BEGINNINGS
THE GOD OF TIME

A NEW YEAR AND A NEW HOME FOR THE ICEJ • PAGE 7
FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Dear friends,

In many ways, this new year is a year of new beginnings. For the ICEJ in Jerusalem, 2019 started with thankfulness for the 20+ years we were privileged to be tenants of our beautiful building, owned by the Republic of the Ivory Coast. Sadly, this season is now coming to an end.

We ask you to pray with us as we search for a suitable new property—one that will allow us to fulfill our calling to comfort the nation of Israel according to Isaiah 40:1, as well as expand and develop the ministry according to what the Lord has called us to do. Please also pray for the financial provision needed to make this move a smooth one.

A Sober Reminder
The recent murder of a young Christian missionary on the Sentinal Islands, John Chau, reminds us there are still nations and tribes on our planet that have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. This event brought Jim Elliot to mind, the missionary killed in 1956 by the Huaorani tribesmen of Ecuador along with five of his friends, as they tried to reach out to them. It was Jim Elliot’s wife that later found an open door to share the saving grace of Jesus with the Huaoranis, including some of the same tribesmen that had murdered her husband.

Jesus declares to His disciples: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). In addition to the restoration of Israel, the spread of the gospel of the kingdom “to all the nations” is one of the great signs of the return of Jesus. The restoration of Israel and proclamation of the gospel are two horses of the same chariot, as former ICEJ International Director Juha Ketola liked to say.

We are living in exciting times: God has an amazing purpose for each one of us. Whether you are called to serve Israel, the nations, or both, I challenge you to give your utmost for His highest. Jim Elliot once said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.”

Again, please keep the ICEJ in prayer regarding our move to a new building and consider supporting the various projects highlighted in this new issue of the Word From Jerusalem.

Thank you so much for standing with us,

Dr Jürgen Bühler
ICEJ President

COVER PHOTO:
The sun rises over Europe and the Middle East.

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The start of each year is always a good time to be reminded that God is a God of beginnings. One of God's main characteristics is His eternal nature. Eternity is a difficult concept for us to grasp. It's a quality that has no end, but also has no beginning: it always was and always will be.

“Eternity” is thus sometimes a term used to refer to heaven—a place where time as we know it does not exist. One of the greatest scientists who ever lived was the Jewish physicist, Albert Einstein. With his theory of relativity, Einstein radically changed our earthly concept of time. According to this theory, the faster you go, the slower times passes.

For example, say you were on a spaceship for one year, moving at high velocity, close to the speed of light. Your time on that ship would be dilated. Travelling at 99.9% of the speed of light, events would look like an extreme time-lapse recording on your smartphone—everything would move 25 times faster. During that year, you would see your family on earth celebrating 25 years’ worth of Christmases, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. When you returned to earth, they would be 25 years older, while you would only have aged one year.

Einstein then stated that, should you travel at the speed of light (which is impossible) and watch events on earth, you would observe it in a “hyper time-lapse,” which would show you everything on earth simultaneously. From your perspective, time as we know it on earth would no longer exist.

Now all this is hard to imagine and even more difficult to understand, but many experiments have proven Einstein's theory to be correct. To see all human history simultaneously seems impossible; our brain would be overwhelmed by the amount of information.

During World War II, my father had an experience that brought him to the verge of such a “hyper time-lapse.” On his deathbed in a Russian POW camp in the winter of 1946, weakened by starvation and extreme pneumonia, he overheard the doctors saying, “Bühler will die tonight!” In desperation, he remembered his mother’s prayers and called to God. Something happened to him that he told us kids many times: “In an instant I saw my entire life, from birth until that day, passing by like a movie. Then a voice came to me saying: ‘If you die now—the way you lived—you will be eternally lost!’” That day he gave his life to Jesus.

When God looks at events on earth, He is not confined to our
time-space world. Augustine, one of the early church fathers, understood that God created time as we know it, and that He exists outside our time. The best way for me to understand this is to remember that God identifies himself with light (e.g. John 1:9). That means in His realm, time does not matter.

Jesus stated to the scribes of His time: “Before Abraham was I am” (John 8:58). From our perspective, this makes no sense; but from God’s perspective, this is perfectly correct and makes perfect sense. As the eternal God, He is without end and without beginning.

Therefore, Paul knew and understood that God knows us and called us even before creation (Ephesians 1:9) and before time began (2 Timothy 1:9). Amazingly, before the Earth and the universe existed, God already thought about us. That is why you and I exist today and this gives meaning to our lives.

Another amazing truth is that before time began, God already knew that humanity would need His saving grace to get us to our destiny. God perfectly knew we would fail, make wrong decisions, and even rebel against Him. But before time began He already provided an eternal remedy: the blood of Jesus. The book of Revelation describes Jesus as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). The cross and the church are not a “plan B” or an emergency scheme of God, but were on His mind before time began. Jesus is thus the focal point and center of time and history.

The prophet Isaiah highlights another characteristic of God that stretches our mind: “I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:9–10). Not only did God see the start of our lives but He also knows how we will finish. There is no doubt that at the end of history His counsel shall stand and He will do all His pleasure.

What a great encouragement that is.

One of the greatest examples of this timeless and unshakable counsel of the Lord is the history of the people of Israel. The foundation of Israel’s purpose lays in God’s eternal purpose. Its biblical account starts after the flood.

After Noah’s family left the ark, his sons—Shem, Ham, and
Japheth—started new families and clans as described in Genesis 10. These families became the starting point of post-flood humanity. The Rabbis count 70 families and clans that originate from the sons of Noah and describe the nations of the world:

- The European clans from Japheth, “... everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.” (Genesis 10:5)

- The African and some Middle Eastern tribes from Ham, “... according to their families, their languages, in their lands and in their nations” (Genesis 10:20).

- The sons of Shem as more tribes from the Middle East and the regions of the East, “... according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, according to their nations” (Genesis 10:31).

Genesis 10:32 summarizes these 70 families of the earth: “These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood.” After the flood, God committed to never again destroy these families with a deadly flood (Genesis 8:21f).

However, the following chapter describes how, even after such a great judgment as the flood, mankind would still not worship God but was only concerned for its own prideful interest (Genesis 11). This is when Israel’s history began. Since God promised not to destroy mankind anymore by a flood, he decided instead to provide a way of salvation. He called Abraham and prophesied to him, saying: “In you the families of the earth shall be blessed,” and the line of hope for the families of the earth began. Paul later recognized that the very moment God established the lineage of Abraham was the starting point for God’s salvation story with all the families, tribes, and languages of the earth (Galatians 3:8).

Israel played a singular role in the salvation story of humanity. Israel gave us the Word of God and the Jews’ Messiah brings light even to the furthest part of the world. As the seed of Abraham, Jesus became the center and focal point of time and history. And that is why the church will always be indebted to bless the seed of Abraham, as the Jews were God’s vessel to bring salvation to humanity.

Let us now fast forward to the end of history. John the seer was supernaturally taken out of the earthly timeframe and could see “the end from the beginning.” He was amazed to see all the families of Noah united in heaven worshiping the Lamb:

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (Revelation 7:9–10).

What started in Genesis—and even existed before the foundation of the world—finds its completion. This amazing truth, that God already knew our end before our lives began, should give each of us the greatest encouragement. He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega. There are no surprises or emergency meetings in heaven because our God is the God of history who says not only about Israel but also about your life: “My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure.” This is why Paul could so confidently state to the church in Philippi: “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

Even if your new year began with difficulty or unexpected challenges, be assured God will accomplish all that He has purposed for you. He will show you the good works God prepared beforehand for you (Ephesians 2:10). As you stay close to Jesus, spending time with Him and in His Word, He will be the author and finisher of your faith (Hebrews 12:1).
As 2018 came to a close, and the ICEJ began to anticipate the new beginnings 2019 would bring, we were presented with the unexpected challenge of finding a new home for the head office in Jerusalem!

The ICEJ leadership is currently in the process of looking for a new home, and we need your prayers.

Since 1996, the ICEJ has been honored to be the tenants of one of the most beautiful buildings in Jerusalem. For the past 20 years, our landlord has been the Republic of Ivory Coast with whom we have enjoyed a strong relationship. Unfortunately, our long-term lease of the building has come to an end and the government in Abidjan, due to legal restrictions in Israel, was not able to extend the contract with us for another period.

Therefore, we are currently searching for the ICEJ’s new home, a facility that will allow us to continue—and eventually expand—our ministry here in Jerusalem. We know God has already prepared the right building for us. He has also placed in the hearts of both ICEJ leadership in Jerusalem and the Board of Directors to eventually own our own property here in Jerusalem.

In recent weeks and months, various people reminded us of Isaiah 54:3–4:

Enlarge the place of your tent and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.

We ask you to stand with us in prayer, believing that 2019 will begin a new season for the ICEJ.

**PLEASE PRAY:**

- for God to enlarge “the place of our tent” and “strengthen our stakes” here in Jerusalem.
- for us to find the right location.
- for God’s provision to meet all the needs that will arise as we make this important move.
- for a release of finances to make this an easy move.

You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out (Deuteronomy 28:6).

Please also pray for God to bless the Ivory Coast for allowing us to use their beautiful property all these years.

Many blessings from Jerusalem, and thank you for standing with us.
The horrific Pittsburgh synagogue massacre in late October left American Jews scrambling to erect new layers of security around their communal lives. Sadly, they are not far behind the Jews of Europe, who have already felt under siege for years. Indeed, there are now metal detectors and armed guards posted outside every Jewish synagogue, day school, and community center across the continent.

The list of recent terror attacks on “soft” Jewish targets is long and far-flung: a Jewish deli in Paris, a day school in Toulouse, a museum in Brussels, and a synagogue in Copenhagen. Even as far as Mumbai, India, and the quiet beach resort of Bondi in Australia, violence against Jews is lurking. Whether Muslim extremists, radical leftists, or far-right neo-Nazis like the Pittsburgh predator, Jew-haters are on the march everywhere.

No doubt, much of the resurgence in anti-Semitism today is fueled by hatred of Israel. Frustrated by their inability to dent or destroy the Jewish state, many anti-Semites lash out at vulnerable Jewish communities nearby. Still, they will never be satisfied until Israel is forced to disappear. And their latest strategy for achieving this goal is quite cunning.

Hauled to The Hague

At the recent International Christian Media Summit in Jerusalem, Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Michael Oren was asked to identify the primary existential threat to Israel in our day. Referring to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, he responded:

“All these groups understand the strategy,” Oren explained. “We have fought this battle already four times. . . and our narrative has been steadily, irreversibly eroded. Our narrative does not get a fair voice . . . and we have not internalized the threat. We think it’s about tanks and planes, but we don’t have the right to use them. The Israeli army is bigger than the standing armies of France and the United Kingdom combined. . . . But the battleground is not Lebanon or Gaza, the battleground is The Hague.”

Oren’s assessment was astonishingly prescient! The very next day, the Palestinian Authority was elevated in status at the United
Nations when it was appointed to head the G-77 group of non-aligned nations, which controls the majority of votes in UN bodies. From this new position, the PA vowed to press on with its campaign to delegitimize Israel on the world stage. That same day, the special prosecutor for the Middle East region at the Criminal Court in The Hague openly warned Israel that she was watching closely for actions along the Gaza border that could be tried as war crimes.

**The Real Thugs**
The United Nations’ abnormal obsession with Israel is well documented. The Jewish state is repeatedly condemned in UN forums far more than all other nations put together, while the real atrocities and abuses being committed by tyrants and rogue regimes are excused or ignored.

Consider the Russian military. Since Russia deployed troops inside Syria in 2015, it has been responsible for killing an estimated 18,000 Syrians, mostly civilians. Yet, the United Nations is silent!

Meantime, the Assad regime in Syria has been killing, wounding, and dispossessing Palestinians in far greater numbers than Israel ever did. In their brutal siege on the Yarmuk refugee camp alone, Assad loyalists over recent years have left tens of thousands of Palestinians dead, maimed, or homeless.

Even the Palestinian Authority and Hamas have been accused by Human Rights Watch of imposing “parallel police states” on the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza, where arbitrary arrests and torture are “systematic.” The group even questioned why Western democracies are still funding these repressive regimes.

Yet the campaign to blame Israel alone for all the woes of the Palestinians, and indeed the whole region and even the world, marches on. It is advancing on college campuses and in the entertainment sector through the BDS movement and false apartheid label. The agenda against Israel is manipulating our court systems. The diplomatic assault on Israel continues to intensify. And the goal is more than just denying Israel the right to exist. The goal of Israel’s enemies is to drag its leaders before the international Criminal Court in The Hague (ICC)...

For instance, they have accused IDF soldiers of killing Palestinians just to sell their organs on the black market. The Mossad was blamed for shark attacks on tourists at Sinai resorts. Israel is purportedly behind all the hurricanes and earthquakes of recent years. While Jews are deemed racially and mentally inferior, they somehow are clever enough to control the world. Some scholars even consider anti-Semitism a mental disorder that requires treatment, which shows how irrational anti-Semitism is.

At its core, anti-Semitism is a spiritual malady—a spirit of jealousy and rejection against the Jewish people. We must choose to agree with this or not! In these darkening times, it is crucial that Christians confront the anti-Semites of our day. The forbearers of our faith made grave errors when they spread outrageous lies against the Jews, with destructive results. Thus, we have a special moral duty to tell the Jew-haters of today that it was wrong then and it is wrong now. We must see to it that they do not repeat our mistakes! (5)

**ICEJ PARTICIPATES IN GPO’S CHRISTIAN MEDIA SUMMIT**

The ICEJ was well represented at the second annual International Christian Media Summit, held in Jerusalem in mid-October and hosted by the Israel Government Press Office. Over 200 Christian reporters, publishers, and broadcasters drawn from some 35 nations were addressed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Reuven Rivlin, Deputy Prime Minister Michael Oren, Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat, former UN Ambassador Dore Gold, and a number of other senior Israeli officials and top scholars and analysts. ICEJ Vice President David Parsons again served as the GPO’s primary Christian consultant for the summit, and about a dozen ICEJ national directors and local staff participated in the gathering.

The Christian Media Summit proved once again to be rich in content and well timed as Israel continues to mark the 70th Anniversary of the nation’s rebirth in 1948. Prime Minister Netanyahu was particularly relaxed at a briefing to kick off the summit, as he fielded some 20 questions—far more than he does at regular press conferences with the local and foreign press corps. He also invited US Ambassador David Friedman to bring a greeting, and the American Jewish envoy proceeded to quote Jesus in his remarks about the media battle over Israel, saying, “The truth will set you free.” (6)
Recently, Dr. Susanna Kokkonen decided to end her time as the director of Christian Friends of Yad Vashem (CFYV), which operates in partnership with the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. She held the position for ten years, and her daily work and impact at Yad Vashem will be greatly missed. Ms. Sari Granitza, a long time deputy with the International Relations Division at Yad Vashem, will assume her role.

“For the past decade, Dr. Susanna Kokkonen has provided outstanding leadership to one of the most vital and sensitive aspects of our ministry by overseeing the Christian Desk, which we helped establish, at Yad Vashem,” said ICEJ President Dr Jürgen Bühler “Dr. Kokkonen put her academic skills as a Holocaust scholar to full use in such initiatives as the annual Christian Leadership Seminars. She also brought a unique spiritual touch to Holocaust remembrance and education, even by creating a place of prayer in her special corner of this revered institution. Most of all, Susanna was a “light” amid the painful, dark memories housed at Yad Vashem. She knew her Bible well and had a distinct way of relating its eternal truths to the universal lessons that Yad Vashem teaches on anti-Semitism, racism, and genocide.”

Originally from Finland, Dr. Kokkonen received her PhD in Holocaust Studies in 2004 from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where her dissertation focused on Jewish Refugees in Post-War Italy, 1945–1951. She later worked as a pro-Israel Christian lobbyist at the European Parliament in Brussels and as cultural attaché at the Embassy of Finland in Tel Aviv.

In 2008, Dr. Kokkonen was tapped to serve as Director of Christian Friends of Yad Vashem, which was still relatively new. Over the ensuing years, she solidified the work of the Christian Desk as an important facet of the Yad Vashem campus, and expanded its reach to Christian communities on all continents. She hosted scores of Christian dignitaries, addressed hundreds of Christian tour groups, and organized numerous Christian Leadership Seminars that drew participants from over 50 countries. Dr. Kokkonen also successfully launched the CFYV’s Prayer and Study Tour, reliving history in Israel from the times of the Bible until today. In addition, she became known for having a special rapport with Holocaust survivors and turned much-needed attention on the needs of elderly, forgotten Righteous Gentiles in Israel.

Fluent in six languages, Dr. Kokkonen will continue to make appearances for Yad Vashem while also traveling around the world to speak to Christian, Jewish, and civic audiences about the Holocaust, genocide, anti-Semitism and Israel today, as well as to engage in humanitarian work. To keep up with her activities, please visit: http://susannakokkonen.com/

To support the ongoing work of the Christian Desk at Yad Vashem, please go to: www.icejusa.org/yadvashem
The 12th annual Festival of Tolerance in St. Petersburg, Russia was yet again a great success. ICEJ Russia, and our longtime partner in the Jewish Community, the Eva Foundation, organized this event to raise awareness of the Holocaust.

The festival began with a Jewish drama group from Bryansk performing the play *The Diary of Ann Frank*. The program continued with a discussion about the book *The Germans are Hunting Us with Dogs*, which is the story of two young sisters who escaped the Holocaust. The book contains a series of drawings done by young Jewish children to illustrate the poem written by Alla Aisensharf, one of the sisters. A video presentation of the story followed, as well as dramatic readings by middle school children.

ICEJ has translated, printed, and distributed the book in Finland as a contribution to this Holocaust awareness campaign. Proceeds from the Finnish book went toward purchasing warm bedding for the remaining 68 Holocaust Survivors living in St. Petersburg that the ICEJ helps care for, along with other elderly Jewish people and invalids.

The festival was a great success and provided an excellent method of Holocaust education for those who attended.

To support the ongoing work of Holocaust awareness, please go to: [www.icejusa.org/yadvashem](http://www.icejusa.org/yadvashem)
ICEJ STAFF CAUGHT IN MASSIVE ROCKET BARRAGE

BY DAN HERRON

It started out as a routine visit to some of our aid projects along the Gaza border. On a bright November morning, I joined ICEJ AID director Nicole Yoder for a tour of several initiatives we sponsor in the western Negev. But by noon, nothing was routine about this day, as we found ourselves caught in the largest, most concentrated one-day rocket barrage coming from Gaza. Over the next 24 hours, nearly 500 rockets and mortars hammered Israeli communities along the border. Nothing could have mentally prepared us for this onslaught of Hamas firepower.

**Timely Shelters**

Our partner Shmuel Bowman, the director of Operation Lifeshield, accompanied us that day. He first took us to a new mobile bomb shelter we had just placed in the region. The fact that the ICEJ has been providing bomb shelters all over the Gaza envelope—more than 70 to date—means residents have places of safety to run to when rockets start falling. By evening, the beneficiaries of this shelter had called to give thanks for its timely delivery, saying it had been quickly put to good use.

**Sweet Produce from a Hard Place**

It was still quiet at our next stop. The iconic Kibbutz Yad Mordechai boasts some of Israel’s best produce, including the best honey. The kibbutz spirit is very much alive at Yad Mordechai with no problems insurmountable. This was clear as we learned about the measures used to counter the arson threat from Gaza. They showed us a specially developed app named “Aviva” that alerts local security officers with real-time information about threats and their location. The threat is often in the form of incendiary balloons. The kibbutz security team showed us one such device they were able to stop in time. Others were not intercepted, but they still were able to douse the resulting fires with a new firefighting trailer donated by the ICEJ, which allows rapid, nimble response to brush fires. The kibbutz leaders could not thank us enough!

**Gadi Arkoni—The Right Spirit**

Our next stop was a meeting with Gadi Arkoni, mayor of the Eshkol Regional Council. Gadi lost both legs in a Hamas rocket strike and embodies the suffering and resilience of Jewish communities in the Gaza periphery. A kibbutznik through and through, he was born and raised in the area and studied agricultural management, which means he is 100 percent invested in this land. Yet, there is no trace of extremism or bitterness in him. Just as Israelis will not budge from their land, he recognizes the Gazans also are “here to stay.” For him, this means some agreement of coexistence eventually must be reached—though it remains a distant dream so long as Hamas rules Gaza. It was not always so. He remembers decades ago when Gazans actually helped work in kibbutzim fields. Ever hopeful, Gadi has several projects already in mind when normalcy returns.
Wounded but not Crushed

Gadi's approach to life is astonishing—not just because of the trauma his region has endured, but also because of his own personal tragedy. In the last hour of Operation Protective Edge, the 50-day rocket war with Hamas in 2014, Gadi was repairing damage to his kibbutz' electrical grid when several mortars landed on his emergency team. One shell severed Gadi's legs and killed two close friends. A lesser man would have given up on life. But Gadi reoriented himself and found meaning in public service. His first act was to testify to a UN commission in Geneva, where he was able to explain the very real consequences of Hamas terror tactics. Back in the Negev, his personal commitment to the Eshkol region has helped fuel a 14 percent growth in population since taking office.

Surviving a War of Attrition

Even with such strength and determination, the people of the Eshkol region need us. Gadi laments the tense “non-war” they have faced since the destructive “March of Return” was launched in March 2018. It seems no end is in sight, yet there are fewer emergency funds being released by the government. Israel faces numerous threats elsewhere and has no ready fix for the war of attrition waged from Gaza. This means Israelis here must persevere, and our support lifts their spirits immensely.

The Barrage Begins

During our third stop that day we suddenly became stuck in the operational room of the Sedot Negev Regional Council, just three miles from where rockets were being launched. We no sooner sat down for a briefing with local mayor Tamir Idan when the security chief relayed a report of an RPG strike on a bus with IDF soldiers at a popular vantage point close to the Gaza border fence. Thankfully, the bus was mostly empty, though one soldier was severely wounded. But the news struck home. Only a few months earlier, a group of ICEJ staff had stood in that very spot peering over into Gaza.

The first “Red Alert” siren sounded shortly after the RPG strike. We had thirty seconds to get to the basement shelter, which also serves as the region’s situation room. We scrambled down the steps with the mayor and watched as he took control.

Under Fire

Down in the basement, everyone began emergency duties. The atmosphere was tense, but these were true professionals. They knew others depended on them. As the sirens kept wailing, we could hear nearby mortar explosions as well as an Iron Dome intercepto launching, followed by the distant booms of Kassam rockets shattering in mid-air. We counted a dozen or so alarms from our location and about 20 interceptors launching. Well over 400 rockets and mortars were fired from Gaza in about 25 hours—the most intense barrage ever.

Your Help Matters

Nicole and I experienced firsthand that day the urgent need to find shelter. We were encouraged by those manning the operations room, and appreciated their words of thanks for the ICEJ’s assistance. We have placed some 70 life-saving bomb shelters in this volatile region, and donated 17 firefighting wagons to drench the flames ignited by incendiary balloons.

Sadly, Hamas continues to wage war from Gaza. So there is still much to do to secure this besieged border area. Thank you for helping us as we stand together with the people of Israel!
“We are blessed with this shelter. We are using it...unfortunately. We really, really thank you for this.” These were the words of a sheep farmer in the southern Negev. When ICEJ staff from Jerusalem headquarters visited a sheep farm and kosher restaurant near the border of Gaza to see a recently-installed bomb shelter donated by the ICEJ, the owner told us they had already used it. Several weeks after installation and only days before we arrived, the warning sirens went off and the owner and her family ran to the shelter as they heard rockets exploding in surrounding areas.

As we were hosted for a tour and delicious dairy luncheon prepared by these humble and resilient Israelis, we could feel the sincere gratitude they expressed toward Christians around the world who helped them in their time of need.

As small business owners, they couldn’t afford a shelter, which the law requires for every business in the area. Thus, they were even more grateful. Without the support of the ICEJ and provision of this bomb shelter, their restaurant would have been shut down. Thanks to Christians like you, this community will keep their restaurant and provide protection for their guests and family.

To provide more bomb shelters for vulnerable communities, give at: www.icejusa.org/bombshelter

**PROTECTING SECURITY VOLUNTEERS**

BY DAN HERRON

At Kibbutz Nachal Oz, right on the restive Gaza border, our ICEJ Aid team visited a chapter of an elite volunteer unit, which serves as tactical support for Israel’s police and Border Police forces. The ICEJ has supported these volunteers with necessities, such as winter clothing, as well as more advanced equipment in the form of protective vests.

Before touring the Kibbutz’ perimeter with a clear line of sight to Gaza, we re-saddled from our Skoda sedan to a heavy Land Rover Defender, with windows made from thick slabs of protective glass. The local volunteer officer normally leads 20 men, but because of the increased challenge from Gaza, all-in-all 70 volunteers are currently active in the entire Gaza Envelope. “No way I’m leaving” was the determined response from this father of two, when asked of the dangers, “this is my home.” The volunteer officer looks forward to returning to the peace which used to characterize the area—like during Shavuot (Pentecost) when hosts of people would congregate for a farmers’ festival right here on the border.

Your help keeps these determined volunteers in the field by enabling the ICEJ to supply items like tactical clothing or winter garb. These volunteers help maintain the civilian presence in one of Israel’s hotspots and are part of the comprehensive effort to enable Jewish civilian life to continue next to the menacing neighbor on the other side of the Gaza border fence.
**OFEK – NEW HORIZONS IN ALIYAH**

**BY DAN HERRON**

Ofek Israeli means “Israeli Horizon” and is the name of the coordinating body for Jewish Aliyah efforts and initiatives. Since the Israeli government seeks to maximize its resources for the greatest impact possible, Ofek was created to harness the dynamic—but at times disorganized—power of grassroots organizations in 22 nations around the world.

Ofek’s recent annual conference with Jewish leaders was held in Ashkelon, bordering the restive Gaza Strip to the north. This location, a natural choice for Ofek’s CEO Shimon Cohen, a retired general, was chosen to show solidarity with border communities along the Gaza Strip, which currently face challenging, turbulent times.

The theme of Ofek’s recent annual conference was “From Vision to Reality.” Many Aliyah experts and operators from several countries were in attendance, which made it a great honor and privilege for ICEJ’s Barry Denison to deliver a keynote speech during the conference. CEO Shimon Cohen warmly welcomed Denison. Cohen stated in a subsequent interview how grateful he was for ICEJ’s engagement and support in Aliyah conferences for Jews in former Soviet republics where freedoms are often highly restricted. The success rate for these conferences is high, with 70 percent of participants choosing to make Aliyah.

Barry Denison delivered a well-paced and poignant survey of Evangelical Christians’ Bible-based motivation for wholeheartedly engaging with Israel and Aliyah, clearly demonstrating the shared biblical foundation between the two faiths and thus the natural practical partnership. Using this principle, it is clear that “when we read the Bible text . . . Israel is there. God’s calling of the Jewish people is without regret. It was His choice.” He captivated his hearers and laid out how “God has a plan for the gentiles to bless the Jewish people.”

The ICEJ’s proud track record of unwavering, and effective support for Israel through aid work and advocacy left a strong impression, especially the ICEJ’s help to the Gaza border region and the fact that the ICEJ has helped 140,000 Jews return home to Israel. Duly impressed, the audience dispatched Barry from the podium with strong and heartfelt applause.

The ICEJ looks forward to continued cooperation with Ofek to help bring more of God’s people back home.

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**ALIYAH THROUGH FINLAND**

**BY BARRY DENISON**

ICEJ VP FOR OPERATIONS

I recently had the privilege to participate in an ICEJ-sponsored Aliyah seminar together with the Jewish Agency in eastern Finland. There are several key experiences I want to share.

First, it was amazing to see about 50 Russian Jews—who had come out of Russia for the weekend to discuss the possibility of Aliyah—learn more about what life in Israel is like and begin praying and considering returning to their biblical homeland, Israel.

A second important experience was watching some of the Israelis—native born-and-raised Israelis who had come to personally share about life in Israel, its benefits, and its difficulties. Sitting down with them over a meal, I was moved as I watched tears of joy roll down their faces as they shared their heartfelt joy of seeing fellow Jews take the first steps to consider the possibility of becoming Israelis.

A third important experience for me was hearing the story of Orit, the Jewish Agency’s emissary in St. Petersburg. As a six-year-old child of a Jewish Zionist father from Russia, Orit and her family were expelled from Russia in the 1970s. They showed up in Austria as refugees, and Christians from Finland provided food, clothing, and toiletries to help these Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union prepare to travel on to Israel. As she shared her story, our founding Director of ICEJ Finland, Ulla Jarvilehto, realized that she was one of those Finnish Christians who had worked in Austria to help the Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union.

I share these experiences because we have the privilege of being your hands and feet in the Aliyah process. Isaiah 49 talks about the gentiles carrying the Jews back in their arms and on their shoulders, as the Jewish people return to their biblical homeland. Likewise, the ICEJ is your extension of the body of Christ to show Christian love, as we have the privilege to participate with God in His fulfillment of this biblical prophecy.

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**To bring more Jews home to Israel, give at:**

[www.icejusa.org/aliyah](http://www.icejusa.org/aliyah)
FEAST TESTIMONIES
ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD

EXPERIENCING GOD
AN INTERVIEW WITH TIFFANY MALLILLIN, FEAST VOLUNTEER

God calls us to the Feast, not as a religious duty but as a promise-filled commandment to encounter His presence

BY DAN HERRON

How did God meet you in a unique way at the Feast?

It was during my first time to visit the [Western] Wall, the Ein Gedi Night, and the Parade of Nations at the arena.

In a nutshell, my first sight of the Wall brought me to tears because I saw how sovereign our Lord is, [gathering] believers and non-believers alike at His holy sanctuary, united with a universal language: prayer. There is a need for every man, Jew, Christian, atheist, male, female, young, and old, to lift up prayers and communicate with a Supreme Being. That is man’s original purpose—to worship. So we will always find ways to fill that [void] in us. What the Wall showed me was the Lord’s power that works miraculously even when our physical eyes can’t see it. Glory.

Both Ein Gedi and the Parade of Nations showed me a glimpse of heaven. To see a group of multicultural believers, worshipping in Spirit and in Truth, to glorify the name of Yeshua—what a sight!

My takeaway: it doesn’t matter where you come from, or what your faith journey with Jesus is like. When you go to Israel and experience the Feast, see what it is, and get a small taste of its culture, you will experience God one way or another. Hallelujah!

What did you discover about God during your time at the Feast?

Wow—that He is a powerful God and a loving God at the same time. His pursuit of man has no boundaries. His love for Israel is real. His Word is real. Whatever He spoke in the Word came and is coming to life. He is the God of miracles, from 2,000 years ago to today and until Jesus comes again. He is in control of every single detail that happens in our life, and we are strategically positioned to fulfill His purposes for His glory in this life. ☺️

Experience the 2019 Feast on the ICEJ USA Feast Tour: www.icejusa.org/feast-tour
I can’t go to Israel! I don’t have the money, and there’s no one to pick up the kids,” I found myself arguing out loud again for the hundredth time. And yet there was a nagging in my heart to attend the 2017 Feast of Tabernacles. After a miraculous answer to prayer, included financial provision and other needed resources, I was confirmed to the ICEJ USA Feast of Tabernacles tour. I had no idea what was ahead.

I was paired with a lady who I didn’t know, though she attended my church. When we arrived at En Gedi, I was overcome by the service. Though amazed by the music, the dancers, the speaker, and the environment, I was most impacted by the ICEJ volunteers. They seemed so happy, so friendly, as if it were a joy to serve me. As the services went on through the week, they became the highlight of each day. As I interacted with the ushers, security, resources, and others, I was more and more impressed with these volunteers. My friend and I discussed it and found that we were both feeling the same. We decided then and there we wanted to be a part of the Feast volunteer team the following year.

I was so excited to serve with this group of people that I began volunteering at the ICEJ USA office in my hometown. My friend and I waited anxiously for the Feast volunteer application to arrive. Finally, we applied and were accepted along with another friend who had caught our passion for serving at the Feast. We were assigned to different teams but were able to travel and room together.

As I began preparing to serve with AJs Club, the childcare team, the responsibility with which I was being entrusted became more evident. I would be the one to represent the ICEJ to those attending the Feast. It would be my interactions that would impact them. They would meet us and entrust their children to us and we would, in a very real sense, become the face of the ICEJ. What a responsibility! What an honor to serve the children and parents of those attending the Feast! What a joy to serve in the Holy Land where our Servant Leader lived and died and rose again! What an honor to give back what I had so bountifully received! What amazing people from all over the world who feel more like family than just coworkers!

Throughout our time in Israel, my friends and I repeated one statement over and over again: “Next year, I will . . .”

We can’t wait to serve again at the Feast in 2019.

GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN

BY LILY SIRONI, FEAST VOLUNTEER

Every Feast, amazing team members from around the world come to Jerusalem to help make this great event happen. Lily Sironi from the United States, attending the Feast of Tabernacles for the first time, was one of more than 250 Feast team members. What follows is her eyewitness account.

More than Pilgrims
People from all walks of life and all pasts had convened for one purpose: to worship at the feet of their Savior. In this worship, unity is found and a kinship is born that is stronger than any earthly tie. While preparing for the Feast, I thought about these people and how they were coming to bless Israel with their presence and prayer. However, what I did not consider was the prophetic significance of this Feast. The Feast is not just a haphazard gathering of Christians that have come to enjoy Israel; it is a prayer and prophecy seat!

More than the Present
As Herve Datro of the Ivory Coast said, “There is coming a day when there will be no more Africans, no more Americans, no more Asians.” That day is coming soon. This sense of urgency brought us to this Feast, the “glimpse of heaven.” This urgency is what unites each one of us in our pursuit of His presence during this Feast—not for our sake, but for Zion and for the nations.

AN HONOR TO VOLUNTEER

BY BOBBI DILLMAN, FEAST & ICEJ USA VOLUNTEER

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YOUR ISRAEL ANSWER:

Is Anti-BDS Legislation Anti-free Speech?

By Daryl Hedding, ICEJ USA Deputy Director

A divisive debate has been brewing recently over legislation introduced at state and federal levels to combat the international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. The aim of the BDS movement is to isolate Israel internationally by promoting the idea she is a pariah state that should be dismantled through the use of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions. The Palestinians are then expected to be crowned rightful heirs to inherit whatever remains of the Jewish state.

A total of 27 US states have so far passed measures restricting local government agencies from contracting with companies that choose to join the BDS movement. Similarly, a January 2019 Senate bill sought to protect US companies (and by extension, US interests) from being forced to comply with discriminatory financial practices prescribed against Israeli-owned businesses by such international organizations as the United Nations and the European Union.

Opposition to such anti-BDS legislation leans heavily on the complaint that Americans’ First Amendment rights are being infringed upon. However, none of the anti-BDS legislation restricts an individual’s right to boycott Israeli products or businesses. It only restricts the government from being party to such boycotts.

What follows are a few reasons to explain why the US government would take such a stand against the BDS movement.

The Biased Blame Game
The BDS movement incorrectly and unfairly places on Israel all the blame for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It totally ignores multiple peace offers from Israel, while also completely ignoring every Palestinian rejection of peace initiatives including the 1938 Peel Commission Plan, the 1947 UN Partition Plan, an offer for land in 1967, the 2000 offer of a state at Camp David, and the 2008 offer of a state by Prime Minister Olmert. The BDS movement’s distortion of history serves only to foster undue antagonism against the Jewish state despite its well proven record of attempts to find peace with her neighbors.

Short Circuiting Peace Talks
The BDS movement holds out false hope to the Palestinians that they can achieve their nationalistic aspirations without having to negotiate a deal directly with the Israelis because only Israel will be forced to compromise for peace.

By attempting to bludgeon Israel into submission through economic isolation, they believe Israel can be weakened enough to capitulate to every Palestinian demand. This is unrealistic, especially given Israel’s strong economic position, and ultimately makes peace far less likely for both sides.

Singling out Jews for Special Treatment
A central premise of the BDS movement is that the modern Jewish state is a racist reincarnation of apartheid South Africa. Ignoring Palestinian demands for a Jew-free state, they falsely accuse Israeli Jews of discriminating against Palestinian Arabs as the white minority in South Africa did to the majority black population.

Unsatisfied with this gross distortion of reality—Israeli Arabs enjoy rights, privileges, and opportunities second to none in the Middle East—the BDS movement goes on to raise the supposed human rights abuses of Israeli Jews to a level that exceeds that of states with the worst human rights records in the world. In the United Nations, that translates into giving passes to repressive regimes like Iran, North Korea, China, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, and Venezuela, while once again singling out the Jew as the prime suspect causing the world’s biggest problems.

The Final Solution
The aim of the BDS movement has nothing to do with creating conditions on the ground where Israelis and Palestinians can finally live side by side in peace and prosperity. On the contrary, the final solution the BDS movement ultimately seeks is the complete dismantling of the Jewish state to be replaced with a Palestinian state.

Stand Against Evil
Representatives in state and federal legislatures should be applauded for taking a stand against the destructive aims of the BDS movement. And they should be supported in their efforts because when the BDS movement loses, everyone wins—including Israelis and Palestinians. This is how we give peace a real chance. ♦

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