‘O Jerusalem...’

Demonstrating Christian love for Israel during her 60th Anniversary Year

By Michael Hines

While teaching in the Temple courts in the days leading up to His death and resurrection, Jesus prophesied the destruction of the city he loved at the hands of Romans. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...” He cried, “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings” (Matt. 23:37).

It is a passage that offers a powerful insight into God’s heart for His covenant people and the place which, to this day, remains the focal point of their identity, belief, and aspiration. It is a moment that points back to the psalms of David, the prophecies of Isaiah and the lamentations of Jeremiah – scriptures that weave the bittersweet tapestry of grief and expectation that has characterized the Jewish people’s tumultuous journey through the ages.

Today, many Jews find it hard to grasp that after centuries of Church-led pogroms and persecutions, Jesus’ modern-day disciples would be such a dynamic force of global support for the re-born Jewish State. There is no need, however, to look any further than Jesus weeping over Jerusalem: an enduring symbol of the heart of compassion that drives the work and ministry of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem.

Taken from the moving opening verses of Isaiah 40, the ICEJ’s founding mandate is a constant reminder that, despite centuries of exile, persecution and suffering, the time to comfort Zion has come:

“Comfort, yes comfort My people!”
Says your God. “Speak comfort to Jerusalem.”
(Isaiah 40:1-2)

That’s why, for the past 28 years, our ministry has been at the forefront of efforts to demonstrate Christian love to the Jewish people, recognizing the centuries of hostility they have suffered, while testifying to the faithfulness of God’s covenant promises to them as a people in these days.

This year-end edition of Word from Jerusalem looks at some of the practical ways we have fulfilled our calling to Israel during the course of 2008 - the nation’s 60th Anniversary year. It is a powerful reflection of the unprecedented outpouring of love that continues to flow from the global family of the ICEJ in more 120 nations worldwide.

Thank you for your faithful support of our ministry throughout the course of this past year. We are privileged to remain your Embassy in Jerusalem.
Dear Friends,

The world is rapidly changing and, more than ever, the problems confronting nations are being settled on the global stage. This has been the case concerning the recent financial crisis which will likely accelerate and, in the not too distant future, usher in a new global financial system. This, too, the Bible speaks and warns about. At the same time, Evangelicals are being vilified and demonized. We saw this recently in the attacks against vice-presidential candidate Gov. Sarah Palin. One major TV network openly accused her of belonging to a religious cult because she attended an Assemblies of God congregation. Later they mocked her for claiming to be a person of prayer!

How did we get here? Because secular humanism has become the world’s new religion. This views man as the center of all things and in control of his own destiny. This thinking is old and bankrupt, yet it is embraced everywhere. As a consequence, more and more ‘Christian’ nations are removing anything Godly from the public place and century-old traditions that honor Jesus are being overthrown.

Some 2000 years ago there was also no room for Him in the inn and He was born in lowly circumstances. Simple hearts that sought Him were forever changed, and His star has always shone in the hearts of those that love Him. Indeed, He also celebrated Hanukkah (John 10:22), which this year coincides with Christmas. Known also as the Feast of Dedication, this Jewish holiday reminds us that God is at the center of human endeavour and from Him alone comes true light into the world. We need His miraculous intervention, as without it we shall drown in our worthless systems.

We are eternally grateful that the God of the Jews has revealed Himself to us through them. He is at the center of world affairs, and we recognize that, in our time, He has revealed His strength by restoring the Jewish people to Zion. In this we rejoice.

As we look forward to 2009, we can also testify to God’s amazing hand of blessing over our ministry this past year. In the pages that follow you will read story after story of Israeli lives that have been touched by our ministry thanks to the prayers and financial support of our Christian friends around the world. Not only have we been able to provide bomb shelters for the embattled youth of Sderot, but we’ve petitioned the United Nations in New York about Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s nuclear-charged incitement to genocide. You’ll learn about pioneering educational initiatives, new-look publications, and cutting-edge online campaigns, that have equipped us now, more than ever, to fulfill our mandate to support the nation of Israel and strengthen the church around the world in this critical hour of history.

So, as we celebrate His goodness this festive season, let us draw close and walk in His light. May your celebrations be blessed and joyful!

Yours in Jesus,

Rev. Malcolm Hedding
ICEJ Executive Director, Jerusalem
The Sons of Issaachar

Shortly after the death of King Saul, warriors from the twelve tribes of Israel travelled to Hebron to “turn over the kingdom” to David. First Chronicles 12 gives the account of their arrival, the men who served under their command, their weaponry, and reputation. The emissaries from one tribe, however, stand out as possessing qualities not shared by the others; qualities vital to the success of the newly crowned king. The “sons of Issaachar,” scripture tells us, “had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...” (1 Chronicles 12:32).

In the New Testament Jesus addressed the same theme. “Hypocrites!” He told the Galilean multitudes that crowded in to listen to him, “You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?” (Luke 12:56). Clearly, in the mind of Jesus, those of us that follow Him should seek to understand the days in which we live.

Rising to the Challenge

2008, therefore, saw the launch of an inspiring educational initiative designed to help Christians here in the US become better equipped to respond to the challenge of Jesus in Luke chapter 12.

The ICEJ Seminar Series, Discerning the Times, offers an in-depth opportunity to learn more about Israel, Islam and the purpose of God in this generation. Featuring a variety of informed speakers, historians and theologians who share a love of Israel and understanding of the significance of the regathering of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland in our day, Discerning the Times seminars in Tennessee in June and Washington DC in November left a deep impact on all those who came.

With more seminars already scheduled for Florida and Alabama in January and February 2009, plans are underway to bring Discerning the Times events to more cities across the nation throughout the course of the coming year.

If you or your Church would like to assist us in hosting a seminar to your area, or you would simply like more information about upcoming ICEJ teaching events, contact the ICEJ office at (615) 895-9830 or visit us online at www.icejusa.org.

New York to San Diego

From upstate New York to southern California, ICEJ speakers and teams spent much of the summer crisscrossing the United States, speaking to church and ministry leaders, youth groups and congregations, bringing a balanced biblical message of God’s love for Israel and His Church.

In two separate teaching tours, ICEJ Executive Director, Malcolm Hedding spoke to more than 10,000 people in meetings held across the Southeast, the West Coast and Texas. Television and radio appearances greatly multiplied those that were introduced to the work and witness of the Christian Embassy for the first time.

Meanwhile, Bram and Liesl Maas from the ICEJ’s Young Adults ministry, Grafted, and Charmaine Hedding, director of the ICEJ’s Sudanese refugee project Operation Hope travelled extensively raising support for the Embassy’s diverse aid projects in Israel and educational initiatives around the world.

What Would Jesus Say...?

At the forefront of our 2009 global teaching efforts is the ICEJ’s first ever Pastor’s Summit that will take place between March 6 -13 in the Galilee and Jerusalem. Featuring an impressive line-up of godly Christian leaders with a proven track record of hearing the voice of the Spirit, this one-of-a-kind gathering will seek to explore the pressing question of Jesus’ heart for the Church in these days by addressing the theme: “What would Jesus say to the Church, the Nations and Israel today?”

For more details, pricing and tour information call toll free: 1-866-393-5890 or go to: www.icejusa.org/pastors.
**Christmas in Bethlehem**

A difficult time of year for the persecuted Palestinian Christian community, Christmas offers a chance to reach out to our brothers and sisters in need. In addition to the annual distribution of Hannukah food baskets to needy Israelis, last Christmas saw the giving of gifts and provisions to believers in Bethlehem and refugees from South Sudan. ICEJ aid efforts in 2008 are set to end on the same note, giving comfort and joy to beleaguered believers throughout the land.

**Shelters for Sderot**

February saw the dedication of three new Lifeshield bus-stop bomb-shelters bringing urgently needed protection for Israeli school children in the besieged Gaza-border town of Sderot. Of the three shelters donated by ICEJ supporters worldwide, one was paid for exclusively through the generosity of American donors, many of whom responded to our Help Sderot campaign online.

During Passover a similar Lifeshield shelter was on hand to save the lives of several terrified Israelis after an incoming Kassam rocket landed just yards away from where they were standing. Shards of deadly shrapnel peppered the shelter's side, but the intended victims escaped unscathed.

In addition to the three Lifeshield shelters, the ICEJ was also able to present a $25,000 donation to Sderot's Karen Or Youth Center to help provide a safe room for the dozens of troubled teens using the facility to try and get their lives back on course.

**Meeting the Aliyah Challenge**

Drawing on over two decades of experience helping more than 100,000 Soviet Jews come ‘home’ to Israel, the ICEJ has redoubled efforts to respond to the growing challenge of North American aliyah.

This year saw the start of a pilot project launched in conjunction with the Jewish Agency to develop a telemarketing strategy to reach over 2 million North American Jewish families. The project builds on the highly successful 2004 telethon developed by the ICEJ in St. Petersburg, Russia in which some 10,000 Jewish households were identified from local telephone directories, 2,000 of which subsequently expressed an interest in moving to Israel.

The Embassy has also increased its efforts to assist Youth Aliyah projects in Russia, Belarus, the Baltic states and Canada. Donations to our aliyah program in 2008 have been used to make grants, pay travel costs, provide hospitality and equip community centers, helping Russian Jewish youths learn about Israel and take their first tentative steps on their journey ‘home.’

**Provision for Passover**

Since the early 1980s, the ICEJ has helped local non-profits feed Holocaust survivors, the elderly, victims of terror and other Israelis facing hardship and lack during Passover. 2008 was no exception, with the generosity of donors enabling us to put traditional ‘seder’ meals onto more Israeli tables than ever. Each meal testified to the sacrificial giving and concern of Christians worldwide, and each food gift was delivered with a scripture-filled card of encouragement.
A Safe Room in the Galilee
In the summer of 2006, deadly Hizbullah rockets rained down on northern Israel. But as the sirens sounded, elderly patients dependent on the doctors at the medical clinic in a small Galilee Kibbutz community were too frightened and frail to run for cover underground. In June of this year, we were able to open a bomb-proof safe-room in the clinic itself, a welcome place of protection for the pioneering generation of Israelis cared for by the medical staff each day.

Adopting Holocaust Survivors
Israel celebrated its 60th anniversary this year with an emphasis on how the nation rose from the ashes of the Holocaust in 1948. But alive in Israel today are 250,000 survivors of that terrible chapter of history, a third of whom live in dire poverty.

That’s why the ICEJ joined forces this year with the Israeli charity L’chaim (to life) to care for a large group of Holocaust survivors in the Galilee region, covering their medications, food, housing repairs and other needs.

Each survivor on our adoption list has an incredible story to tell. Hadassah was buried alive in a cemetery at night and survived on scraps in order to avoid capture by the Nazis. Until recently she was forced to choose between buying medicine or food. Today, however, Hadassah receives regular assistance for all her basic needs and the companionship and support provided through the ICEJ AID adoption program.

New Year Blessing
The dramatic plunge in the global financial markets coupled with the resignation of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert overshadowed October’s Rosh Hashana holiday, as Israelis anxiously eyed a New Year of challenges ahead.

That’s why, for many of those helped by the ICEJ’s New Year aid drive, the practical expression of Christian love shown in the distribution of food and financial assistance, appeared to carry a greater blessing than the actual gifts themselves.

“The social welfare department in our town hasn’t been able to give out even a symbolic gift at the holiday for the past 4 or 5 years,” said Avraham Abouya, an Ethiopian social worker in the underprivileged Israeli immigrant town of Kiryat Gat.

“If we did not receive help from ICEJ AID and others, we would have nothing to give to the many needy in our community,” he continued. “Your gift lets them feel that someone cares about them and that they are not forgotten.”

Solidarity from the Nations
In a climate of political and economic uncertainty, the largest ever Christian celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles saw the ICEJ bring almost 8,000 pilgrims from 100 nations to Jerusalem, injecting some $20m into the local economy. Spilling out onto the streets of the capital for the traditional Jerusalem March, pilgrims from every continent were greeted with cheers by thousands of Israelis who lined the parade route to welcome their Christian guests.
Standing Against the Tide

The ICEJ is called to stand against the rising tide of hostility that threatens the nation of Israel and the Jewish community worldwide. Whether it is our strategic partnership with Yad Vashem aimed at helping Christians better understand the roots of the Nazi Holocaust; our efforts to mobilize over 50,000 Christians worldwide to petition the United Nations to indict Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad before he has a chance to carry out his nuclear ambitions against Israel; or simply offering practical support to hundreds of African refugees who have fled Muslim warlords in Sudan and persecution in Egypt - we remain committed to taking a stand against the hatred and injustice that threatens our world. We do this all in the name of Christ, on your behalf and thanks to your generous financial support.

Yad Vashem

Nestled on the shaded southern slopes of Jerusalem’s Mountain of Remembrance, is the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial, charged with the duty of memorializing the 6 million Jews that were murdered by the Nazis. At its heart is the ‘Garden of the Righteous’, a quiet leafy walkway which honors those that risked their lives to rescue Jews from Hitler; people like Corrie ten Boom, Oscar Schindler and Raul Wallenberg. It is a place that begs the silent question of why they were so few.

As the memories of the Holocaust fade, it has become more important than ever that Christians confront the resurgent wave of anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial that is sweeping the nations. This year, therefore, the ICEJ deepened its strategic partnership with Yad Vashem by establishing a ‘Council of Remembrance’ for Christian leaders willing to educate the next generation of Americans about the Holocaust and lend their support to Yad Vashem. Find out more at: www.icejusa.org/yadvashem.

Operation Hope

Since June 2007 the ICEJ has provided aid and accommodation to scores of persecuted Christians from South Sudan, Darfur and Eritrea who have fled the east African killing fields through Egypt to find refuge in Israel, the only true democracy in the Middle East.

Yet, even in Israel, few of the thousands of refugees that have survived the perilous wilderness journey from Egypt have found the freedom they sought. Authorities, unsure of their legal status, placed most of them on arrival in a makeshift tent city in the grounds of an Israeli prison in the Negev.

In February, Israel agreed to relocate these refugees to Tel Aviv - a victory in our efforts to prevent their deportation back to Egypt. Operation Hope, the Embassy’s Sudanese refugee project, then stepped in to provide emergency housing and assistance and continues to work with local agencies to secure the necessary training and employment opportunities they need.

‘Stop Iran’ Petition

On Monday September 22, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad arrived in New York to address the United Nations. CNN’s Larry King offered him a prime time TV audience while the World Council of Churches hosted a dinner at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in his honor.

After an 18-month global petition campaign, it was left to the ICEJ to speak up for the 55,000 Christians in more than 120 nations that have called on the UN to respect its own charter and indict Ahmadinejad for incitement to genocide by delivering our petition to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon. ICEJ Media Director, David Parsons, was interviewed on Fox News outside the UN headquarters while three days later US Media Director, Michael Hines addressed a protest rally outside the Grand Hyatt, repudiating the welcome given to Ahmadinejad by mainline denominational leaders, and calling for tougher international action against the growing threat of a nuclear Iran.
Word from Jerusalem

Published in Israel and shipped to dozens of nations around the globe, Word from Jerusalem, has, for many years, been the primary vehicle of communication with ICEJ friends and supporters worldwide. As our global reach has expanded, however, it has become increasingly difficult for a single bimonthly publication to do justice to our extensive aid projects in Israel and advocacy efforts in the nations.

This past year, therefore, saw the launch of a monthly USA edition of Word from Jerusalem, combining world class teaching, reporting and analysis from Israel with relevant news updates on our growing work here in the States. It has been a vital part of our ongoing efforts to inform American Christians about Israel, and raise up prayer for ‘the peace of Jerusalem’ according to Psalm 122: 6.

Presidental Prayer Campaign

The closing months of 2008 ushered in a period of economic upheaval that proved to be a decisive factor in a compelling US presidential election race. With political turmoil in Jerusalem, the rearming of Hizbullah and the seemingly unstoppable rise of a nuclear Iran, the stakes for Israel on November 4 could hardly have been higher.

That’s why on September 11 we convened an eight-week web-based prayer campaign, “If My People...” drawing on God’s powerful promise to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:14. Over 500 people signed up online to fast and pray together with the staff from the ICEJ’s US Branch each Tuesday in the weeks leading up to the election, trusting God’s sovereign hand for the outcome.

Online Innovation

Throughout the course of 2008, we have worked hard to re-configure the ministry’s web presence here in the US to make it the most effective resource possible for Christians wanting to support Israel, grasp biblical truth, and confront anti-Semitism in all its forms.

Our new-look site offers a dynamic overview of our ministry projects in Israel and our educational outreach here in the United States. It features an extensive archive of written, audio and video resources dealing with the theology of biblical Zionism, the history of Christian-Jewish relations and original news commentary designed to enable Christians to better grasp the complexities of events in the Middle East. The new site also provides a secure and simple platform for online tax-deductible giving. Log on today at: www.icejusa.org.

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