NEW HOME FOR THE FEAST

WORD FROM JERUSALEM

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ICEJ AID

HAIFA HOME

JESUS AND THE PALESTINIANS

BY DR. JÜRGEN BÜHLER

NEW HOME FOR THE FEAST
LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

The modern-day restoration of Israel represents a paradigm shift in God’s salvation history. To be certain, God Himself never changes (Malachi 3:6). But He does arrange times and seasons in which His ways of operation can differ. This is the case with Israel today, as we are in a time of the Lord’s favor on Zion. Indeed, in Zechariah 8:11 the Lord declares: “But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days.” Here, God proclaims a new day in His dealings with Israel.

The prophet had thought that things just would not work out for his people, but God revealed that a change would come. “Just as I determined to punish you [...] so I am determined to do good to Jerusalem” (Zechariah 8:14-15).

The struggles and defeats would be turned completely around. People who called them cursed would now call them blessed (Zechariah 8:9-14). In the midst of this incredible shift, God twice challenges His people: “Let your hands be strong!” (verses 9 and 13).

In other words, God was bringing forth a change in Israel but He wanted to use the people to accomplish it. Therefore, He urged, “Let your hands be strong and act!”

Such promises always present new opportunities but they also come with responsibility. A season of harvest requires the harvester to fill the granary. This new season for Israel provides us with the great opportunity to become co-laborers with Christ in this exciting moment of redemptive history.

This issue of our Word from Jerusalem magazine will again inform you of the many new opportunities which God has opened to us. Whether it is the exciting new venue for our Feast of Tabernacles celebration in Jerusalem, our work with Holocaust survivors in Haifa, our Passover assistance to poor families in Ashdod, or our aid to new immigrants arriving from Ukraine, the opportunities are many and they are tremendous.

Please read these pages prayerfully and ask the Lord how He can use you in this new season for Israel.

Your co-laborer in Christ,

DR. JÜRGEN BÜHLER
ICEJ Executive Director

Support our ministry on-line at: www.icejusa.org
Next month, we will have an important update on our efforts to bring more Bnei Menashe home to Israel and how you can support this exciting aliyah operation. We will also have a report from the ICEJ’s annual national directors’ summit scheduled for Rome in early May. And expect another insightful Bible teaching from our ICEJ ministry team.

Learn more about our upcoming events at: www.icejusa.org/events
The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem is pleased and very excited to announce that our annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration will have a new home this coming October, as we will be moving to the brand new sports arena in Jerusalem.

Ever since 1981 the ICEJ has hosted the Feast in the Jerusalem Convention Center, drawing thousands of Christians each year for a dynamic celebration of this “Feast of the Lord.” Now, a new opportunity has opened to expand the Feast to accommodate larger crowds in coming years, as our following continues to grow worldwide. The ultra-modern Jerusalem arena will enable us to welcome over three times as many participants into our main services in the future.

“Our move to this new facility in Jerusalem is a very exciting development which will allow us to further grow the Feast of Tabernacles,” said Dr. Jürgen Bühler, ICEJ Executive Director. “We strongly feel that this is a God-given opportunity to expand our mandate to bring the nations to Jerusalem to worship the Lord and to stand alongside the nation of Israel. We trust God that in the years to come He will fill this new hall with the nations in the same way He was faithful to fill the previous venue.”

Mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat, has been particularly encouraging about the move to the new arena, offering the Christian Embassy the privilege of hosting the first major international gathering in the state-of-the-art facility.

So please join us in Jerusalem this fall for the historic opening of a new home for our Feast of Tabernacles 2014, under the theme “Restoration!” And do your best to bring as many pilgrims as you can with you.

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Sharon (Shay) Kasper
2013 Jerusalem March

“It was my 33rd Feast...to be in the midst of ‘prophecy being fulfilled’ was/is a thrill! This is the one time of the year I know I am doing the right thing!!!!”
FOR MANY DECADES, Evangelical support for Israel seemed rock solid. Today, however, many younger Christians in Western churches are hesitant to give Israel the same unconditional support which their parents did. Stories of Palestinian suffering have attracted the sympathy of young Evangelicals, rather than the struggles and triumphs of Israel.

They appear to be motivated more by the cause of social justice for the “oppressed” Palestinians than a prophecy-driven backing of the restored Jewish state. Many Christian youngsters have sided with the Palestinians as the perceived underdog. And in any case, Jesus in the Gospels seems to have very little to say about the current situation. So for a generation known to read far less from the Old Testament than previous generations, this supposed New Testament “silence” makes a big difference in how they view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Today, they simply ask: What would Jesus do?

A strong guide for answering these questions is to look at how Jesus dealt with the most prominent indigenous minority living in Israel during his time. As we shall see, there are many striking parallels between the Samaritan people in the days of Jesus and the Palestinians of today. So, who were the Samaritans, and how did Jesus treat them?

A Replaced People
The first time the Bible mentions the Samaritans is in II Kings 17:22-41, which gives their historical background. The passage recounts how the northern Kingdom of Israel was “carried away from their own land” (verse 23) and taken into exile in 722 BC by Assyria, whose King Sargon II followed a common practice of conquering empires in those days. He replaced the dislodged Israelites with people from other regions of his empire. Thus, he took people “from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities” (verse 24).

Jesus did not consider them as enemies, but reached out to them with compassion and love. He healed them, ministered to them, used them as examples to His Jewish brethren, and even envisioned them as part of the harvest.

Then in 586-582 BC, a second uprooting occurred when the southern Kingdom of Judah was also forced into exile by the Babylonian Empire. This gave even more room for the Samaritan people to expand and solidify their presence in the Land of Israel.

Resisting the Restoration
Some 70 years later, the Jewish people started to return to the land and to rebuild the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. Yet the Samaritan communities were among the strongest opponents of this Jewish restoration. They resisted it religiously and politically (Ezra 4; Nehemiah 4:1-3). Nevertheless, Jerusalem and the Temple were restored, and the Jews re-established their presence again in their promised homeland because the Lord was with them (Haggai 1:13).

Still, the Samaritans continued to oppose the Jewish return and to develop their own rival culture and national identity. Over time, they even cultivated their own form of pseudo-Judaism. The prophets and other writings of the Tanakh were rejected and only the five Books of Moses were considered binding. For this reason, they rejected the idea of a promised Messiah from the lineage of David who would restore the Kingdom for Israel. Rather, they expected a messiah figure who would be “a prophet like Moses,” as the book of Deuteronomy foretold, ushering in a moral and spiritual revival but not a national restoration.

Tense Relationship
By the time Jesus came along, the Samaritans had lived in the land for more than 700 years. They developed their
own narrative of the region’s history and considered themselves as the true Israel and rightful heirs of the land, claiming descent from Ephraim and Manasseh. The Temple in Jerusalem was considered an apostate shrine and its worship blasphemous to God. During the time of Alexander the Great, the Samaritans built an alternative temple on their holy mountain of Mt. Gerizim - the biblical “Mountain of Blessing” overlooking Shechem.

Meanwhile, the Jews did not recognize the Samaritans as part of their people and would not allow them to enter the Temple in Jerusalem. Yet when Jesus was a child, around 6-9 AD, Samaritans reportedly forced their way into the Temple during Passover and desecrated it by throwing bones into the sanctuary. Indeed, for the centuries it was a relationship characterized by tension and disdain. Jewish writings from 200 BC called Samaritans “the foolish people.”

Thus, during the time of Jesus both Jews and Samaritans refused to mingle (John 4:9). Jewish pilgrims who were on the way to worship in Jerusalem were harassed (Luke 9:51-55). The Jewish historian Josephus reports that in 52 AD, Samaritans even massacred a group of Jews making pilgrimage to Jerusalem. For Jews, the name “Samaritan” became a curse word (John 8:48). Even the disciples of Jesus were not fond of them and were anxious to call down fire on their heads (Luke 9:54).

**Jesus Crosses the Border**

Amid this hostile, complex relationship, Jesus sets a refreshingly different tone towards the Samaritan populace. The Gospels surprisingly record that Jesus healed them (Luke 17:16) and reached out to them individually and as a community (John 4). In fact, Jesus rarely shared such deep thoughts on worship, his own Messianic identity, and the Spirit of God as he did with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. The encounter eventually led to revival in the entire village, and it was there that Jesus spoke about the fields being white for harvest (John 4:35ff).

Then there is the legendary parable of the “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:30-37). Surely, it was offensive to Jewish listeners when Jesus described the Samaritan and not the Jewish priests as being a true neighbor to the man in need.

Thus Jesus would not allow himself to be drawn into the negative stereotypes of his time. When his disciples wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan village for not allowing their master to pass, Jesus rebuked them harshly, saying, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them” (Luke 9:56).

So Jesus did not consider them as enemies, but reached out to them with compassion and love. He healed them, ministered to them, used them as examples to his Jewish brethren, and even envisioned them as part of the harvest.

**Jesus and the Samaritan Narrative**

Still, while Jesus may have displayed an unusually kind attitude towards the Samaritans, he did not buy into their version of history. When Jesus healed the ten lepers, the only one who returned to thank him was a Samaritan, to which Jesus replied, “Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” (Luke 17:18).

Jesus had reached out to him with compassion and healing, yet he still
considered him a foreigner. The Greek word used here is allogenes, and is used in the Septuagint translation to mean the “stranger” who dwelt within the land. He would have many rights and privileges but was still excluded from the covenant promises and privileges of Israel. It was the same Greek word used in the inscription around the temple courts allowing access only to Jews but not to allogenes - foreigners.

So Jesus reached out to the Samaritan people but also maintained a clear distinction between them and the Jews. He once instructed his disciples “not to enter a city of the Samaritans,” but to focus rather on “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5-6).

Finally, when Jesus ministered to the Samaritan woman at the well, she confronted him with her people's own narrative: “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship” (John 4:20).

In other words, she wanted to know whose narrative was correct. And Jesus answered, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth…” (John 4:20–23).

Jesus portends that a new era in salvation history was soon coming when the place of worship would become secondary, and each believer would become a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit. But Jesus did not conclude that Jewish tradition would become irrelevant. On the contrary, he strongly challenged her Samaritan belief system, saying, “You worship what you do not know.” At the same time, he identifies himself with Jewish tradition in a manner rarely found in the Gospels: “We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.”

In a way, Jesus underscores with the Samaritan woman what he also stated to the healed leper, that they were “foreigners” to the covenants of God with Israel. The only way for them to become truly part of the household of God would be through the covenants and revelation given to the Jewish nation.

Note that he did not say that salvation is received by becoming Jewish, but rather that she should reconsider her theological and personal attitude towards the Jews. Decades later, the Apostle Paul would make the same point: “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:1-2; see also Romans 9:4–5).

Jesus thus affirms to the Samaritan woman the ancient Abrahamic calling of Israel, that through them “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). This covenant relationship with Abraham’s natural descendants remains even if they reject Jesus as their Messiah (Romans 11:28).

The Samaritans of Our Day
There is still a small Samaritan community living in Israel today. They number less than a thousand members and are mostly located on Mt. Gerizim, near modern-day Nablus. However, they are too small to play a significant role in current affairs. Instead, the community which more closely mirrors the dynamic between Jews and Samaritans at the time of Jesus is that of the Palestinians.

When the Jews were exiled by the Romans under Titus in 70 AD and later under Hadrian in 120 AD, other people groups moved in. Each successive conqueror seizing control of this major crossroads...
of the world brought their own ethnic mix, whether the Romans, Byzantines, Arab-Muslim invaders, the Crusaders, the Mameluks or the Ottoman Turks. The result is an indigenous people with a broad amalgam of ethnic backgrounds. Some Palestinian Christians today may claim to be descendants of the first Messianic Jewish community in Israel, but this would be difficult to prove after all the turbulent history in the region.

Scholars have also documented that when Jews started to return and cultivate the Land of Israel in the 1800s, many Arabs from neighboring countries also came to find work created by the Zionist movement.

Most of these people today would call themselves Palestinians. The vast majority of these Palestinians are Muslims. They not only reject the teachings of the Bible but also maintain that Jews have no right or historic connection to the land. Supported by the global ummah (body of Muslim believers), they resist by all means the restoration of Israel on the land much like the Samaritans in the times of Nehemiah and Ezra.

On the other hand, the small Palestinian Christian community shares in many ways a common faith in Christ and the Bible that we do, yet they have developed their own unique twist to history and theology. Many of the Palestinians contest the restoration of a Jewish State, both politically and theologically. In their own nationalized version of Replacement Theology, they not only see the Jewish people as being replaced by the Church but Jesus has become a Palestinian - one of the true custodians of the Holy Land. The promises of God to Israel have elapsed by either being fulfilled in Jesus or now falling to the Palestinian people.

Like in biblical times, both sides rarely mingle and the tense relationship has drawn even more blood than in the times of Nehemiah, Ezra, and Jesus.

**A Call for Today**

The unique approach of Jesus to the Samaritans can help us face the challenges of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today. Jesus demonstrated a heart of compassion towards the Samaritans, who were not accepted by most of his fellow Jews. Under his ministry, they were privileged as the only people besides the Jews who experienced the personal touch of the Messiah. After his resurrection, Jesus instructed his disciples to consider the Samaritans as the very first non-Jews to receive the Gospel. Phillip, Peter, and John did just that and brought a powerful revival to them.

Likewise, the Church today is called to show similar compassion in reaching out to the Palestinian people, and in particular the believers among them. They often feel forgotten by many Evangelicals around the world who show support to Israel but ignore their Arab brothers living in the land.

But we also learn from Jesus that despite the fact that Samaritans had lived in the land of Israel for hundreds of years, Jesus still considered them foreigners, even though it surely offended them. Jesus did not deny their right to live in the land, but he also affirmed the unique covenant promises enjoyed by Israel, including the land promise.

Paul notes that Jesus “has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers” (Romans 15:8). He was sent by God to “remember his holy covenant, which he swore to Abraham” (Luke 1:72ff), not to forget or forfeit that covenant.

So Christ, in his time of earthly ministry, set a remarkable example for us on how to reach out to the Palestinians - and the Christians especially - without compromising the divine calling of his own people.

This might be a challenging balancing act for today, as the harsh realities on the ground are often more complex than they appear. For Palestinian Christians to look into the eyes of young Israeli soldiers and call them “beloved for the sake of the fathers” is far more difficult than for Christians from abroad. For many Jewish believers, it is equally difficult to accept that their brothers and sisters those Palestinian Christians who question their biblical right to the land and even voice support for Israel’s worst enemies.

In the end, the Church in the nations is called to pray and care for both sides. We are called to uphold God’s promises to Israel and support a nation which after 2000 years has returned to the land of their fathers and remains surrounded by implacable foes bent on her destruction. We are also called to recognize the needs of our Arab brothers and sisters in the land who are often caught in between their long-time Muslim neighbors and the new Jewish reality.

That means we are called to be peacemakers without compromising truth. May the Lord help us in pursuing these worthy aims.
there, he was accompanied by a prominent Christian Zionist named George Gawler.

When Theodor Herzl published his book "Der Judenstaat" in 1895, he was quickly befriended by Rev. William Hechler, who became a sort of "foreign minister" for the young Zionist movement.

Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann in turn was befriended by Arthur James Balfour a decade before he became the British foreign secretary and signed the Balfour Declaration.

But Menachem Begin was the first Israeli prime minister to warmly embrace Christian Zionist support in an open manner. He, too, had developed friendships with individual Christian leaders like author Dr. David A. Lewis.

But Begin went further by actively seeking Christian support and acknowledging its value in public. There are several reasons why.

First, Begin realized that he shared a certain biblical worldview with Evangelicals. Dr. Gordis noted that, Begin looked on the Bible as Israel's title deed to the land and saw the Jewish return as fulfillment of the vision of the Hebrew prophets, just as many Christians did.

Second, Begin was surrounded by several close advisors who shared his friendly disposition towards pro-Israel Christians. This included Harry Hurwitz, who had been exposed to genuine Christian supporters of Israel in his native South Africa and was the key official within Begin's inner circle who convinced him to approve the founding of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem in 1980.

Finally, Begin's last years in office were marked by several steep challenges to the nation, including the American AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia, the US "reassessment" after the Osirak air raid, and the fallout from the First Lebanon War. To meet these challenges, Begin actively sought Christian support, especially from among prominent American Christian leaders like Jerry Falwell and Ed McAteer.

Yet Begin's first public embrace of pro-Israel Christians came at the ICEJ's Feast of Tabernacles in September 1981, when he stood before a gathering of several thousand cheering Christians from dozens of nations and told the crowd: "Tonight, I know that we are not alone."

Later, when Begin resigned from office, the Christian Embassy sent him a letter of gratitude for his friendship. In response, Begin wrote back: "Your decision to establish your Embassy in Jerusalem at a time when we were being abandoned because of our faith was an act of courage and a symbol of the closeness between us. Your acts and gestures gave us the feeling that we were not alone."

The partnership between Israel and her Christian friends has grown ever since into what Israeli officials now view as a "strategic asset" for their nation. Current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, knows this history well and continues to value and nurture Christian support. But this official embrace truly started with Menachem Begin.
The ongoing revolution in Ukraine has caused great concern for the Jewish community there, which numbers some 200,000 people. Both pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian elements are blaming Jews for provoking the current unrest and neo-Nazi forces are taking advantage of the chaos to make their presence felt in the streets. Thus many Jews are thinking about moving to Israel and some have already begun making their preparations to leave. Reports indicate that the number of Jews making aliyah from Ukraine has already doubled so far in 2014.

In March, the Jewish Agency for Israel approached the Christian Embassy with an official and urgent request for help in bringing Ukrainian Jews to safety in Israel. There is a special need at present for funding to cover extra aliyah flights, plus transport and logistics for poorer Jewish families in Ukraine who cannot afford the travel costs at present.

Since the early 1990s, the ICEJ has sponsored over 42,000 Ukrainian Jews in making their way home to Israel. Some were courageously evacuated by Christians from conflict zones, while others made the decision to move to Israel in quieter times. But this unexpected crisis in Ukraine now demands that we act once again to bring needy and endangered Jews home from this troubled region.

Please help us by making your most generous contribution for the urgent aliyah of Jews from Ukraine. The cost for sponsoring these flights is around $600 per passenger, which includes extra baggage fees and any needed domestic flights within Ukraine.

DONATE ON-LINE TODAY AT www.icejusa.org/ukraine
ICEJ OPENS NEW BRANCHES IN AFRICA, ASIA
BY REV. JUHA KETOLA

FOUR NEW ICEJ NATIONAL BRANCHES were officially inaugurated and dedicated before the Lord in March and April, including in Burkina Faso, Benin, and Togo in West Africa, and then the latest one in Singapore.

The favor of God continues to go before us as prominent spiritual leaders in these countries are embracing the God-given mandate of the Christian Embassy and welcoming our ministry warmly into their nations.

West Africa
In March, I travelled to West Africa where all the major Evangelical streams were represented at official ICEJ branch launches in Burkina Faso, Benin, and Togo. Senior leaders of the Baptist, Apostolic, Apostolic Missions, Assemblies of God, and other Evangelical movements all welcomed the new ICEJ branches and received their appointed leaders with honor and joy.

I was joined in these dedication meetings by the ICEJ’s esteemed West Africa Representative, Dr. Abdou Maiga from Senegal, who assisted me in setting apart the National Directors and the Board Members in each country with prayer and the laying on of hands.

We commissioned them to fulfill their calling and assignment within the Body of Christ, and to make a difference on behalf of Israel in their respective countries.

In addition to ministering the Word of God, I had discussions and meetings with the key evangelical Christian leaders in all these nations, and I also had the honor of meeting with several government ministers. These various cabinet members showed genuine interest in the global ministry of the ICEJ and were receptive to strengthening the connections between Israel and their nations.

In the Republic of Benin, we met with Foreign Minister, Dr. Nassirou Bako-Arifari; Minister of Industry and Trade, Naomie Azaria Hounhoui; and Minister...
of Justice, Valentin Djenontin. In Togo, we were hosted by Minister of Justice, Koffi Esaw, who interestingly enough is also a well-known and beloved evangelist in his own country. Indeed, he is a very powerful and Spirit-filled man of God.

Singapore
The believers in Singapore call their country “a red dot” due to the fact that it is located in the midst of countries with largely Muslim populations, such as Malaysia (29 million) and Indonesia (246 million). Meanwhile, Singapore only has about 5.4 million people living on a very, very small island. The color “red” in front of the name signifies the saving blood of Jesus, who also has protected and blessed them enormously both spiritually and economically.

Singapore not only has a strong and prosperous economy, but also has many powerful and influential believers in different areas of society. They truly have strong Christian ministries, good local churches – and a love for Israel!

With great joy and thankfulness to God, I joined together last month with prominent Singaporean spiritual leaders – among them the greatly respected “Papa” Khoo Oon Theam – to set apart National Directors, Jehu and Christine Chan, during the inaugural ceremony of the ICEJ Singapore Branch. The Lord was gracious again and several prophetic words were spoken over the new directors, as well as concerning the future impact and good fruit of the ICEJ’s global ministry.

FRANCE
ICEJ-FRANCE HOSTS NATIONAL CONFERENCE

IN APRIL, ICEJ Media Director, David Parsons, was invited by our French Branch to speak at their annual national conference held this year in the cities of Lyon and Valence. David gave a series of teachings on the “Restoration of Israel,” while popular violinist Serguei Popov also came to perform several medleys of Hebraic and classical worship songs. The audiences were greatly encouraged by the ICEJ ministry team. Meanwhile, Paule Bessac, who died unexpectedly last year from a brain tumor, was honored for her faithful work over recent years as the administrator for ICEJ-France.
PASTORS FROM ISRAEL BLESS GERMANY
BY LISA SCHMID

In March, the ICEJ’s German Branch hosted a pair of national conferences, one in the north and one in the south, to reach the whole country with a message of serving the Lord and standing with Israel. The gatherings in Stuttgart and Hannover focused on worship, prayer for Israel, relations between Jews and Arabs, persecuted Christians in Muslim lands, and ministering to the young generation.

ICEJ-Germany National Director, Gottfried Bühler, invited two ministers from Israel as special guest speakers – Messianic Pastor Oded Shoshani and Ugandan Pastor Umar Mulinde. Thanks to their presentations, the 1,200 participants gained greater understanding of God’s plans for Israel and the great diversity within the Body of Christ worldwide.

Pastor Mulinde told of how he was born into a large Muslim family, but became a follower of Jesus as a young man. In late December 2011, he was attacked with acid by Muslim extremists outside his church in Kampala because of his love for Jesus and support for Israel. In desperate need of proper medical care for the horrific acid burns on his face, Mulinde was offered free treatment at the world-class burn and trauma center at Sheba Hospital near Tel Aviv. Now under the care of the ICEJ head offices in Jerusalem, Mulinde has nearly completed his reconstructive surgeries and is travelling once more to tell his story to audiences in various countries. He challenged German Christians to support Israel openly and to be fully aware of the dangers of Islam.

Pastor Shoshani explained that Israel was sent into exile twice because of disobedience but is coming back to her homeland in modern times through the grace of God to await her spiritual restoration. “God always remembers His promises,” Shoshani stressed. “He stays faithful towards His people Israel. In the Land of Israel she will recognize the Lord. Coming to Germany and seeing all of you praying for Israel, I have reason to hope and believe!”

Dr. Dan Shaham, the Israeli Consul General in Munich, also addressed the gatherings about the importance of German-Israeli relations in the post-Holocaust era. His wife, Charmaine Hedding, founder of the non-profit Shai Fund, also shared about three joint German-Israeli humanitarian aid projects she is involved in to help needy communities worldwide.

OPEN HEARTS IN GERMANY

Last month, ICEJ International Speaker, Doron Schneider, visited six cities all across Germany to share about Israel, God’s salvation plan, and how churches can be a blessing for the Jewish people today. Often driving long distances between meetings, he arrived to find churches packed with people hungry to hear about what God is doing in Israel. In several instances, Doron’s preaching brought real conviction on the audience and even a pastor was moved to repent and rededicate his life to Jesus.
WE ARE LIVING in an age of expanding knowledge. Every day, we are bombarded with information, equivalent to 177 newspapers worth of information from: TV, Internet, email, text messages, magazines and apps. Today’s global companies process more than 60 terabytes of information annually, about 1,000 times more than a decade ago. The information barrage starts the second you open your eyelids in the morning.

Our access to information today is remarkable. George Washington had to wait two weeks to find out he had been elected president of the United States. That is how long it took for the news to travel from New York to his Mount Vernon home in Virginia. Now, someone in Mexico can watch developments as they occur live in Ukraine. It is of little wonder then that young people boast of their knowledge. Many youth feel they are the wisest generation in history. Yet possessing information does not necessarily translate into wisdom. If that were the case, we would be surrounded by geniuses solving all of our societal problems. Moreover, I see many confused individuals filled with information who cannot distinguish right from wrong, war from peace, sin from holiness, or truth from lies. No wonder Israel is so misunderstood in our churches.

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to Your word” (Psalm 119:9).

We must encourage our young people to search the Scriptures and meditate on the counsel of God. We cannot bail out and think they are too young to understand the Bible. His Word is always appropriate and impacting. Then, it is up to our young people to accept its message and step out in faith.

Those who want to grow must break away from the surrounding garbage, laziness, coldness and biblical illiteracy, and grow up in the Word. It will take courage, and it may well be a lonely road, but it is right and it is worth it.

May we, as adults, do our part to serve young people in their place of need. We must raise up young adults willing to build God’s Kingdom, speak loudly for the truth, and pray for the nation of Israel.

Jani Salokangas is Director of the ICEJ’s young adults program, ARISE. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and two daughters.

RECENTLY, ICEJ ARISE Director, Jani Salokangas, visited Switzerland for a series of meetings with young adults in both the German and French-speaking parts of the country. Young Swiss adults enjoy a high quality of life with an abundance of material blessings, which often means they do not feel much need for God or take church seriously. As a result, many churches are struggling to retain their youth and keep their values in order. However, Jani encouraged them that only Jesus is able to fill the void left by a shallow, materialistic lifestyle. “The youth were hungry for the word of God and it was encouraging to see that even in rich countries, people want something more than just what society can offer,” said Jani.

Meanwhile, ARISE Assistant, Emanuel Mfoukou, recently visited Sweden to share about the ICEJ with several congregations. He also held several meetings with pastors and church leaders to strengthen our work there. “There is a deep passion among the Swedish people I met to hear more about Jesus and the land where He was born,” Emanuel reported.
CHRISTIANS AND THE HOLOCAUST
A THOUGHT-PROVOKING INTERVIEW WITH SHAYA BEN-YEHUDA OF YAD VASHEM

IN LATE APRIL, Israel observed its annual Holocaust Remembrance Day – Yom HaShoah. The main ceremonies were held at Yad Vashem, the nation’s official memorial to the six million Jewish victims of the Nazi genocide. For the past seven years, the ICEJ has partnered with Yad Vashem to take its message to the Christian world. ICEJ Executive Director, Dr. Jürgen Bühler, recently spoke with Shaya Ben-Yehuda, Director of International Relations at Yad Vashem, about our common cause in remembering the Holocaust and combating anti-Semitism today.

Jürgen: Yad Vashem is one of the most revered institutions in Israel today and every visitor to the land should go spend time there. What is Yad Vashem’s purpose and vision?

Shaya: Yad Vashem is a Holocaust center established in the early 1950s by survivors who came here from Europe. It is a state authorized institution where survivors can bring their memories and ensure they will be preserved, and that the future of Holocaust remembrance will be kept. It’s also a place where people can come to study, learn, and understand what happened and to ask themselves, “What is my personal responsibility in order that this atrocity will not happen again?”

Jürgen: I remember visiting the archives of Yad Vashem with you one day and you showed me the original blueprints of Auschwitz... Today, there are people who deny the Holocaust – they say it never happened. Isn’t what you are doing crucial to tell the world it was real?

Shaya: Absolutely! The records we keep of the millions of names of victims make it clear to anyone that the Holocaust did take place.

Jürgen: Yad Vashem is one of the most revered institutions in Israel today and every visitor to the land should go spend time there. What is Yad Vashem’s purpose and vision?

Shaya: Yad Vashem is a Holocaust center established in the early 1950s by survivors who came here from Europe. It is a state authorized institution where survivors can bring their memories and ensure they will be preserved, and that the future of Holocaust remembrance will be kept. It’s also a place where people can come to study, learn, and understand what happened and to ask themselves, “What is my personal responsibility in order that this atrocity will not happen again?”

Jürgen: I remember visiting the archives of Yad Vashem with you one day and you showed me the original blueprints of Auschwitz... Today, there are people who deny the Holocaust – they say it never happened. Isn’t what you are doing crucial to tell the world it was real?

Shaya: Absolutely! The records we keep of the millions of names of victims make it clear to anyone that the Holocaust did take place.

Jürgen: What does Yad Vashem mean – the Hebrew words?

Shaya: This is from Isaiah, chapter 56, when Isaiah tells the nation that every human being who will follow the way of justice, the way of righteousness, the way of the Lord, will have a place of memory within the house of the Lord. This is the phrase, yad va shem – “a memorial and a...
name.” It means a place of memory to the six million victims of the Holocaust.

**Jürgen:** You have your own personal history in that your ancestors went through the Shoah. So what does it mean for you personally to work in such an institution?

**Shaya:** For me, it’s a very meaningful place and a commitment to my family. My mother came from Germany, my father escaped from Vienna in Austria, but many of my relatives perished during the Holocaust. My grandfather was taken to Buchenwald and died there. I feel Yad Vashem is an important place because from there you can educate the world. From there you can teach youths about their responsibilities. And there you can also ensure survivors that their memories of the Holocaust will live on.

**Jürgen:** With your history as the son of Holocaust survivors, you undertook a very courageous step seven years ago when you went to your leadership and challenged them to establish a Christian Desk at Yad Vashem. This was an historic step for Israel and for Jewish-Christian relations...

**Shaya:** Indeed, it was not an easy step. It took some time... I came up with the idea because I saw that Yad Vashem deals with the worst atrocity and this atrocity has a history, a background. It did not come from nowhere... It’s based on the hatred Jews suffered from Christianity for many centuries. So I said that if in this place, we can establish a Christian Friends of Yad Vashem which will forever teach the Christian world, and build bridges between Jews and Christians, and also raise support for the work of Yad Vashem, then it will give a message that we can put the past behind us. We cannot ignore it, but we can seek to build a better future together for humanity.

**Jürgen:** And that means there are groups of pastors coming to Yad Vashem today to be educated about this Christian history and how the Church acted during that time.

**Shaya:** Right! On Yom HaShoah this year, we will again open another seminar for Christian leaders from all over the world. We bring them for a week to Yad Vashem to study about the Holocaust and learn how to teach its moral lessons in their own communities.

**Jürgen:** You mentioned Yom HaShoah, this day in Israel when the whole nation comes to a complete standstill for two minutes to remember the six million Jews who died. How does the Holocaust still affect the average Israeli today?

**Shaya:** The Holocaust has a very deep meaning within Israeli society. It’s a day when we can all reflect on the history of what happened to us, what we lost and our responsibilities for the future. Because, when you come to this day, the whole country is united in mourning the loss. But we also think about our responsibilities to work together to defend this country. And we also value what we have managed to build here 60 years after the Holocaust. It’s a miracle!

**Jürgen:** It is a miracle! ... It’s like the prophet Ezekiel says in Chapter 37, that this nation was re-built out of the ashes. A nation so close to vanishing is now building one of the most successful nations on our planet today. Still, all over Europe there are radical right-wing parties spreading anti-Semitism. Does this concern you that history might repeat itself?

**Shaya:** Obviously, we are very concerned about the left-wing anti-Semitic groups in Europe as well. We feel that it’s an obligation for Christians and every human being to understand what can happen when you ignore the right of anyone to exist... I think all of us together – Jews and Christians who believe in the Bible – we know that everyone was created in the image of the Lord... So we have a common responsibility to ensure that the world understands this.

**Jürgen:** Amen! So what can Christians do in order to help Yad Vashem keep that message alive?

**Shaya:** I would say, first and foremost, it is important to learn about the Holocaust and understand what happened. If you can come to visit Yad Vashem, please do so. If you cannot come, our website offers a lot of valuable information. And, please partner with us. Here in Israel, every Christian that is involved with us and our mission is considered among the righteous of the nations. ☝

Please consider a special gift to support the work of Christian Friends of Yad Vashem. Make your best donation online today by visiting:

www.icejusa.org/yadvashem
YOUR WINDOW INTO THE HAIFA HOME
A REVIEW OF RECENT HAPPENINGS AT THE ICEJ’S SPECIAL ASSISTED-LIVING HOME FOR HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS IN HAIFA
BY BIRTE SCHOLZ

PASSOVER PROVISIONS

Just ahead of the Passover holiday in mid-April, residents of the ICEJ’s Home for Holocaust survivors in Haifa joined with other volunteers in packing boxes of food for hundreds of needy Jewish families in the area. The residents were thrilled to take part, given that they had experienced much lack and hunger themselves as children during the Nazi occupation of Europe. Thus the survivors were eager to pack unleavened matza bread and flour, grape juice, kosher cookies, and an array of other food items in the Passover packages. They were joined in the task by ICEJ staff members from Jerusalem, as well as a group of local policemen. The holiday gift packages were later delivered to some 1,000 needy families, single parents, and Holocaust survivors in the greater Haifa area just in time for the Passover holiday. “It warms my heart to see our Christian friends come and help us so that the needy might celebrate Passover in dignity,” said Haifa Home director Shimon Sabag. “That is wonderful!”

YOUNG VISITORS

A special gift from ICEJ-New Zealand allowed the Haifa Home to purchase ten computers and set them up in a dedicated room for use by the elderly residents with assistance from local school children. Twice a week, students from a nearby school come to show the residents all that can be done with a computer. The survivors especially like to “explore” online maps to locate where they once called home before the horrific events of the Holocaust changed their lives forever. Meanwhile, the Haifa Home recently received a visit by a large group of young students from a local school. They met with residents in the community dining hall and listened to their life stories. Afterwards the students sang songs and danced with the residents, before offering them gifts. The children say the encounters help them understand better what Jews suffered in exile and why the nation of Israel exists and must remain strong.
MEET THE RESIDENTS

Michelle is one of the newest residents at the ICEJ's Home for Holocaust survivors.

IN HER NATIVE ROMANIA, she found out at a very young age what it was like to be hated for being Jewish. In primary school, children pelted her with stones and called her a “dirty Jew.” Severe restrictions were placed on Jewish citizens and life became hard for them. In between the frequent bombings of the city, Michelle tried to earn a little money by babysitting in order to help buy food for her family. She and her mother survived the Holocaust, but most of her extended family perished. To this day, Michelle suffers from nightmares of that terrible time. But now she enjoys living among a caring community of fellow survivors who understand her. “I am glad that I live in Israel and feel safe here,” said Michelle.

OUT AND ABOUT

The Haifa Home residents really enjoy their frequent day trips to different places around northern Israel. Recently, a group of residents who study with a Bible teacher and tour guide each week went with her to the top of the Mount Carmel range to be inspired by the story of Elijah confronting the prophets of Baal. They also shared a picnic while enjoying the panoramic views of Haifa’s harbor and the Jezreel Valley.

GET INVOLVED

The Haifa Home’s community dining hall also serves at present as a multi-purpose room for recreational activities, workshops, art classes, exercises and lectures. With the number of residents increasing, a more suitable place is needed for the many different activities held there. Design plans have now been drawn to construct an activities hall in an empty space between two of the main buildings, to take advantage of existing walls. Please consider donating towards this project, and to the many other needs at the Haifa Home for Holocaust survivors!

YOU CAN GIVE ON-LINE TODAY BY VISITING

www.icejusa.org/Expanding-Haifa-Home
IN APRIL, Israel marked the revered Jewish holiday of Passover. As the week-long holiday approached, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem encouraged our supporters to help us serve the poor in Israel by providing them with the means to celebrate this time-honored holiday according to tradition. Thanks to the generous response from Christians worldwide, the ICEJ was able to prepare Passover baskets for hundreds of needy families, including new immigrants, single-parent homes, the elderly, and especially Holocaust survivors.

The Embassy staff in Jerusalem pitched in to help pack the Passover gift boxes with unleavened matza bread, grape juice, other traditional Passover fare, and basic food staples. The packages also included Haggadah booklets telling the Exodus story, as well as a holiday greeting card from the Christian Embassy.

The Passover gift boxes were then distributed to families in Jerusalem, Ashdod, Kiryat Gat and other Israeli towns. In Ashdod, ICEJ AID worked with the local social services to make sure the Passover packages especially reached the large families in desperate need of help.

“We are so grateful for how you bless us for the holidays,” said Leah, a single mother. “It’s very touching not only to receive these amazing gifts, but even to hear that there are Christians in other countries who think about us, and who want to help us. It’s so special!”

In Kiryat Gat, the ICEJ team met with members of the Ethiopian Jewish community. Many of the families who made aliyah from Ethiopia are still struggling to adjust to life in modern Israel and remain under the poverty line. But they dressed up for the occasion and thanked God for the help they were receiving from Christian friends.

Keeping the Passover

Passover is the biblical Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is celebrated every spring by Jews all around the world to remember the ancient Israelites’ miraculous deliverance from bondage in Egypt, led by Moses. The week-long holiday starts with a festive meal called the Passover Seder, which includes Scripture readings and songs and can last several hours. This sacred holiday is a very special occasion for Jewish families, and many begin preparing for it well in advance by cleaning their homes of all leaven (yeast). Then during the week of Pessach, they eat unleavened matza bread to remember how the Hebrew children had to pack up and flee in haste from Egypt.

With the help and support of Christians like you, we can make a difference in the lives of many here in Israel! Make a generous donation today at: www.icejusa.org/aid
GOD’S EYES not only see individuals, but also He collectively sees families, cities, and nations (Exodus 12; Leviticus 16; Acts 16:31; Matthew 11:21-24; Genesis 12:1-3; Deuteronomy 32:8; Job 12:18-25; Jeremiah 1:5; Matthew 28:19; Acts 17:26; Revelation 7:9).

This means we need to enlarge our hearts and stand in the gap in our prayers on behalf of whole nations. This is exactly what we did as a staff during the weekend before Passover.

Praying on Mountain Tops
In mid-April, our Jerusalem staff travelled by bus to Israel’s northern border with Lebanon and Syria. Standing on a high ridge looking over into Lebanon, we raised our prayers on behalf of that nation and all her people. We asked for God’s grace to be manifested in Lebanon, and that the Lord would grant them revival.

Later that day, we arrived on top of majestic Mount Hermon along the Syrian border and again, looking over into Syria, raised a corporate prayer before the Lord. We especially pleaded with the Lord to turn the tide of violence in Syria! We also asked that God’s purposes be fulfilled over that nation (Isaiah 31:35-36).

The descendants of Abraham were exiled for two thousand years in all corners of the world, but in our times God has gathered them back as a fully independent nation living once again in their ancient homeland. What a joy this is for our hearts! It speaks volumes of how God faithfully and righteously guides and conducts world history. He has not withdrawn Himself from the affairs of the nations. It is also confirmation that entire nations are included in God’s heart, mind, and purposes.

Israel Will be Saved
The Bible also affirms that the next phase for Israel will be her spiritual recovery in Jesus, the Messiah, and that all Israel will be saved – as a nation (Romans 11:26; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Luke 21:24-28; Matthew 23:39). This is a clear call for all of us to pray for Israel – as a nation! And to pray for the nations surrounding her!

God will Restore Justice and Peace
Eventually, peace will come to all nations in the person of the returning King, Jesus (Isaiah 2:1-4; Jeremiah 3:17; Psalm 2, 96, 98). This glorious truth is like a continual, powerful current undergirding our spirits, and moving us forward in Jesus with great hope. This truth also inspires us to faithfully pray for Israel and the neighboring nations with faith in our hearts. The Kingdom of our God will come and His will shall be done here on earth as it is heaven!

Join Isaiah 62 Prayer Initiative
Please join our Isaiah 62 Global Prayer Initiative every first Wednesday of the month on behalf of Israel, the surrounding nations and our ministry. People from more than 60 different nations are already interceding with us, some with fasting. Let us hear from you!

Make the month of May a special dedicated month of prayer. Pray for the nation of Israel, the surrounding nations and your own nation. Take the word of God, let it quiet your spirit, be filled with His promises, and ask the Lord to guide you how to pray.

Detailed points of prayer are available in our monthly Isaiah 62 Prayer Letter via email. To receive our monthly prayer letter, sign up at: www.icejusa.org/Isaiah62_Pledge
He is telling the truth; it is evident in what he says and does. “God gave me,” said Ray Ramirez, “a passion for people.” This theme was repeated again and again in the hour I spent interviewing Ray in his Jerusalem office at the ICEJ.

His office is obviously that of a musician. On the desk there is the standard computer, but also an audio mixing board and microphones, with cords twirled around them. An acoustic guitar was in the corner on the floor, with speakers, cords and other electronic things, and extension cords of every color. The high-tech equipment was impressive, but secondary. His talent and music, as extraordinary as they are, are also secondary. His presence on the platform as he leads worship is bigger than life, but that’s not his focus—it’s the people he leads in worship and the staff under his care.

Ray’s ministry is kind of a point-counter-point. For each people-oriented or God-centered aspect of his work, a technical dimension is coupled with it. One could sum up the key motifs of his ministry like this:

**Management:** he cares for and supervises personnel, creative projects and implementing vision.

**Creative Direction:** he ensures that ICEJ looks and sounds excellent in electronic, print, radio, and TV media.

**Music:** he composes music, leads worship, and orchestrates the Feast of Tabernacles and other events.

**Mechanics:** he masters and oversees audio-visual technology and computers.

Married to Nyki in 2000, their son Kenton was born in 2008, and little Naomi in 2012, thankfully waiting until the day after the Feast of Tabernacles concluded with its immense weight. It was as if she knew how important her birth would be to her parents and she wanted the moment to count. The year before, Nyki and Ray had been expecting twins. It was during the Feast 2011, that Nyki had her first doctor’s appointment for the babies she was carrying, when, to their utter shock, the doctor discovered the babies had died. Grieving their loss, yet leading a celebration of worship—sometimes we are called to do extraordinary things. “I will trust You,” became Ray and Nyki’s repeated refrain. The couple tells their story of God’s care for them through their sorrow, ministering to lonely parents who have lost children of their own. This is music of a different kind.

In 1985, when he was only 14, he made his first trip to Israel with his parents – returning often. Ray’s ministry began by serving in a local church in Melbourne, Florida where he helped his mom with music. He also worked professionally in the theatre as a free-lance technician, gaining proficiency in music and in technology, which form the twin pillars for his current responsibilities. Then in 2003, he came to assist with technical production during the Feast of Tabernacles. “Everybody knew me as the guy in the back who wore the headset,” he quipped. When Chuck King, the former Music Director for ICEJ needed a replacement, he knew Ray was it. “Move to Jerusalem,” King told him. In 2007, Ray and Nyki sold their home in two months, just before the market tanked.

One of the key things Ray remembers of that transition was this impression from God: “You focus on things that will help change peoples’ lives, and I’ll do the rest.” “Anybody can sing songs,” Ray said. But seeing people touched and changed takes the ministry of music to a higher plane.

The reluctant young man from Florida who helped his mom and just wanted to make records is now in Jerusalem, on a platform with worldwide media coverage, with an international ministry that reaches multitudes. The guy in the back is now the guy in front. Isn’t that just like God?
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