HAVE YOU NOT READ?

BY DR JÜRGEN BÜHLER
Dear friends,

This editorial is the last I will write from my office here at 20 Rachel Imeinu, which has been “home” to the ICEJ for the past 22 years. For our Jerusalem staff there is a sense of sadness, as we will miss the beauty of the building and gardens. But we also are thankful for over two decades of God’s blessing and provision. In this landmark building, we have seen many prayers answered and many people impacted from Israel and around the world. Quite a few staff first met here, married, and started families. Dignitaries, prime ministers, and scores of Christian tourists and ordinary Israelis came through our doors. It was truly a season of blessing!

Now we move on to a new facility in Talpiot, a main business hub of Jerusalem. As you receive this magazine, we will be settling into our new offices. I just reminded our staff of how King David was troubled over having a nice palace while God dwelt in a portable tent, so he sought to build the Lord a house. Yet God had never asked for such a home and was content with the tabernacle in Sinai and Shiloh. Wherever Israel went, God’s presence followed. When Solomon later built the temple in Jerusalem, he prayed: “But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” (2 Chronicles 6:18). Still, the Lord declares: “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made . . . “But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isaiah 66:1–2).

Our prayer is that the presence of the Lord will be with us in the new location as He was with us here. For “if Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here” (Exodus 33:15).

The next magazine will include more about our new location. Meanwhile, we must continue our daily ministry of comfort to the people of Israel. Recently, we welcomed the newest wave of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants at Ben-Gurion Airport. We also visited the Druze community in the North to help with educational projects, and we are preparing Passover baskets to make it a joyful season again this year for many needy Israelis.

Please keep our staff in prayer for extra strength in this busy season. Also, if you feel led to support us with a special financial gift for the moving expenses, please do so by mentioning “Embassy move” with your donation.

Yours in Christ!

Dr Jürgen Bühler
ICEJ President

FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK
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HAVE YOU NOT READ?
BY DR JÜRGEN BÜHLER

In his eulogy to Billy Graham last year, Franklin Graham made one statement about his father that really touched me. He spoke about the deep love and respect his father had for the Word of God. “The Bible was his sole authority,” Franklin said, adding he remembers how often his father would hold up the Bible while preaching and proclaim: “The Bible says…”

Over Christmas, I was troubled as I read Irresistible, a new book by Andy Stanley who is a cutting-edge preacher with significant influence in the evangelical world today. In his book, Stanley advises preachers to drop such phrases as “the Bible says” and “the Bible teaches,” claiming there is nothing to be gained by it and much to be lost. In addition, Stanley suggests reading the Old Testament with great caution, as it contains no doctrinal relevance to the church today and represents a God that “appears uncivilized” to the modern reader.

This approach represents a growing phenomenon in the church today. Though some may be less extreme than Andy Stanley’s views, there is a deliberate, growing move away from the Word of God and from the Old Testament.

When speaking in congregations around the world, I often ask: “How many have read at least once through the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation?” The answer is sobering. In most cases, only a few hands go up—sometimes, not even a single hand. I find the highest percent of Bible illiteracy among churches in western countries. While the results are a little better when I ask who has read the entire New Testament, the Bible in general and the Old Testament in particular seem to be an ignored black box for many believers. In one church, I was told by the pastor that I was quoting too many Scriptures. One, maximum two per sermon will do; otherwise, I would overly challenge the audience. A close friend told me that for years now he cannot remember hearing a single sermon in his church on any Old Testament passage.

This phenomenon is nothing new and can be traced back to the early church. Marcion, an influential teacher in the Church of Rome around AD 140, rejected the Old Testament writings—and even some New Testament books—as being too Jewish and misrepresenting the loving God revealed by Jesus. While he was removed as a heretic, his Marcionism
would leave a wide imprint on the church for centuries to come.

This all leads us to ask: What does the Bible say about its own relevance and authority? And how did the early church approach Scripture? Indeed, the question often posed by Jesus to the scribes and teachers, “Have you not read?” is more relevant than ever today (see Matthew 12:3; 19:4, etc.).

**Tanach: The Old Testament**

First of all, the early church did not have a New Testament yet, as it was only written and canonized decades later.

**FOR THE EARLY CHURCH, THE TANACH WAS CONSIDERED THE MAIN SOURCE OF DOCTRINE AND TEACHING. REGARDING THE HEBREW BIBLE, PAUL COUNSELS HIS SPIRITUAL SON TIMOTHY:**

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

(2 Timothy 3:16)
Thus, when New Testament writers refer to “Scripture,” they are clearly referencing the Old Testament.

Also, the early church never used the term “Old Testament.” They referred to the Hebrew Scriptures as the Tanach. This is a three-letter acronym [T-N-K] containing the first letters of each section of the Old Testament. The “T” is for Torah, or the Law contained in the five books of Moses, also referred to as the Pentateuch. The middle “N” refers to the Prophets (Nevi’im in Hebrew), which includes all the prophets of the Old Testament, from Isaiah to Malachi (except for Daniel, which is counted among the Writings). The final “K” is for Kevvim, or the Writings. The Writings contain all the other books from Joshua through Samuel, Job, and Psalms, to “Song of Songs.”

Thus, New Testament authors often refer to the Old as “the Law and the Prophets” (e.g., Matthew 5:17; 11:13; 22:14; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; etc.), or “the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). Only once in the Bible is the Old Testament referred to as “old testament,” in 2 Corinthians 3:14. Here, the Greek text literally speaks of the “old covenant,” but Jerome’s Latin translation in the fifth century used the expression “old testament” in this passage, and the term stuck.

**The Bible Says**

The Bible never refers to itself as the “Bible,” but rather as the “Scriptures.” In more than 20 instances, Jesus affirmed His teachings by declaring, “It is written,” or “the Scripture says,” or “Have you not read?”

Think about it: Jesus was God incarnate. As Creator of heaven and earth, he could have established an entirely new framework and set of rules to define His role and mission. Yet He continuously accredited the Scriptures as the fixed point through which He identified Himself.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refocused our approach to the Torah from mere external obedience of the letter to a transformative expression of the heart and mind. Yet He never discounted the Law or advocated for replacing it, choosing instead to expound upon and sharpen its meaning. “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets,” Jesus told His disciples. “I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17–19).

“It is written” was His chosen weapon to overcome Satan. And what was true for Jesus is true for the New Testament writers, who repeatedly refer to the then-existing Hebrew scriptures—the Old Testament. The New Testament directly quotes or cites the Hebrew Scriptures more than 300 times and alludes to them over 1,600 times.

So Billy Graham’s practice of often referring to what “the Bible says” was not a quirky habit of an old-fashioned preacher but the same time-honored custom followed by Jesus and the apostles. And we would do well to keep this practice alive today.

**The Noble Church**

The book of Acts honors one particular church as being “noble”: the church of Berea, in Greece. Luke testifies of the Bereans: “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Paul must have loved this church. First, they readily received the preaching of the Word of God. Yet they also went home and made sure the message matched with Scripture.

Please understand, they did not check Paul’s sermons against Peter’s epistles or the Gospels. All they had at the time was the Tanach—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. In other words, if they could not find what Paul was preaching in the Old Testament, they likely would not have accepted his gospel. This also means the original apostles only preached the gospel from the Old Testament (Acts 17:2–3; 18:28). Many Christians today would be lost if they had to share the Good News of Jesus solely from the Old Testament. And again—Paul did not consider the Bereans to be a particularly critical or backward-minded audience; on the contrary, he called them more fair-minded and noble than the others.

**Jesus in the Old Testament**

Jesus did not come to start something completely new, but to affirm and fulfil what was written. For three-and-a-half years, John the apostle watched Jesus teaching, engaging with men and women, and caring for children, the sick, and the rejected. And then John described his experience with Jesus as “the word became flesh.” While hearing His words and watching His deeds, the passages of the Old Testament suddenly became a “red-letter edition” for his disciples. In Jesus, they saw their Scriptures coming alive and understood the true meaning of God’s Word. Jesus elevated the outward ritual of the Law in Tanach to the level of transformed hearts. While His
bold new approach to Scripture at times frustrated even the disciples (Matthew 19:10). He also promised the Holy Spirit would soon purify their hearts, just as the prophets foretold (Ezekiel 36:25–27).

Jesus also declared it was the “Scriptures who testify about Me” (John 5:39). This is a concept Jews hold to this day. A rabbi once told me: “Jürgen, you can find Messiah on every page of the Bible (the Tanach). For example, the very first verses of the Bible say: ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...’ and the Spirit was hovering over the waters. This was the spirit of Messiah! He already was there.” And this is exactly what we find in John 1: “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God.” The places where Jesus can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures are countless—whether in the story of Joseph who was rejected and sold by his brothers and became the redeemer of Israel, or through the lives of Moses, David, and many other figures and stories that foreshadow the future Redeemer.

Thus, when Jesus met two disciples on the way to Emmaus after His resurrection, Luke tells us: “Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). We also find Paul in Rome speaking to the Jewish leaders: “So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23).

The Main Source of Doctrine
For the early church, the Tanach was considered the main source of doctrine and teaching. Regarding the Hebrew Bible, Paul counsels his spiritual son Timothy: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). In fact, all the major doctrinal positions of the church emerged from the Old Testament. The divinity of Jesus (Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2), His atonement through suffering and death (Isaiah 53) and his resurrection (Psalm 16:10), the high priesthood of Jesus according to the order of Melchizedek (Genesis 14; Psalm 110), salvation by faith (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4), the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28; Ezekiel 36–37), gentile inclusion in the redeemed (Genesis 12:2; Isaiah 11:10), and so forth—all can be found in the Tanach. From start to finish, the Hebrew Scriptures informed and inspired the theology of the early church.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and it starts—not with the book of Matthew—but in Genesis. In so many ways, the New Testament can only be understood through the pages of the Old Testament. For example, it would be difficult to fully grasp the atoning power of the blood of Jesus without understanding the sacrificial system of the tabernacle and temple. The heroes of faith, from Noah and Abraham to Nehemiah and Ezra, serve as our examples to this day of how to trust in God. In the same way, the books of the New Testament and working of the Holy Spirit can shed light on the writings of the Old (2 Corinthians 3:14ff).

Conclusion
All this, of course, should not cause us in any way to abandon or devalue the New Testament. On the contrary, knowing and studying the Hebrew Scriptures helps us better understand Jesus and the New Testament. It should encourage us to take the entire Word of God for what it is—the Word of God! Indeed, the whole canon of Holy Scriptures deserves our fullest respect as God our Creator speaking to humanity.

So ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your heart and mind as you read your Bible. Ask Jesus to show you the wonders of His Word. I encourage you to embrace and study all the books of the Bible. Decide even today to read through the entire Bible. I assure you, it will change your life. God promises us: “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

I pray this will be your experience as you study and absorb the whole counsel of God. ☕
Great Hope in the Midst of Great Tragedy

By Kayla & Ionatan Muchnik

“It was here. It hit in our home!”

Gladys needed few words to describe the most harrowing day of her life. Last November, she and her husband Sergio were at home in Ashkelon, just north of Gaza, when they heard sirens and Hamas rockets being intercepted by Iron Dome batteries. All night long the alarm kept sounding and sent them scurrying toward the bomb shelter specially built into their home.

From inside the shelter, they heard a rocket hit nearby. After a while, Gladys went to the balcony and saw smoke rising in the distance. For Gladys, her balcony is not only a great lookout point but also one of her favorite places to talk with God. Standing there watching the smoke rise, Gladys heard the Lord say: “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you” (Psalm 91:7).

Sergio suggested they move their mattresses into the shelter for the night, which they did. They had barely closed the door, when muffled explosions of Iron Dome intercepts began again and then everything went silent. But the eerie calm abruptly ended in a loud, violent BOOM!

Hearing debris falling outside, Gladys shouted, “It was here, in our home!” But her husband thought otherwise. Gladys slowly opened the door to investigate. A gray cloud of smoke and sulfur enveloped her, so she slammed the door in shock. Later, Sergio ventured out into the dark, smoke-filled home. Stepping over debris and broken glass, he reached the balcony and yelled for help. Their home had suffered a direct hit!

As Sergio led Gladys safely out of the home, she looked at the devastation and felt her dreams were crushed. Yet when the police arrived, they made an extraordinary discovery: the rocket never exploded! Instead, the massive rocket—over five meters long—had split in two and exited the home, unexploded. The security forces were perplexed how this happened. But Gladys knew why! The Lord had kept His promise to protect them.

During the ambulance ride to the hospital, Gladys kept repeating Psalm 91:7. She asked God, “Why did this happen?” And she heard the Lord reply, “I told you that it would not touch you.”

“This situation changed me,” Gladys explained during a solidarity visit from an ICEJ team. “I strongly believe that God is with me and He answers my prayers. This made me stronger as a believer to trust in God, and it strengthened my marriage.”

As Gladys related her experience, her heart overflowed with both sorrow and thankfulness. The destruction of her home was shocking, yet she was utterly grateful for God’s protection. When Gladys later met an old man with scratches all over his face from rocket shrapnel, she appreciated God’s protection even more. A rocket scored a direct hit on their home, yet Gladys and Sergio walked away without a scratch!

Despite losing everything, Gladys insists, “I still prefer to live in Israel, even if a rocket hits my home, because this is the land that God wants me to live in.”

Gladys and Sergio are now in temporary housing, but must still pay rent on their gutted home. When the ICEJ heard their story in the Israeli media, we stepped in to provide some much-needed assistance. Gladys was greatly comforted with the love and care from her brothers and sisters in Christ. “I am so thankful you are here,” she said. “It brings healing.”

Your generous support allows the ICEJ to reach out quickly to families like Gladys and Sergio when they most need our help. Please pray for this dear couple and many other Israeli families who must overcome the trauma of violence and terror every day.
Women who are abused, lost, and hurting have found a well of hope amid south Tel Aviv’s desert of prostitution, poverty, slavery, and addiction. This hope is found at the “Red Carpet” ministry center, which receives women in distress—some even near death.

When they first enter the center, many women are shocked to see fellow prostitutes being cared for with a tender grace. A small Israeli lady greets them at the door and wraps each one in a hug. The warmth easily touches hearts as they are introduced to volunteers eager to offer a nice lunch. They talk with the women as if they are old friends. After a hearty meal, the women are offered a hot shower, plus a free haircut and manicure, before they are ushered to a special area to pick out new clothes, shoes, and bags, along with toiletries and other necessary items. These are all luxuries, as many of these women are homeless. Treated for once with dignity and respect, they usually leave the center a little different than when they arrived.

This description of life in south Tel Aviv is not fiction. Sadly, it is the reality for countless women who have been trafficked and now are caught in the snare of prostitution in central Israel. Thankfully for them, the Red Carpet center is not fictitious either, but a ministry birthed out of the godly compassion of a believing Israeli couple who saw women in need and decided to reach out to them. The work they do is physically and emotionally demanding and comes at the cost of their family time, their rest, and their own pocketbook.

Today, the center provides numerous services for these battered women, including supplies for infants and new mothers. Many of the women are simply seeking warmth and support, while others are desperate to escape the vicious trap of prostitution.

Red Carpet’s work is highly sensitive and dangerous. A security guard is stationed at the door to prevent pimps from trying to forcibly drag the girls back to the streets. Inside, some of the women have been known to turn violent against themselves or the workers out of fear or a drug-induced hysteria. Workers at the center must be extremely sensitive to these women’s moods and often simply sit and listen to their stories to provide emotional support.

Regrettably, some of the women are dying from sexually transmitted diseases. To them, the Red Carpet team offers the redeeming love of the Lord and their most earnest prayers.

For those who seek to escape this abusive profession, Red Carpet offers safety and tools to take back their lives. Women who are pregnant can receive prenatal support and counseling—hopefully securing one crucial victory at a time in the fight against abortion.

The Red Carpet center is salvaging and changing lives forever. Without the center, these women would have nowhere to turn to flee their enslavement. The continued support of ICEJ donors is vital to helping rescue these extremely vulnerable women. Please also pray for these broken women, that they would find the courage and strength to break away from their cruel masters and seek help from the center. And pray for the Red Carpet workers, that they might have the grace and power needed to truly help these women become free and whole again.

To support projects like Red Carpet and others go to: www.icejusa.org/aid
We truly have an out-of-the-ordinary home,” says ICEJ Haifa Home director Yudit Setz.

The purpose of ICEJ’s Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors is not only to provide the best care for the residents but also to bring purpose to their last years of life. In fact, it was revealed in a recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association that while Holocaust Survivors experience more chronic illness than the general population, they outlive them by an average of seven years. The study cites several possible reasons for this, such as their unique resilience, including favorable genetic, physical, and emotional capabilities that may have helped them survive the Shoah (Holocaust) in the first place.

However, this extra lease on life requires a special kind of care, not only for the body but also for the mind and the soul. Therefore, ICEJ’s Haifa Home provides the Holocaust Survivors with opportunities to share their personal stories of suffering and survival with visitors from around the world. Each story, along with photos, is also displayed in the Haifa Home’s museum, which receives a steady stream of visitors both from Israel and abroad.

The Haifa Home buildings are always in need of maintenance, so the ICEJ team in Haifa recently launched a renovation and expansion called “Project Upgrade.” A dynamic couple, Yudit and Will Setz, oversees this project and are on site managing the daily progress of the renovations. When heavy rain and wind hit Haifa early in the new year causing water damage in some apartments and even toppling an old tree against the main dining hall, Yudit and Will were able to respond rapidly and supervise the cleanup and repairs.

“Our journey now is discovering how to fit our volunteers into the work we do,” explained Yudit. “We started to invite Christian handymen from abroad to join our local team in refurbishing many of the older apartments and to adapt the living quarters of the residents to their changing needs. It has been a great blessing for the residents.”

At the same time, this project is impacting the Christian volunteers in special ways. They take pride in bettering the home through their valuable time and trade skills. These foreign volunteers not only see the land but also connect with the people and return to their home countries as ambassadors for Israel.

One recent handyman from Germany was 72-year-old Rainer Kert. During his stay, Rainer helped repair a handrail and other features around the property, bringing greater safety and comfort to the Survivors at the Haifa Home. After serving the Survivors for several weeks, Rainer stated: “What touched me the most was that I was in such close contact with people who lived through hell, and that I—a German—could have a positive impact in making the lives of Holocaust Survivors more comfortable.”

This year, the ICEJ team in Haifa hopes to:

• Upgrade and expand the volunteer infrastructure
• Create more videos capturing the great work ICEJ is doing at the Haifa Home
• Develop a local team in Haifa to help with daily tasks
• Finish construction in a new building for residents in need of intensive care
• Continue upgrading and renovating existing buildings
• Add gardens and beautify the exteriors of the Survivors’ homes

This one-of-a-kind humanitarian project needs your prayers. Please pray for God’s wisdom in Will and Yudit’s daily decisions, for a healthy balance of work and rest, for grace to minister to the residents, and for the right volunteer team members at the right time to complete each job. As the ICEJ Haifa team moves forward in this year of new beginnings, we look ahead with great expectation to see how the Lord will continue to move in extraordinary ways!
HOME CARE LETTER
OF THANKSGIVING

BY MAXINE CARLILL

When Tatyana needed assistance, the ICEJ’s Homecare team was there. In 1998, Tatyana and her husband made Aliyah from Kiev, accompanied by her elderly parents. After her mother passed away, her father needed in-home nursing care. “The Embassy will help you,” acquaintances told her. When Tatyana called the ICEJ for help, that was the beginning of a long relationship with ICEJ Homecare. After Tatyana’s father passed away, she and her husband developed serious health problems, so Homecare came back into their lives and continued to provide help and friendship.

During a recent visit, Tatyana shared: “Life has been difficult in Israel. My health problems and having seven grandchildren gave me no time to make a circle of friends or learn Hebrew, but in Israel I feel at home. This is my home!”

When our Homecare worker, Corrie, asked Tatyana what gave her the most joy in Israel, she beamed and instantly replied, “My son’s family!” Tatyana’s son made Aliyah four years before his parents and started a family. She also expressed appreciation for the “new friends I’ve made through ICEJ. I know I am not alone in difficult moments.”

Her joy also includes memories of Israeli Guest Night at the ICEJ’s Feast of Tabernacles and visits from Christian friends at her husband’s hospital bedside for his eightieth—and last—birthday. Her apartment was painted and extra groceries arrived for a Jewish holiday, thanks to the generous giving of ICEJ donors.

“They didn’t help me out of obligation, but they helped me with the heart,” she says. ☺️

Above: Tatyana expressed gratitude to ICEJ Homecare with this touching handwritten letter. She is grateful for the assistance ICEJ Homecare provided her family over the years.
Felicia from Canada shares about her experience on the ICEJ Arise Tour in Israel:

The Arise tour greatly impacted my life. When I went on the tour, my faith had been dormant for a number of years. In Israel, the connections I made, the people I met, and the places we visited slowly reignited my faith. It has been a four-year transformative journey since then. I can wholeheartedly say God has changed the posture of my heart completely since Israel.

Before the tour, I only heard negative things about Israel in the news. But when you’re there, you truly feel safe and protected. I see Israel as an extraordinary place. It opened my eyes to the biblical truths of the Holy Land, the recent history of Israel, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

If you feel that subtle heart tug calling you to Israel, don’t ignore it. That’s the voice from heaven telling you it’s your time to go home. I was hesitant at first, but God led the way. I think every believer should experience Israel at some point. I can tell you it was truly life changing.

Like Felicia, many more young adults’ relationships with God have been impacted through the ICEJ Arise Tour. We encourage you to sign up today, or encourage other young people to sign up for this unforgettable trip to Israel this summer!

Travel to Israel this summer: www.icejusa.org/young-adult-tours


– FELICIA
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A NEW YEAR & A NEW HOME: ICEJ HEADQUARTERS UPDATE

BY DR JÜRGEN BÜHLER

This new year holds the promise of many new beginnings, and for the ICEJ, one of those new beginnings involves a move to new offices. After much prayer and four months of evaluating almost every available rental space in Jerusalem, we have finally found a new place to serve as our ICEJ Headquarters for at least the next two years. The new “home” takes up an entire floor in a large office building in southern Jerusalem. (Pictured above)

Thank you for your prayers regarding this move. Please continue praying for grace, strength, protection, and favor as our staff adjusts to the new working environment after 22 years at Rachel Imeinu. Once some necessary remodeling is completed in June, we will be ready to receive visitors. Watch for updates on our progress where we will share the new address and instructions on arranging a tour of the new building!

During this transitional season, we also invite you to continue praying for a more permanent home for the ICEJ, as we are convinced that the Lord would have us own and not just rent an office building here in Jerusalem. We are excited about the great plans God has to expand our work and ministry in Israel and around the world, and we look forward with faith and anticipation to seeing this unfold in this new year, filled with new beginnings! 😊
One popular way to attack Israel these days is through BDS (Boycott, Divest, and Sanction), whether in business, culture, or via legislation.

A proposed law currently making its way through the Irish parliament would criminalize the trading of goods from Israeli settlements. As a native German and citizen of the European Union, I find this bill totally misguided, extremely unfair, counterproductive to peace, and—above all—morally outrageous. It is a clear example of why BDS will never bring peace and only harms the people it claims to help.

According to this bill, anyone found guilty of importing or selling any goods or services originating from “occupied territory” would face a fine of up to $285,000 or five years in jail. Yet the bill is deliberately worded to only apply to “Israeli settlements” in the West Bank, eastern Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. Those pushing this Irish bill have proudly proclaimed it will lead Europe and the world out of the current impasse in negotiations and toward Middle East peace. Nothing could be further from the truth!

The international community has always approached the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a dispute that must be resolved by the parties involved. From Resolution 242 forward, every UN Security Council decision has been geared to offering the parties a suggested pathway to peace and encouraging them to sort out their differences in direct talks. This approach helped produce the Oslo Accords, witnessed by the EU, which left the fate of the settlements to a final-status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

However, the Republic of Ireland is now trying to force the issue unilaterally. Yet, how is putting someone in an Irish dungeon for buying a gold-medal winning bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon from Tura going to bring us closer to peace? A housewife making a salad with olive oil from Shiloh or a dessert with dates from the Jordan Valley could unknowingly bankrupt her family. Will some Jew-hating neighbor see such contraband in her kitchen and report the family to the Irish authorities? How can you ever fairly enforce such an absurd criminal law?

The bill is also counterproductive to peace, in that it rewards Palestinian intransigence. When all the blame is being placed on Israel, what incentives do the Palestinians have to make concessions? Are the Jews who have returned to the heart of their ancient homeland any more a threat to world peace than those Palestinian neighbors who have been violently attacking them for decades?

In practice, this criminal law would harm Palestinians the most. As the SodaStream episode made clear, many businesses and factories in the Israeli settlements employ Palestinian workers and pay them salaries four times higher on average than what ordinary Palestinians earn. These breadwinners often support large families, so tens of thousands of Palestinians could be impacted if, due to BDS pressure, Israeli businesses fire these workers and move elsewhere.

But the truly odious aspect of the Irish bill is its blatant anti-Semitism, as it viciously singles out Jewish “occupiers” while ignoring all other occupying forces in the world. What about olive oil from the Turkish-occupied part of Cyprus, fish from Russian-occupied Crimea, or dates from Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara? All these products are free to enter the Euro zone, while it is the Jews who must be taught a lesson again. How can this truly be a righteous act, as the Irish sponsors claim, when it is so clearly discriminatory?

I cannot help but think these Irish do-gooders are taking us straight back to the racist laws of the 1930s in Germany. *Kauft nicht bei Juden!* “Don’t buy Jewish!” was the rule then and is precisely what this law tells Irish citizens today. It is legislated anti-Semitism dressed up in nicely polished legalese and lip service to promoting peace and “European values.”

If we have truly learned the lessons of the Holocaust, Europe will reject this attempt to single out Jews for punishment.

So please stop the nonsense, Ireland!
In December 2018, I visited Tanzania. The short trip took me to Arusha, a modern city located within sight of the majestic Mt. Kilimanjaro, and then to Dar es-Salaam, a bustling metropolis on the shores of the Indian Ocean. The purpose for this trip was simple: I wanted to visit what has been our most productive branch in Africa over recent years and understand the reasons for its success.

In just a few short years, our energetic National Director, Stanton Newton, managed to mobilize thousands of Tanzanian Christians to support Israel. Coached by David Parsons, who has been tirelessly traveling to the country over the past three years, Newton drafted the constitution of the Tanzanian branch and appointed the first board members. During my trip, an important milestone was achieved: the board signed their constitution, which will be submitted to the authorities for registration. This development opens the way for further growth of the Tanzanian branch.

ICEJ Tanzania exemplifies that with the right people and motivation, ICEJ can thrive in every culture and connect all peoples, tribes, and languages with Israel.

Since the 1970s, the idea has developed that international law requires resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict by creating a State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, and borders based on the “1967 lines”—the so-called “two-state solution.” Conference speakers challenged this concept and pointed out the difference between legal facts under international law and political proclamations, such as non-binding UN resolutions. In practice, however, the international legal system is at risk of being manipulated by coalitions of nations to achieve their ideological ends. Denying the Jewish people the right to determine where their capital is located falls into this category of “lawfare.”

With the evident collapse of the Oslo Accords, it is time to revisit this prevailing legal paradigm to resolve the conflict. The goal of the seminar was to provide a legal framework for the exploration of alternative policy solutions to balance the rights of the Jewish State of Israel with the rights of Palestinian Arabs to political autonomy, and economic and social advancement.

Our hope is that, in at least a few European nations, insights gained from the seminar will inspire policy makers to adopt a more realistic approach to the conflict, which could help make life better for people in the region. ICEJ has a network of branches in Europe with people who will certainly assist them in working toward this goal.

In January, the Czech Parliament hosted an international seminar on the legal status of Jerusalem under international law and the future of the two-state solution. Organized by the ICEJ with local Czech partners and The Hague Initiative for International Cooperation, this event brought together an impressive lineup of renowned international speakers, including ICEJ Vice President & Senior Spokesman David Parsons, legal counsel Andrew Tucker, Israeli analyst Yitzhak Sokoloff, Chairman of the European Coalition for Israel, Tomas Sandell, and others to the Czech capital. More than 60 participants from 13 nations, along with ICEJ directors from four European countries, were greeted by Czech MPs and the Israeli ambassador, Daniel Meron.

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YOUR ISRAEL ANSWER:

A Dangerous Theology—Not Irresistible at All

By Susan Michael, ICEJ USA Director

The pastor of the second-largest church in America, Andy Stanley, wants to change the way Christianity is taught to reach new generations of skeptics, according to his book Irresistible: Reclaiming the New That Jesus Unleashed for the World. While he has every good intention, he proposes a shocking approach that takes the church back centuries—not to the first-century church led by the apostles as he claims, but to a later time when Replacement Theology was the prevailing theology and the church was, therefore, largely anti-Semitic.

While that is certainly not his intent, it is the ramifications of his dismissal of everything Jewish in the Bible—namely the Old Testament—deeming it obsolete. Speaking of the Old Testament, the apostle Paul said it was useful for “teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). All of the New Testament writers treated the Old Testament Scriptures as foundational. Stanley, however, sounds more like second- and third-century Church Fathers when he says that the Old Testament and Judaism have been brought to an end and replaced with something totally and completely new—Christianity.

Even more disturbing is the way he describes Judaism in only negative terms. It is a well-known fact that during the time of Jesus the priesthood and some of the Pharisees had become corrupt. Jesus was not the only one who denounced them for it. But in this book, Stanley describes Judaism itself as the problem—it is legalistic, hypocritical, self-righteous, and exclusive. He even claims the apostle Paul tried to keep Judaism from “eroding the beauty and simplicity” of the ekklesia (church) of Jesus. Of course, Paul was against legalism—not Judaism.

There are many issues found in his 330-page book to address. This article, however, is a summation of the dangers in adopting Stanley’s definition of irresistible Christianity.

The Bible No Longer Makes Sense

Because Replacement Theology creates a disconnect between the Old and New Testaments, it is hard to teach the former in an exciting way. I have been reading and studying the Bible for over 40 years and I find it is the most exciting book on the planet—one that makes perfect sense from Genesis to Revelation! To teach the Old Testament is obsolete is what produces this disconnect. To teach it in its proper context, however, and under the inspiration of the very Holy Spirit who inspired its writing, makes it stand up and come so alive it is life-changing!

Anti-Judaism Leads to Anti-Semitism

A lesson learned from Christian history is that the anti-Judaism of some early Church Fathers led to anti-Semitism and persecution of the Jewish people by later generations. This highlights the danger in Stanley’s negative descriptions of Judaism. He even blames the sin of the church throughout history on the influences of Judaism—the ultimate example of anti-Semitic scapegoating if ever there was one. Leading Christian voices today must resist this theology and thereby stop the slide down a slippery slope toward renewed anti-Semitism in the church.

Jesus Becomes Gentile

Reading Jesus from any perspective other than a first-century Jewish one lends itself to misinterpretation. If a church considers the Old Testament irrelevant to the Christian faith, then it is studied less and less, creating followers of Jesus who are unaware of the Old Testament foundations for all he did and taught. He was not some Greek god with a mythical birth and resurrection story, but came in a carefully prepared Jewish context that explains His teachings, death, resurrection, and His future return to the earth as King. Without that context, we read Jesus through gentle, twenty-first-century eyes that see Him just like us, and not who He really is.

A Blind Church

Replacement Theology holds that the Jewish people have lost their standing with God, due to their rejection of Jesus as Messiah, while the church has assumed their place. Therefore, their return to their ancient homeland in the last 100 years is just an anomaly—a political accident—and has no theological significance. These Christians deny that the God of Israel has brought the Jews back to the Land just as the Hebrew prophets said He would. This return prepares the way for the next great act of God in which the Messiah returns to the planet to defend Jerusalem, judge the nations for their evil treatment of His people, and establish the kingdom of God on earth. A blinded church will not understand the times we live in and may find itself outside the move of God in our day.

Throws out the Baby with the Bath Water

Instead of throwing out legalism, Judaizing, or misapplication of the Mosaic Law, Stanley has thrown out the entire Old Testament. In so doing, he has set a dangerous precedent for new generations of believers adhering to a Christianity that is void of its eternal, spiritual context, which is, simply put, a Jewish one. A better solution to the problem Stanley is trying to address is to study Scripture in its proper cultural and religious context and teach the overarching story of the Bible that truly makes it the most exciting book on the planet!
Many families in Israel live in poverty and are unable to properly celebrate the Passover Feast. Every year, ICEJ AID and supporters like you provide Passover care packages to families in need throughout Israel. Here are a few highlights from last year’s Passover:

**In Beit She’an**, 50 needy families received gifts. One father of 14 said: “My family appreciates your support. We thank you that we can celebrate and remember Pesach.”

**In Kiryat Gat**, 20 Ethiopian families that had just made Aliyah to Israel received care packages. One of the women said: “The heart only works if blood is flowing through it, and only then are you alive. If you do something with your whole heart, only that is life-giving. This is your visit and the work you are doing in the Land—giving life, making sure that the heart is working.

Thank you for coming, thank you for warming our homes with your presence.”

At Netanya’s Social Welfare facility, we handed out 50 care packages. One recipient, a religious Jewish man named Isaac, has four children and a beloved wife who has been bedridden for more than 14 years. When Isaac received his gift, he said: “Thank you with all my heart for being here today and listening to me. Thank you for these gifts that indeed show you care. My wish is that next year, I will belong to the people who give and no longer need any support. Chag Pesach sameach (happy Passover).”

Your generous donations made many hearts glad and we know God will do marvelous works again this Passover, April 2019. We hope to provide even more Passover care packages to help needy Jewish families celebrate Passover!

Send your gift today and wish needy Israelis a “Chag Pesach sameach,” or “Happy Passover!”

Donate online at: www.icejusa.org/passover-appeal
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