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THANKSGIVING and the FEAST OF TABERNACLES

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Holiday Gifts
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There is a lot we do not know about the very first Thanksgiving. Historians even debate where and when it took place—was it in Florida, Virginia, or Massachusetts? The most famous harvest meal, usually considered to be the first Thanksgiving, however, took place in the fall of 1621 in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

The Mayflower landed on the shores of Massachusetts on December 21, 1620, and some 100 pilgrims waded ashore in the icy waters only to find themselves unprepared for the harsh winter. Without food and supplies, sickness and disease took its toll—barely half survived till spring. The local Wampanoag Indians pitied these sickly newcomers and taught them how to plant crops, harvest them, and store reserves for the winter.

Once their fall harvest was gathered, the Pilgrims set aside time for a harvest festival to give thanks to God. They were joined by Chief Massasoit and some 90 Wampanoag Indians who contributed deer to their meal of cod, sea bass, turkey, duck, and geese. They feasted and celebrated for three days, thanking God for their abundant provisions.

**THE BIBLICAL PRECEDENT**

While harvest festivals were common in other parts of the world, including England and Holland where they had lived, the Pilgrims were not given to secular festivities. They were very religious and approached everything from a biblical perspective. Therefore, we can be assured that their gathering was focused on the biblical doctrine of thanking God for His provision and blessing upon them. We should also expect that the Feast of Tabernacles was the biblical precedent for their harvesttime celebratory feast.

An anonymous Pilgrim hymn found in Songs of the Pilgrims published in 1887 confirms this:

> We had gathered in our harvests, and stored the yellow grain,  
> For God had sent the sunshine, and sent the plenteous rain;  
> Our barley-land and corn-land had yielded up their store,  
> And the fear and dread of famine, oppressed our homes no more.  
> As the chosen tribes of Israel, in the far years of old,  
> When the summer fruits were garnered, and before the winter's cold,  
> Kept their festal week with gladness, with songs and choral lays,  
> So we kept our first Thanksgiving in the hazy autumn days.
The Pilgrims were religious separatists who had fled persecution in England to live in the more tolerant society in Holland before they then set sail for a place where they could be free to build a society based on biblical principles and freedom of worship. They found in the pages of their Bibles a precedent for the freedom from bondage for which they were looking. The Israelites had been freed from slavery, crossed the Red Sea, and entered the promised land where they were free from oppression and able to serve the God of Israel. These biblically motivated Christians looked at the great Atlantic Ocean as their Red Sea, and the New World was their promised land where they would be free to live and worship as they wanted.

After arriving at the shores of their promised land and encountering the harsh cold winter without adequate supplies, they most certainly would have found comfort in the biblical story of the Israelites’ wilderness experience. They too encountered harsh conditions with no food or water, and just as God supernaturally provided for the Israelites, He would provide for the Pilgrims as they sought His help.

Sure enough, that help had come in the form of the local Indians who taught them how to grow grain and live off the land. They truly had much to be thankful for in the fall of 1621, and who better to celebrate with than the very Indians who had helped them so much.

The Pilgrims also had much to fear as they faced an uncertain future in a harsh environment and surrounded by other Indian tribes who were hostile. But they understood the biblical precedent for setting all of those troubles aside and celebrating God’s provision during the Feast of Tabernacles.

The biblical Feast of Tabernacles is a weeklong festival during which Jewish families gather together in a temporary dwelling (booth) to enjoy a celebratory dinner together to remember what God did for the nation of Israel as He delivered them out of Egypt and cared for them in the wilderness. It is not a feast that celebrates the absence of difficulty but a celebration of how God sustained them through the hard times. Therefore, these family gatherings are filled with thankfulness, celebration, and joy!

**THE GOD OF ISRAEL**

The God that the Pilgrims were thanking for their survival and blessing was the very God who had protected, fed, and cared for the Israelites in
the wilderness. As we face the Thanksgiving holiday here in America, it is important to remind ourselves who we are thanking and all He has done for us.

God Our Provider: He provided water from a rock and Manna to eat in the wilderness. He had provided the Pilgrims with an abundant harvest that would see them through the coming winter and allow the Plymouth colony to become established and flourish. Hence the roots of our nation were established.

God Our Guide: He led the Israelites through the desert with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God had led these courageous Christians through rough times and waters to their promised land because of His desire to see a nation established on a biblical foundation that would then be a light of truth shining into a dark world.

God Our Defender: After the Egyptian army drowned in the Red Sea, the remaining Egyptians fled because they saw that the God of Israel was fighting on behalf of His children. Soon the Amalekites attacked the Israelites, and the Lord gave them the victory again. The Pilgrims knew there were hostile Indians in the area but that they could rely on the Lord, their defender, for safety.

God Who Dwells with His People: God instructed Moses to build a temporary structure (tabernacle) where His presence would reside because He desired to dwell with His people. The Pilgrims knew that through times of prayer and repentance, coupled with thanksgiving, they could keep in right relationship with God, and His presence would remain with them during their difficult times.

OUR AMERICAN HERITAGE

Ever since that early Thanksgiving feast, churches and states alike have called for days of prayer, fasting, and thanksgiving. According to Dr. Paul Jehle, the executive director of the Plymouth Rock Foundation, more than 300 days of public fasting and prayer, or days of thanksgiving for answered prayer, occurred between 1607 and 1800.

The first national day of thanksgiving was called in 1777 by the Continental Congress to thank God for the victory at the battle of Saratoga. They then issued annual thanksgiving proclamations each year through the end of the Revolutionary War.

Once the new Congress was established under the Constitution, a resolution was drawn, asking the president to call for a day of public thanksgiving and prayer. In 1789, George Washington’s first official act as president was to do just that.

As we prepare for Thanksgiving some 230 years later, let’s remember the words of His proclamation and pray for godly leaders who will acknowledge our nation’s indebtedness to God and call us all to repentance and thanksgiving as He did:

Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly implore His protection and favor ... I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be, that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country ...

That we may unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions; to enable us all whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our national government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a government of wise, just and constitutional laws ...

... and generally, to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best. ☺️

Happy Thanksgiving
To All of Our ICEJ USA Family!
FAITHFULLY SUPPORTING ISRAEL

Be a part of that future generation spoken of in Psalm 102 that is partnering with the Lord in His work to restore Zion, for the set time has come.

PARTNER LEVELS

Covenant Partner
Show your love and support for Israel by partnering with the ICEJ. Become a Covenant Partner at a giving level of at least $30 a month. In appreciation, you will receive the following resources:

- A Partnership Certificate
- The Word From Jerusalem magazine
- A year-end gift of appreciation

Ambassadorial Partner
Partnership in ministry is a gift God gives to strengthen and undergird His work. Become an Ambassadorial Partner with the ICEJ at a giving level of at least $100 a month. In appreciation, you will receive everything in the Covenant Partnership level plus:

- Exclusive access to ICEJ’s quarterly Mid-East ministry update conference call with Jerusalem
- An invitation to attend our ICEJ USA leadership briefing during our national conference

Builder of Zion Partner
Isaiah declared the Lord will call Zion’s walls “salvation” and her gates “praise” (60:18). As we walk together side by side, the ICEJ would be honored if you would become a Builder of Zion Partner at a giving level of $2,500 a year or more. In appreciation, you will receive everything in the Ambassadorial Partnership level plus:

- A discount of $200.00 on a pilgrimage tour to Israel during the Feast of Tabernacles or other qualifying tour
- An additional gift acknowledging you as a Builder of Zion Partner

Gateway of Zion Partner
Show compassion for Zion and bless the people of Israel. The ICEJ would be honored if you were to become a Gateway of Zion partner at a giving level of $20,000 a year or more. In appreciation, you will receive everything in the Builder of Zion Partnership level plus:

- The opportunity to meet with ICEJ leadership and/or receive personal briefings on ICEJ projects that are of interest
- Special invites to exclusive events such as pastors’ lunches and VIP meetings that are held in your area or community
- An additional gift acknowledging you are a Gateway of Zion Partner

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Online: www.icejusa.org/partner
The US Branch of the ICEJ has embarked on a campaign to donate approximately 10 bomb shelters to protect the children and residents of southern Israel. The first shelter has been placed at a community arts center.

The Eshkol Regional Arts Center is located in a former school that is just one mile from the Gaza border. Volunteer artists help relieve stress by using art as trauma therapy for students struggling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) because of the incoming rockets. The Center also hosts regular festivals for the community.

This shelter was the third one funded by longtime partner Deby Brown, President of Song for Israel in California. When visiting the art center, she saw a nearby restaurant where the sign on the door reads: “We have no bomb shelter, but great food and great people!” Deby was introduced to the owner and told her she would soon need to take her sign down because a bomb shelter was on its way to the neighboring arts center!

A second shelter was placed at the Path to Hope Kindergarten for Ethiopian children in Ashkelon. While schools in Israel are not segregated, there is a large population of Ethiopian immigrants in Ashkelon. Their kindergarten had only one shelter and left many students exposed during rocket attacks. Thanks to the generous donors of the ICEJ USA, the children and staff now have adequate coverage.
HELP PROTECT ISRAELIS WITH YOUR PRAYERS & GENEROUS SUPPORT

URGENT BOMB SHELTER CAMPAIGN
BOMB SHELTERS COST ANYWHERE FROM $24,000 TO $60,000, DEPENDING ON THE SIZE AND TYPE OF CONSTRUCTION REQUIRED. HELP THE ICEJ USA RAISE THE $240,000 NEEDED TO PLACE APPROXIMATELY 10 SHELTERS IN SOUTHERN ISRAEL.

GIVE TO WWW.ICEJUSA.ORG/BOMBSHELTER
Our eldest resident of the Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors, Shoshana Kolmer, died on the evening of July 2 in Ramban hospital, Haifa. She left behind her son, Asher, and daughter, Pnina, plus grandchildren and great grandchildren. In December, she would have turned 100.

Shoshana, a Survivor of Auschwitz, came to the Haifa home in 2013 with her mentally challenged son, Asher. Here, life changed for her completely. She became well known after she won the second annual Beauty Contest and shared her story with many people and groups. Her daughter Pnina said:

“These last years were the best years in Mom’s life. She received wonderful care and had the opportunity to share the horrors of the past, which she wasn’t able to before. Through the Haifa Home she received a stage to tell her story.” Pnina continued, “My mother was a very strong woman. Also, this time I was sure she would survive.... She didn’t and died when we held hands together.”

After Shoshana’s funeral, one visitor was deeply touched by the Home for Holocaust Survivors, which is run by Jews and Christians. He shared that his recent visit to Berlin completely changed his way of thinking: “First, I thought that all Germans were Nazis. Going to Berlin showed me that the people there remember also the Holocaust. Now I hear about all the work you are doing here, at this home, with Christians from Germany and other countries. It’s wonderful!”

Thank you for those who supported Shoshana in these years through our Adoption Program. There are still Survivors who need your support and love. Please, consider adopting a Survivor with your church, community, home group, family—or even alone! 😊
Sometimes a story begins even before its beginning. This is the story of ICEJ Homecare. After the Six-Day War in June 1967, Soviet Jews were stirred to return to their roots and immigrate to Israel. There were no direct flights, and many obstacles were imposed by Soviet authorities. Once the Iron Curtain fell in the late 80s, ICEJ became part of the story of this modern-day exodus when God provided pathways to Israel through our international branches.

Then in 1996, in response to an influx of about 5,000 Olim (immigrants) coming into Israel every month, the ICEJ took over an initiative started by Dutch nurses who recognized the great needs of many new immigrants. This basic home nursing program for Russian Jewish immigrants initially became part of ICEJ’s Soviet Jewry Department. ICEJ Homecare has since come to the aid of scores of people who have made Aliyah but struggle with serious health challenges. Many are elderly, sick, and often traumatized by the darkness of the Second World War.

God says in Jeremiah 32:41: “Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.” Homecare reflects this verse and the Father’s heart for His beloved people. Aliyah is a beautiful fulfillment of God’s purpose. Jews come to Israel full of hope, yet because of difficult circumstances, discouragement can overwhelm them. Homecare steps in when nobody else is there to help and has been a channel of comfort and hope for over 30 years.

For many, the visits from ICEJ Homecare are a highlight of their week. Eyes light up when a Homecare worker comes in bringing joy and compassion into their rooms and hearts.

Please join us in making an impact on elderly Russian Jews today. When you send your generous gift to ICEJ Homecare, you make a difference one life at a time! 😊

Corrie van Maanen (left), our dedicated Dutch ICEJ Homecare staff member

Irmieli, a Finnish nurse with ICEJ Homecare, visits with Chaya (1999).

DONATE TODAY AT WWW.ICEJUSA.ORG/HOMECARE
This summer, Dr. Mojmir Kallus, the ICEJ’s VP for International Affairs, Barry Denison, VP for Operations, and Israeli pastor Birlie Belay traveled to Mwanza, Tanzania for a regional conference aimed at expanding the ICEJ’s impact in East Africa. The delegation from Jerusalem received an impressive welcome. Indeed, there is nothing quite like African hospitality! Local African Christians were singing and dancing and expressing their genuine excitement over greeting the ministry team from Israel.

Held on the shores of beautiful Lake Victoria, the conference drew hundreds of bishops, pastors, and other church leaders and laymen from across East Africa, all with a burning desire to learn more about Israel and see God’s purposes for their nations fulfilled. This gathering was the first ICEJ regional conference in East Africa. Representatives came from the Swahili-speaking nations of Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, and Rwanda to hear about God’s enduring covenant with the Jewish people and discover Africa’s important role in blessing Israel.

“It was encouraging to witness such great enthusiasm to learn about the things God is doing in Israel,” said Dr. Kallus. “After much positive feedback from the participants, we know that the Lord is on the move. God is birthing something new in the hearts of these leaders.”

Word of the meeting spread quickly, and a representative of the Regional Commissioner came to address the conference and greet the visitors from Jerusalem. Her visit was even covered by the national television.

The East Africa regional conference was a success because of the incredible work of our team in ICEJ Tanzania, who prayed, fasted, and put immense effort into organizing this groundbreaking event. They even went above and beyond by traveling to neighboring countries to recruit participants. In addition to covering all the costs of the conference, plus accommodations and meals for all the visiting pastors from the surrounding countries, they also collected offerings for Aliyah with such dedication that our team came back with more than $18,000 in donations.

This conference not only bolstered the work of the ICEJ in Israel but it also blessed and encouraged unity among the local churches and leaders in East Africa. We anticipate opening several new branches in these East African nations unified by their common Swahili language, while special editions of the *Word From Jerusalem* magazine are also in the works in their native tongue.
Over the past decade, the ICEJ was able to establish a number of national branches in West Africa and to encourage attendance at our Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. These efforts have been bearing much fruit. For instance, over 600 pilgrims from French-speaking West Africa made the journey to Jerusalem last year to take part in the Feast. We were also blessed by the anointed preaching of Nigerian pastor Dr. Enoch Adeboye as well as the powerful singing of a gifted worship team from Togo.

This year we welcomed a large number of West African pilgrims, coming from such countries as Benin, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo. Some came with the blessing and sponsorship of their governments, and several national delegations included members of parliament and cabinet ministers. The ICEJ and our Feast celebration is becoming more widely known thanks to the cooperation of Christian broadcasters like Dieudonne Gollett of LMTV, based in the Ivory Coast.

From the founding of the ICEJ in 1980, our national branch in South Africa has always been a source of strong support and unique contributions to our work and ministry. After a time of restructuring and transition to new leadership, the South African branch is poised for new growth and great things ahead.

“South Africa is a multi-cultural Christian country where many have a strong heart for God,” explains Vivienne Myburgh, the ICEJ South Africa national director for the past two years. “We are experiencing open doors from a wide spectrum of believers who want to understand the heart of the Father for Israel, and to hear more about the outworking of God’s plans for the Jewish nation in these days.”

Here are some achievements for which we are grateful:

- ICEJ South Africa has excellent relations with the local Jewish communities and leadership, and its leaders have been invited to speak at their conferences on several occasions. Vivienne Myburgh even received the Jerusalem Prize from the World Zionist Organization in recognition of her commitment to the nation of Israel and the South African Jewish community.

- ICEJ South Africa is partnering with committed Indian pastors who have opened a satellite ICEJ office in the Natal area.

- We have experienced open doors in neighboring Namibia to teach about Israel and to lay a foundation for establishing the ICEJ’s work there.

- Membership has increased more than fourfold to over 10,000 members within the last two years.

- The branch has generated over $140,000 in donations in the last 20 months toward the work of the ICEJ.

- Finally, we must give due recognition to all the faithful pioneers who ploughed the
In August, thousands of Bolivian Christians gathered in Santa Cruz for an annual gathering convened by ICEJ Bolivia National Director Apostle Alberto Magno to proclaim their faith in Jesus and demonstrate support for Israel.

Apostle Alberto oversees the First Evangelical Baptist Church, a nationwide network of churches with over 50,000 members. Their annual congress seeks to have a positive spiritual impact on every sphere of life in Bolivia—including family, government, and culture—and to express Christian solidarity with Israel. After several days of solid Bible teaching and inspiring worship, the conference ended with a march through the streets of Santa Cruz where over 15,000 Bolivian Christians boldly declared their love for Christ and their stand for Israel.

Among the guest speakers and worship leaders invited to the gathering were Apostle René Terra Nova, national director of ICEJ Brazil; Dorothy Bedford of the Feast worship team; Tiffany Mallillin of our Jerusalem staff; and the ICEJ’s Spanish-language coordinator, Claudia Fierro. The audience was deeply touched as Claudia described firsthand how their support of the ICEJ was ministering to the needs of Holocaust Survivors, new Jewish immigrants, farmers suffering from arsonists along the Gaza border, and many other Israelis.

“This congress was much bigger than what we could have imagined,” Claudia said. “Bolivia is usually our biggest Spanish-speaking delegation at the Feast, and also our largest and most faithful donor nation in Latin America. And it is because Apostle Alberto and his team work very hard all year round to be able to bless Israel the way they do.”

“Being here has allowed me to understand that this love for Israel is almost supernatural,” she added. “It is only possible if God puts it in their heart. And they accomplish all this despite Bolivia still being a developing country and having an anti-Christian, anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian government.”

Apostle Alberto insists that since he started taking Bolivian pilgrims to the Feast of Tabernacles in 1989 and bringing generous donations from his followers to the ICEJ in Jerusalem that his churches have multiplied—not only in terms of new members but financial prosperity as well.
In July, Royal Highnesses Crown Prince Alexander and Crown Princess Katherine of Serbia hosted ICEJ President Dr Jürgen Bühler, his wife Vesna (who is Serbian), and their family at their palace in Belgrade. Crown Prince Alexander was especially keen to share how, some 20 years ago, the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church arranged for his return from exile via Jerusalem, where the Crown Prince was blessed in a celebratory ceremony.

“The royal couple took time out of their very busy schedule to give us insights into their family history and their vision for the Serbian people as well as their efforts toward peace and mutual understanding in the world,” said Dr. Bühler. “They also were very interested to hear about the ministry of the ICEJ in Israel and worldwide.”

Dr. Bühler was also hosted in the Serbian Parliament by National Assembly Deputy Speaker Dr. Vladimir Marinkovic.

Recently, ICEJ VP and Senior Spokesman David Parsons traveled to Stockholm to assist ICEJ Sweden’s new national director, Gitten Öholm, in her efforts to revitalize our branch there. David and Gitten first held meetings with Israeli Ambassador Ilan Ben-Dov, as well as five members of the Swedish parliament, before recording several TV shows with Manager of TBN Nordic Anders Wisth on the prophetic fate of Jerusalem. He also spoke at the branch’s annual national conference and preached in several churches. David reports that while Sweden is considered secular, there is a strong remnant of Christians there who stand for biblical morals and for Israel. Meantime, Gitten is a well-known pro-Israel voice and has the backing of the veteran ICEJ supporters there to press ahead with taking the branch to new levels.
Apostle René Terra Nova, the national director of ICEJ Brazil, recently hosted Dr. Jürgen Bühler for a series of meetings in the city of Manaus that demonstrated the growing Christian support for Israel in this key Latin American country. Accompanied by local Israeli pastor Oded Shoshani, Jürgen addressed a summit for nearly 7,000 Brazilian pastors—as well as a mass rally in the local “sambadrome,” where a crowd of over 100,000 Christians joined together in prayer for Israel.

“It was a tremendous thrill to look out over the sea of flags and smiling faces and to sense the great zeal which these Brazilian Christians have for the Lord and for Israel” said Jürgen. “We came back to Jerusalem completely energized by their outpouring of love and support for the Jewish nation and people. Apostle René and his team are doing an amazing work there in Brazil.”

Apostle René is one of the most widely-recognized and respected Evangelical leaders in Latin America, with oversight of a growing Pentecostal movement that numbers over 7 million believers. His home church alone has some 70,000 members, and he has instilled in them his great passion for building the kingdom of God and for standing with Israel.
Brazilian and Israeli officials have duly honored Apostle Renê for his strong support for the Jewish state. Several years ago, the Israel Ministry of Tourism recognized him for his stellar track record of bringing tens of thousands of Latino Christians to the ICEJ’s annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration in Jerusalem. Then in May, Israeli Ambassador Yossi Shelley joined with the president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, in awarding him the “Jerusalem of Gold” medal for his many accomplishments in building stronger relations between the nations of Israel and Brazil.

Brazil is in a time of political and social transition, marked by a return to biblical values and closer alignment with Israel. This is largely due to the rapid growth of the Evangelical community, now 30 percent of the population. Many Evangelical Christians supported the successful candidacy of Jair Bolsonaro in the recent presidential election. Apostle Renê has held meetings with President Bolsonaro, and they both credit much of the positive changes happening in their country to prayer and to the government’s stronger stand with Israel.

In a recent video posted on his popular Instagram and Twitter accounts, President Bolsonaro congratulated Apostle Renê for hosting his twentieth annual national prayer and missions conference. He also thanked God for sparing his life after an assassination attempt during last year’s presidential elections.

“I owe my life to God and also to your prayers,” said President Bolsonaro. “Congratulations for 20 years of this event interceding for Brazil. At this time also a very, very special hug to Apostle Renê Terra Nova.”

The Brazilian state of São Paulo has declared that the Feast of Tabernacles is an official government holiday. In a unique law, the state decreed that observances of the biblical festival of Sukkot will take place each year exactly 14 days after the Jewish new year of Rosh Hashanah.

The person behind this law is the ICEJ regional director for the city and state of São Paulo, Apostle Fabio Alves Abbud. He is doing a great work to mobilize Christians to stand with Israel in his region of Brazil and to bring Christians on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Apostle Fabio and his wife Claudia are leaders of the El Shaddai Church movement and have spiritual oversight of 300 churches in greater São Paulo. Descended from a traditional Arab Christian family who fled persecution in Syria two generations ago, Apostle Fabio says he was the first one in his family to have a real encounter with Christ. He was raised up in ministry under Apostle Renê Terra Nova, which means he, too, loves Israel.

Apostle Renê Terra Nova is awarded the “Jerusalem of Gold” medal by President Bolsonaro and the Israeli Ambassador.

SÃO PAULO OFFICIALLY CELEBRATES TABERNACLES

The Brazilian state of São Paulo has declared that the Feast of Tabernacles is an official government holiday. In a unique law, the state decreed that observances of the biblical festival of Sukkot will take place each year exactly 14 days after the Jewish new year of Rosh Hashanah.

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YOUR ISRAEL ANSWER:

How the Church Failed the Jewish People
By Susan Michael, ICEJ USA Director

It is a part of fallen human nature to need a scapegoat. Human beings tend to look for someone else to blame for their problems, someone to look down upon so they feel better about themselves. It’s easier to hold grudges and even take revenge than to forgive and demonstrate the very compassion we preach.

This is true of the history of the church and its posture toward the Jewish people. Soon after its inception, the church fell prey to Satan’s lure and embraced the idea that the Jews killed Jesus and were therefore cursed by God and deserving of maltreatment.

Theological Seeds Sown
Evidence of the differences between church and synagogue showed early in the life of the church. Disputes between Jewish Christians and Jewish leaders created a schism that eventually led to the separation of Jewish Christians from the community. By the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 AD), Jewish leaders saw Jewish Christians not as Jews with different views about the Messiah but as Christians. Jewish Christianity began to fade, while gentile Christianity gained preeminence.

Anti-Jewish thought soon permeated the theology of early Christian leaders such as Justin Martyr (185–254 AD), Origen of Alexandria (185–254 AD), and Tertullian (160–225 AD). Saint John Chrysostom (349–407 AD), one of the most eloquent preachers of truth and love (whose very name meant “golden-mouthed”), said of the Jewish people, “God hates you.”

Centuries of anti-Jewish rhetoric had become embedded in church doctrine and gave Christians appropriate reason to hate the Jews. Their children were kidnapped and baptized to save them from hell. They were rounded up and beaten as a highlight of Easter celebrations, since they deserved it as murderers of the Lord.

Anti-Jewish theology then paved the way for degrading laws against the Jews in the Middle Ages. They were eventually forced to live in walled ghettos or expelled from their country.

The Protestant Reformation produced more of the same. Martin Luther is best known for the 95 Theses that he nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church birthing the Protestant Reformation—a return to the Bible as the source of religious authority.

Unfortunately, in his later years, Luther turned bitter toward the Jews and in his writings outlined specific ways to persecute and degrade the Jewish people ending with a plea for some solution “that we all may be free of this insufferable devilish burden—the Jews.”
Hatred in Full Bloom
It is no coincidence that 400 years later, in Luther’s Germany, Hitler came up with his solution for “the Jewish problem.” Hitler reprinted Martin Luther’s anti-Semitic writings for distribution and leaned heavily on one of Luther’s works, On the Jews and Their Lies, to create his own “solution” when crafting his autobiographical manifesto Mein Kampf.

After Christian leaders known for love and charity had called the Jews “monstrous animals” and “evil seed,” it is no wonder Nazi cartoons could depict them as devils with horns and tails. It was not Hitler who thought up the distinctive yellow-star badge to be worn on their clothing like lepers, but thirteenth-century Pope Innocent who called for Jews to be identified by distinctive clothing pieces.

Hitler also used medieval Catholic anti-Jewish legislation as a model for his own. Eventually, this outright evil, anti-Jewish sentiment manifested in the Holocaust. And the church was silent—neither the Catholics nor the Protestants withstood him.

To paraphrase Raul Hillberg in The Destruction of the European Jews, the early church declared: “You have no right to live amongst us as Jews.” The secular rulers who followed that era expelled Jews from their lands as though to say, “You have no right to live amongst us.” Then Hitler later decreed: “You have no right to live.” The Nazis were just one more step in the progression of anti-Semitism and those who brought the previously planted theological seeds of hatred to full bloom.

The Need for Humility
Ironically, the Christian religion—an offshoot of Judaism, founded by the Jewish Messiah, and built on teachings of forgiveness and love—was the devil’s tool to bring hatred, persecution, and even murder of the Jewish people. This in spite of the apostle Paul’s instruction to believers to honor the Jewish people (Romans 11:28–29) and Jesus’ teaching that salvation comes from them (John 4:22). Something went horribly wrong.

To be clear, Christianity did not cause the Holocaust. But Christian anti-Judaism, which led to anti-Semitism—history’s oldest hatred—made the Holocaust possible.

The lesson for us today is to be careful of the seeds we plant. As Christians, we should walk in the compassion and forgiveness of our Lord. If the church had walked in the humility and meekness Jesus modeled and taught, the Holocaust might never have happened.

No matter what brand of Christian we are, we must be on guard about the human tendency to find someone else to blame—someone to look down upon—and the tendency to walk in blind self-righteousness. May we instead learn to walk in the compassion and humility of our Lord. ☺️
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