayed for all of us, who emailed me, and who helped financially. And thank you to my family and husband, who supported me from the beginning and did without their mom and wife for a good two months—maybe even longer! I would also like to say thank you to all those in Israel who helped take care of me, and to all of Neriyah's family. More than just my kidney remains there in Israel, for my heart will never be the same again. I love you all so very much. I am most grateful, though, that I was allowed to be a small part of God's plan. It is only because of the love of Yeshua that any of this could have happened at all. ☆

(*name is changed)



Anna: The "Healthy Wife"

Sometimes, hard as it is to be ill, it is the close family member or friend that suffers all the more—in a different way. Yet, faith brings the “peace that passes all understanding,” as Neriyah’s wife Anna will tell you:

Before our marriage I knew that Neriyah was seriously ill and many people warned me that to marry him would be the mistake of my life. I wasn’t a hero who wanted to suffer—I just did not see him as a sick man. Neriyah does so much, and sometimes I think that if he were completely healthy, it would be very difficult to me to keep up with my husband! But there is another side—because he was so ill, I was always seen as the “healthy wife of Neriyah.”

When I first heard about a woman who wanted to donate a kidney for Neriyah, I did not know what to expect. But when I met her and got to know her, I found that she was smart and beautiful, with a strong sense of God’s guidance in her life. I just sensed that the Lord cared about my husband and had prepared something great for him.

For a long time, we did not know if Cyndi would be a compatible donor, but she passed test after test and finally arrived in Israel, ready to have the surgery. When Neriyah finally went into the operating room, I was sure that everything would be OK. I personally felt all the prayers of so many people, and was so encouraged by the hundreds of notes that we received by email. It’s unbelievable to me that so many people would care, because they love God, about my husband and our young family. ☆

Some of the many prophecies that

convinced Neriyah that Yeshua was the Messiah:

☆ He will be a Descendant of Abraham

Genesis 12:1-3: *The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

☆ From the Tribe of Judah

Genesis 49:10: *The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.*

☆ From the House of David

2 Samuel 7:12-13: *When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

☆ He will be Born of a Virgin

Isaiah 7:14: *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

☆ He Will be Born in Bethlehem

Micah 5:2 (5:1 Heb.): *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.*

☆ He will be God Himself

Isaiah 9:6-7 (9:5-6 Heb.): *For to us a child is born, to us a son is*

given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

☆ He will be a Prophet Like Moses

Deuteronomy 18:15: *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.*

☆ He will Come Humbly

Zechariah 9:9: *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

☆ He will be Crucified

Psalm 22

☆ He will be a Suffering Servant

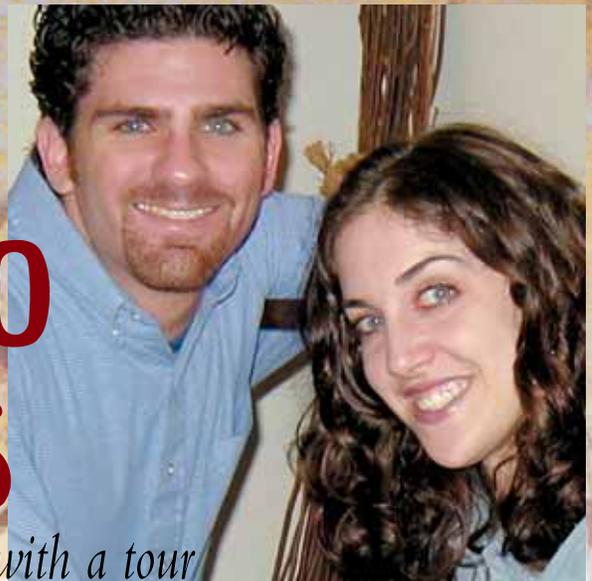
Isaiah 53:5-6: *But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

☆ Israel Will Mourn for Him

Zechariah 12:10: *And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.*

There is no person in all of recorded history who fits these descriptions more perfectly than Yeshua (Jesus in Hebrew). ☆

A Tale of Two New Hearts



Anyone who has ever traveled to Israel with a tour

will readily understand how quickly friendships can develop with the Israeli guides that so frequently accompany such trips. But when the members of Fellowship Bible Church got to know their Israeli guide, Uri,* and his wife, Shira,* something truly special was born.

Uri was a believer in Yeshua (Jesus), the Jewish Messiah and Shira, although cautiously open, was not. Still, the couple was glad to continue the friendships that were formed in the Land, and over the months, people from the church continued to communicate with them.

Then came the deep waters. Uri began to suffer from heart disease. As his condition deteriorated, he was confined to a wheelchair, unable to work. Hearing of his plight, one of the women from the church took action. She actually paid for Uri and Shira to come to the United States. When they arrived, Uri was already in heart

failure. Nothing less than a heart transplant could save his life. Their benefactress actually offered to pay for the surgery—if a heart became available in time.

The church prayed—and God answered. A heart became available almost immediately and the surgery was a success! It was at this time when Scott and Dana Nassau became involved as part of the team of caregivers the church organized during Uri's convalescence. They—along with others—showed Messiah's love by providing food and other necessities and by sharing the Good News of the Messiah with Shira. During one conversation, Shira asked Scott a number of searching questions and Scott simply told her, "Just pray and ask God to speak to you." This phrase stayed with Shira in the coming days.

Uri's health improved dramatically, and when the couple returned to Israel, he was actually

able to resume his work as a guide. Both of them had much to be thankful for—and Shira had much to consider.

A New Heart for Shira

It was hard for Shira not to see the reality of God every day, as Uri's dramatic recovery progressed. But she had also been deeply affected by the unconditional love that the church members had given her and her husband. Did this love really come from faith in Yeshua the Messiah, as those loving people had told her?

The step that convinced her came on yet another Israel tour that Uri was guiding. A pastor traveling with them gently but firmly challenged her to make a decision. She finally felt ready and said, "Yes" to the Messiah.

Only a God who is real can turn the terrible affliction of heart disease into not just one new heart—but two! ✠

(*names are changed)

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