CENTER STAGE AZUSA
THE COVENANT HITS LOS ANGELES
ICEJ puts Israel at the heart of the Azusa Street Centennial
The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ)

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem was founded in 1980 as an act of comfort and solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people in their claim to Jerusalem.

Today, the Christian Embassy stands at the forefront of a growing mainstream movement of Christians worldwide who share a love and concern for Israel and an understanding of the biblical significance of the modern ingathering of Jews to the land of their forefathers.

From our headquarters in Jerusalem and through our branches and representatives in over 80 nations, we seek to challenge the Church to take up its scriptural responsibilities towards the Jewish people, to remind Israel of the wonderful promises made to her in the Bible, and to be a source of practical assistance to all the people of the Land of Israel.

The ICEJ is a non-denominational faith ministry, supported by the voluntary contributions of our members and friends worldwide. We invite you to join with us as we minister to Israel and the Jewish people worldwide.

If you wish to make a donation to the general work of the ICEJ or to a specific project described in this magazine, please use the attached response envelope, use the address below or visit our Web site at www.icej.org/get-involved to send your gift. All donations are tax deductible according to the law of your country.

Cover Photo: The Covenant, one of the events at the heart of the Azusa Street Centennial celebrations in Los Angeles this April.

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Dear Friends,

Our world stands at all sorts of crossroads. Sadly the forces of secular humanism and radical Islam will drive many into the cul de sac of hopelessness and even destruction.

Nevertheless, God is always at work in a fallen world and even Jesus said that there would come a time when the love of many would grow cold. But there would also be those who would keep their “oil lamps” well trimmed and shining brightly.

One hundred years ago such a light fell on Azusa Street in Los Angeles. In a little unattractive wooden church the power of God came in light and Pentecostal anointing. A black preacher called William Seymour, together with a white preacher called Frank Bartleman ignited a fire from heaven that gave birth to many of the great Pentecostal denominations of our day. Indeed, the anointing of God’s Spirit was so strong that many in the church, and in the city blocks around it, were struck down by it. This was a new “baptism” that saw countless millions swept into the Kingdom of God. The world was changed!

Now in April of this year, on the very site of the original church in Azusa Street, the ICEJ will produce “The Covenant” in the American/Japanese theatre as part of the Centennial celebrations of this great event. This is a great privilege and it is remarkable that this humble musical that began in Israel has now crossed the world to take centre stage at the conference.

Not only will Israel’s role in world redemption be projected by this, but there is the possibility of encouraging many wonderful Christians from all over the world who have never thought much about Israel to get involved and pray for her.

The Covenant will be produced twice a day from the 25th to the 27th April 2006, and we do ask that you pray about this. Further details concerning this development are given in this magazine. As always, thank you for partnering with us.

Yours in Jesus,

Malcolm Hedding

P.S. Don’t forget to subscribe to The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition
On April 18, 1906, a devastating earthquake struck the booming California gold-rush town of San Francisco. Felt as far away as Oregon and Nevada, the tremors triggered a massive fire that raged for days, killed 3,000 people and left half the city homeless.

Along the same deadly fault-line, four hundred miles south, Los Angeles was rattled by the earthquake's power. But another kind of fire was already blazing there. Ignited a week earlier in the humble home of Richard and Ruth Asbery – these flames burned brightly long after San Francisco was re-built. More than that, they lit up the century that followed.

2006 marks the centenary of what became known as the Azusa Street Revival - the 100th birthday of a spiritual renewal that has shaken the world and changed more than half a billion lives on the way.

From the Asbery’s small wooden home on Bonnie Brae Street, to the abandoned gospel mission at 312 Azusa Street, the unique outpouring of the Holy Spirit in April 1906 ushered in the modern Pentecostal movement. Those touched went across the Americas and out to Africa, Europe and the rest of the world carrying a new fire for world mission, a passion for Jesus and a transformed understanding of the very scriptures that had so faithfully prophesied these things.

It has been termed the “world’s greatest revival,” and this April between 80,000 and 100,000 Christians will return to Los Angeles to celebrate it.
“The events at Azusa Street typified what it truly means to be empowered by the Spirit of God,” says ICEJ Executive Director, Malcolm Hedding, detailing the Embassy’s involvement in the five-day centennial event.

As the twentieth century progressed, Hedding explains, this growing movement was among the first to embrace the prophetic purpose of God in the re-building of Zion and the rebirth of the Jewish State. If God had kept his end-time promise “to pour out his Spirit on all flesh,” then it stood to reason that the church could expect the One “that scattered Israel to regather” them again.

“Today,” Hedding continues, “large numbers of Pentecostals who appreciate Israel’s biblical position and modern day restoration, are testimony to the heritage that the movement has left them.”

**THE ONE-EYED PREACHER**

It all began two months before the earthquake when William Seymour – an uneducated, half blind, son of former slaves - arrived from Houston, Texas to preach at a small African-American holiness church in the heart of Los Angeles. Although he had never spoken in tongues, Seymour had encountered the phenomenon in Texas where he sat under the teaching of renowned Bible teacher and evangelist Charles Fox Parham.

Soon after his arrival, Seymour began preaching the unfamiliar message of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with great fervour. Within a few days, the pastor threw him out and locked the church doors – mainly on the grounds that Seymour himself had not yet experienced the blessing of which he spoke.

But he was undaunted. A man of great humility, Seymour was characterised by a deep hunger for more of God.

A local newspaper reporter who visited the Azusa Street mission months later dismissed those touched by the revival as “mad, mentally deranged or under a spell.” But his disparaging perception of this “one-eyed, illiterate Negro,” preacher, was telling.

Seymour “stays on his knees much of the time with his head hidden between the wooden milk crates,”
the journalist wrote.” He doesn’t talk very much but at times he can be heard shouting, ‘Repent,’ and he’s supposed to be running the thing.”

In retrospect, the power of Seymour’s ministry can be traced to the fact that he spent more time on his knees than trying to ‘run’ anything. Drawn by that fervour, the Asberys and others from the congregation soon joined him, convinced that they stood on the threshold of a great revival.

The group continued to gather for prayer and worship. On April 9 Seymour was praying on his own with a man called Edward Lee – who that afternoon became the first person in Los Angeles to experience speaking in tongues. The two brothers excitedly made their way to Bonnie Brae Street, and the fire spread. Six others experienced Spirit-baptism that night, among them Jennie Moore, the woman who would later marry Seymour and carry on the work of the Azusa Street mission after his death. According to eyewitnesses, Moore – gripped by the power of God - began to sing in tongues and play the piano, having never learned to play a note in her life.

They shouted three days and nights,” she said. “The people came from everywhere. By the next morning, there was no way of getting nearer the house. As the people came in they would fall under the power, and the whole city was stirred.”

SHAKEN AND STIRRED

Three days later at 4am. on April 12, Seymour finally received the baptism he sought after praying all night.

Years later Emma Cotton recalled what she saw. “They shouted three days and nights,” she said. “The people came from everywhere. By the next morning, there was no way of getting nearer the house. As the people came in they would fall under the power, and the whole city was stirred.”

The foundations of the Asbery home even gave way under the weight of the people, Cotton remembers, “but no one was hurt.” The sick were healed, “and sinners were saved just as they came in.”

More and more people flocked to the prayer meetings, which soon moved to an African Methodist mission that had fallen into disrepair and was being used to house hay and livestock. In a time of great racial division and segregation, Seymour was joined at the new Azusa Street premises by a white pastor, Frank Bartleman, who famously noted that in their meetings, “the ‘color line’ was washed away by the blood.”

“What began in a small house a mile or so away,” Hedding reflects,
"found full revival expression in the little wooden church on Azusa Street," where three daily services would draw upwards of 1,300 people.

"Lives were dramatically and forever changed, equipped for service and went out into the world to preach," he continues. "So much of our concept of ‘revival’ today lacks these three fundamental authenticating evidences."

Two thousand years after Jesus’ birth, and it seemed that God once again was using poor folk in a humble stable to shake the earth.

**REVIVAL TOWN**

Twenty-first century Los Angeles could hardly offer a more striking contrast to the anxious quake-shaken town where the 1906 revival broke out. One of the largest cities on earth, and possibly, the most influential, L.A. in 2006 is far better known for the pervasive global reach of Hollywood, than the humble heritage of Seymour and Bartleman. In fact, many today would describe it as the last place in the world to seek spiritual renewal.

Not so, argues former ICEJ International Director Michael Utterback, the head of the Church of God’s Ministry to Israel, and a man closely connected to the vision behind the Azusa Street Centennial.

"600 million charismatics worldwide can trace their steps back to Azusa Street." By convening such a gathering the church is “celebrating the acts of the Holy Spirit for the last 100 years, and passing on the torch.”

At the heart of the Centennial vision - pioneered by the late Dr. Robert Fisher who founded the Center for Spiritual Renewal - is a passion to see an even greater revival in the new century.

"The greatest thing we can do is to bring all that we have received and lay our hands on the next generation to pass the mantle on for even greater things that are going to transpire on the planet – Elijah to Elisha” says Utterback, a close friend of Fisher before his unexpected death in September 2005.

It is a desire easily traced back to Fisher’s own “spiritual genetics” as the grandson of one of Seymour’s co-Pastors in the early days of the Azusa Street Revival and a firm believer in the power of imparted prayer.

After four days of different ministry opportunities, featuring speakers and workshops representing the diversity of the worldwide pentecostal movement, the Azusa Street Centennial.

"600 million charismatics worldwide can trace their steps back to Azusa Street."

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Centennial is set to climax with two events at the 92,500-seat Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. The International Centennial Assembly on the afternoon of April 29 will set the stage for commemorating the move of God in the 20th Century, and seek a new outpouring for the days ahead.

That evening, tens of thousands of young people will enter for a worship celebration and face an uncompromising challenge to lay down their lives for the work of the Gospel. The International Youth Convocation concludes with a massive anointing service, where Pentecostal leaders from around the world will commission the next generation to pass on the fire into the century ahead.

“My conviction is that there is a second book of Acts being written,” says Utterback, “and the players are alive today.”

Now a trash-littered alley in the metropolitan heart of L.A. the birthplace of the modern Pentecostal movement is today at the centre of ‘Little Tokyo’ - the Japanese quarter close by City Hall, just out of reach of the shadows of the skyscrapers downtown.

And where Seymour’s Gospel Mission once stood, stands a theatre.

“But Israel is not the chief focus of the Centennial,” Hedding admits, “the organisers have asked the ICEJ to present The Covenant there - using the very Azusa Street site where the original church stood in 1906 to draw attention to the fact that one of the great movements of God’s Spirit in our time has been and still is the restoration of Israel.”

Fisher’s son, Cameron, a key player in the broad coalition of ministers and ministries coming together to coordinate the Centennial celebrations, puts it more bluntly. “We want Pentecostal people who may not know about the Israel connection to get it when they come,” he says.

But hosting six performances of a full-length biblical musical tracing the faithfulness of God to the Jewish people through the ages is just a start.

The Centennial events point to “an unveiling revelation that all people are coming to receive,” suggests Utterback, echoing the progressive understanding of the gifts and person of the Holy Spirit that followed the 1906 outpouring. Though the message has been “held in obscurity for the past 2000 years,” he continues: “The fullness of time has come. The mystery is becoming reality. The message of Israel is going mainstream within the Body of Christ today.”

But does anyone think that just bringing 100,000 believers for a worship service in a football stadium is enough to trigger revival?

“There is no planned response that we’re expecting” says Cameron Fisher. “We’re just gathering in thankfulness for what the Lord has done,” hoping that it will be “a wake up call for renewing and refreshing that sends a signal to the world that God is here!”

For Utterback, it’s not about who or how many show up, but whether those that do grasp the ‘if-then’ concept laid out in 2 Chronicles 7: 14: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

“The Lord God of heaven may not visit his people exactly as he did at Azusa Street,” reflects Hedding after some thought.

“But to be sure, the apathy, apostasy, prayerlessness and lack of zeal all tell us that if ever we needed another Azusa Street - it is now.”
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WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
ROBERT AND ELIZABETH MUREN
PRODUCED BY CHUCK KING
www.thecovenant.com
During the latter part of January, Malcolm Hedding and Jürgen Bühler attended a “Prayerquake” conference in the city of Port Harcourt in Nigeria. They were invited to be a part of this conference by Rev. Mosy Madugba, the ICEJ Nigerian national director.

What awaited them was nothing short of an encounter with what is perhaps the new power of Christianity. Some 10,000 people were gathered together in the local civic center and their zeal for and dedication to the Kingdom of God was astonishing. Their prayers were like the sounds of thundering waters and the manifest presence of God was felt everywhere. Without a doubt something wonderful is taking place in the Third World, since our two directors experienced the power and presence of God in a way that they have never encountered anywhere in the world.

These Christians from all over Africa are not rich in worldly goods but they are rich toward God. It was a humbling experience! In addition they have a love for Israel that is infectious and when they prayed for her, they did so with stirring crying and tears.

Malcolm and Jürgen ministered the Word of God concerning Israel but they left Port Harcourt more enriched by the believers there than when they arrived. It was like a living example of the Book of Acts! 😇

Malcolm Hedding and Jürgen Bühler in Port Harcourt, Nigeria
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FEAST 2005 PRODUCTS

Recapture the EXPERIENCE of the 2005 Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem! Available now on DVD or Video, you can relive the moments or watch for the first time, the Celebration that was attended by over 6,000 pilgrims from around the world! THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM draws on the rich spiritual principles contained in the parables of Jesus.

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In need of pictures from the 2005 Feast? No problem! We have the 2005 Feast Photo CD on sale for $9.00 USD (reg. $15.00). This CD contains 260 colorful pictures! (regular shipping fees apply).

SEE BACK PAGE TO ORDER
The disturbing events and violence surrounding the removal of Amona, an “illegal outpost” in Samaria, and the ensuing demonstrations in the capital have reminded us all of the deep divide between the different sectors of Israeli society regarding the future borders of the land. For the Gush Katif evacuees, however, this latest clash was a poignant reminder of the traumatic upheaval and loss of their homes just six months ago.

In the months since disengagement, the evacuees have faced confusing government bureaucracy and many challenging delays as they have tried to re-build their lives. Throughout this process, our social assistance staff has kept in contact with the evacuee leaders and provided assistance, as they have made needs known to us.

In October, a group of Feast pilgrims visited several communities, one being the newly established community of Nitzan. There they participated in giving equipment for five kindergartens to replace what was lost in the move. This hastily constructed temporary community, located on the coast between Ashdod and Ashkelon, was a cabbage patch until last summer. Here, the Christian guests were welcomed with open arms. Laurence Beziz, one of the community workers, expressed her appreciation for the generosity of Christian donors saying, “You help us to make a new beginning and to do what we have always done – to give to others.”
For many of the evacuees, these intervening months have forced unforeseen situations and decisions upon them. The children have been particularly impacted as their faith and life values have been challenged. The Sha’ar HaNegev Regional Council has responsibility for educating many of these displaced students.

Tsila Levi, an educator at the school told us that the concentration level of the children has been deeply affected making it difficult for them to study. In addition, the level of violence and conflict between students has risen significantly due to the stress and uncertainty. This in turn has caused a greater need for special counseling and extra tutoring to help them overcome the trauma.
Because Christians like you reached out from around the world and generously gave to the ICEJ disengagement appeal, we in turn were able to extend a helping hand to these children. As Varda Goldstein, the Public Relations officer of the Sha’ar HaNegev Regional Council expressed in her thank you letter, “You have proven once again that we are not alone.”

Many families, however, have yet to be resettled into even temporary housing. These unfortunate ones are still living in hotels where some families with as many as 10 children are divided up between several rooms. As winter approached, many did not have access to their stored belongings. One evacuee, Dikla Cohen, explained to us, “I am in a hotel in Jerusalem. My storage unit is in Beersheva an hour and a half drive south. I am unable to access my storage unit because the caravan units were unloaded next to each other with the doors facing in. It would cost me 7,000 NIS to have it turned around.”

Many of these families left their homes with only a small backpack and no winter clothes. They are also facing financial challenges and unemployment. The social assistance program was able to provide blankets for many families as well as vouchers for the purchase of winter clothing for the children.

Dikla Cohen sent us her thanks in these words, “We received your aid for the blankets and winter clothing. It came at the right time and to the right place. We were so happy to receive the assistance and hope that you will be able to continue to help in the long and difficult way ahead.” With your help, we aim to continue finding ways to bless the evacuees and let them know that they are not forgotten.

The ICEJ Social Assistance Program helps meet social needs throughout the land, showing Christian care to the people of Israel in every sector of the society. Please see the enclosed donation form if you would like to partner with us financially. To contact the social assistance team directly, email: sapdept@icej.org

“*We received your aid for the blankets and winter clothing. It came at the right time and to the right place.*”

Sanne ten Klooster, a Dutch ICEJ feast pilgrim presents a gift to help the children of the Gaza evacuees to Sarita Maoz, former resident of Alei Sinai now relocated to the tent village of Yad Mordechai.
“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.” Isaiah 40 vs. 1-3

HAVE YOU FELT GOD’S CALL TO THE NATION OF ISRAEL?

- God is inviting our generation to answer the call of Isaiah 40 and be a voice of hope, love and restoration to the people of Israel.
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The Great Hosanna!

*Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous...* Psalm 118:15

For many centuries, countless pilgrims have streamed up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, culminating in the prayers of THE GREAT HOSANNA, recited at the Western Wall. Psalm 118 is our theme of this year's celebration, the largest annual Christian event in Israel. We join the people of Israel in this joyous festival, lifting our hearts and voices with them to pray:

*Hosanna!*

*O Lord, save us! O Lord, grant us success!* Psalm 118: 25

Special Guests

Speakers include Malcolm Hedding, David Pawson, Lance Lambert, Allan Jackson, Jurgen Buhler, Michael Utterback and Mosy Medugba.

**Ron Kenoly**

Joining the worship will be special guest artist Ron Kenoly.

For more detailed information and to register online visit our website: www.icej.org

Schedule

**SATURDAY OCT. 7TH**
- Ein Gedi opening ceremonies at sunset

**SUNDAY OCT. 8TH**
- Evening celebration

**MONDAY OCT. 9TH**
- Morning seminars
- Evening celebration

**TUESDAY OCT. 10TH**
- Morning seminars
- Jerusalem march
- Evening celebration

**WEDNESDAY OCT. 11TH**
- Morning seminars
- Evening celebration

**THURSDAY OCT. 12TH**
- Morning seminars
- Israeli Night & Closing ceremonies (watch our website for more details)

**FRIDAY OCT. 13TH**
- Morning Seminars
- Evening Alternatives:
  - Succah Celebration at Ramat Rachel
  - Classical Concert at Christ Church
  - Evening of Ministry at The Pavilion
  - Healing Service at the YMCA
Recently the leaders of a synagogue came to the Embassy’s Jerusalem Support Center to ask for money to help them repair their facilities. The Synagogue is located in Neve Ya’akov, a community a few miles outside of Jerusalem and serves abused and disadvantaged kids, primarily from Russian and Ethiopian backgrounds. After touring the synagogue it became apparent that this would be a perfect project for the Practical Assistance Team that would be coming in November from the USA.

It amazed these Jewish Leaders that Christians would travel to Israel, giving their time, energies and resources to help, expecting nothing in return. An advance project crew did the preliminary work. When the workers arrived, they were ready to clean, paint and repair in order to make over the facility. For three and a half days the team of twelve worked tirelessly. When they had finished the project, repairs were complete, walls were painted, a computer room was built, and there was a new refrigerator and stove in the kitchen. New tablecloths even graced the tables where the children eat their dinner after school. Those who run the center were overwhelmed.

Perhaps even more significant than the extreme makeover given to the facility, was the transformation brought about in the hearts and attitudes of the Jewish people these Christians came to serve. Bridges were built and walls of misunderstanding torn down.

The team was able to take a brief tour of Israel the first few days they were in the country; and shared a time of worship and devotion.

Special thanks to the team from Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina for their efforts, to come alongside the JSC and work together for this important cause. Only heaven will know the impact that was made.

The Practical Assistance tours are just one way the Jerusalem Support Center helps new immigrants here in the land of Israel. If you would like to know how you could be a part of JSC by giving a love gift, supporting your own immigrant family or adopting a Lone Soldier, you can contact Gina Utterback at the ICEJ or email: gina.utterback@icej.org
The Christian Zionist road map

BY MALCOLM HEDDING

In the light of current events and in the interests of clarity, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem wishes to place on the record our theological position regarding the land of Israel. It is a stance that in no way compromises the absolute conviction that arises from the pages of scripture, that the land of Canaan belongs to the Jewish people as an everlasting possession (Genesis 17:7-8). But it is an approach rooted in the recognition of God’s Sovereign dealings with Israel throughout history, and a message that the Church in our day needs to hear.

On July 21st, 2005 the ICEJ Board issued a statement clearly stating this position in terms of the Gaza disengagement. We even stated that we considered the withdrawal dangerous, as it would lead to rocket attacks on the towns and cities in the region. This has happened.

However, we were not prepared to say what a Sovereign God would do as He deals with Israel. There is no doubt that prayer for Israel, in the light of this situation, was offered up all over the world. And yet a Sovereign God, who loves His people, allowed the Gaza withdrawal to go on!

We can only believe that He is dealing with His people in His own way and since we all “see through a glass darkly” we are not in a position at any time to know all that He is doing. We pray for Israel and desire that she should keep all the land bequeathed to her but then we rest in the knowledge that a God Who loves her and cares for her and continuously watches over her will do what is right for her.

Job had to learn, through a process of repentance, that God can do what He likes and nothing, absolutely nothing, can frustrate His purpose (Job 42:1).

The ICEJ is not weak in its conviction concerning who the land of Israel belongs to. But we are weak on knowing the full purpose of God all the time. We have to cling to His sovereign love and nothing more. The disengagement from Gaza was such a time.

There is no doubt that Israel is on a journey and none of us know all the details of this journey. We know the big picture and that is that Israel will, in the end, be victorious over all her enemies and Jerusalem will be a “praise in the earth”. All nations will ascend to Zion to worship the Lord and the nations will not learn war any more. All this is true and we can positively affirm it, pray for it and stand upon it.

The “twists and turns” in the road toward this final place of glory are not known to all of us. And those who project themselves as “in the know” are simply wrong. Our God is sovereign and He calls us to trust Him even when we can’t figure out His purpose. This we do with a heart of full assurance because, as He watches over Israel, He neither slumbers nor sleeps!

Those then who are seeking to suggest that we have moved away from our original mandate are mistaken. We stand side by side all our brethren in this great calling and we will not compromise.

The scriptures are, however, clear that Israel’s process of restoration will involve affliction. The Prophet Hosea looks forward to a day when Israel will not only be restored to the land but also to the Lord. This restoration to the Lord will be accomplished by the “tool” of affliction.

“For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue. I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.” Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the
Two things are worth mentioning here. First, it is ultimately the Lord God of Heaven that is afflicting Israel. As the prophet says, “He has torn us ....” That is, He allows it as a tool to further her spiritual recovery. And second: We are in these times.

Of this we can be certain: all of Israel’s enemies are going to fall! What they mean for Israel’s destruction, God will use for her deliverance and salvation. We are in a time then to favour Zion (Psalm 102:13-22).

This “favour” cannot be understood merely as the arrival of “the good times”. No, this is not what scripture means. The Biblical principle is that God’s purpose to restore Israel and exalt her finally in the sight of the nations has begun. It is a process of restorative favour and part of this will be affliction.

The same principle works its way through all of our lives. It is trial, tribulation and trouble that very often furthers God’s work in our lives (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7). This is the expression of God’s favour and, though the process is far from enjoyable, we will come to thank Him for it! (Hebrews 12:11).

Great shakings are coming upon the world and Israel will also be impacted by them. In the end, however, she will be “married” to all the land promised to her and Jerusalem will be a praise in the earth (Isaiah 62:1-5).

This is a road map for peace that is breathtaking, sure and worth living for!
Flush with victory in the Palestinian elections, Hamas supporters protest in Gaza over sketches of Mohammad published in a Danish newspaper. (AP)

Mideast marathon

Israel’s long struggle to outrun radical Islam

By David Parsons

The debilitating stroke suffered by prime minister Ariel Sharon alongside the political triumph of Hamas in Palestinian elections came as a double shock to Israelis in recent weeks, and there is a sense that the region is headed for even greater convulsions in the months ahead. Iran is defying the world over its nuclear ambitions, which it hopes to combine with threats from terrorist proxies like Hamas and Hizb’Allah to bring Israel to its knees. Meantime, the Islamic world is boiling with rage over the Mohammad cartoons controversy. Set against such news, the current Israeli election campaign has seemed rather tame by comparison.

A NARROW WINDOW

Israeli leaders have had their eye on the twin threats of Iran’s nuclear program and rising Hamas terrorism for some time now. When the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin first embarked on the Oslo process in 1993, his envoys explained that Israel had a seven-year “window” in which to make peace with the PLO – before Palestinian society went radically Muslim and before Iran crossed the nuclear threshold. The race for peace is now 13 years on, and it looks like Israel has failed to outrun either threat.

Dubbed “the Earthquake” in Israel, Hamas scored a landslide victory over the ruling Fatah faction in the Palestinian parliamentary ballot on 25 January, taking an outright majority of 74 seats in the new 132-member parliament. The margin of their win even surprised the extremist Islamic militia. While many Palestinians were registering a protest vote against Fatah’s record of corruption and lawlessness, they also were obviously quite comfortable with Hamas’ militant agenda of exterminating Israel.

In response, the caretaker government of acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has tried to build a unified international front against dealing with a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority. The Bush Administration led the West in setting out clear conditions for opening contact with Hamas and for the continued funding of the PA: disarm and disavow terrorism, recognise Israel and signed agreements, and abolish the hard-line charter calling for destruction of the Jewish state.

Hamas commanders in turn have vowed never to abandon their ultimate goal of eradicating Israel, while hinting they may be prepared to consider a long-term cease-fire while they further the Islamisation of Palestinian society, consolidate power at home and forge alliances with friendly regimes in the region. For now, they are trying to use PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas as a ‘fig-leaf’ to keep international donor funds flowing, knowing Iran is more than ready to fill any financial void.

It has not taken long for the united ‘wall’ against legitimising Hamas to crumble. Russian president Vladimir Putin hosted a Hamas delegation in Moscow late February, and Turkey may soon follow suit. Despite his country’s membership in the ‘Madrid Quartet’ – sponsors of the ‘roadmap’ to Palestinian statehood – Putin appears determined to recapture past Soviet influence in the Middle East. The headstrong Russian premier
even falsely claimed that Moscow has “never regarded Hamas as a terrorist organisation.”

**ISLAM AWAKENING**

Russia also is breaking ranks with the West on the growing threat posed by Iran’s nuclear program. Moscow continues to transfer to Iran sophisticated dual-use technology critical to development of its covert nuclear weapons program, while impeding international efforts to stop Tehran’s nuclear drive.

After European diplomacy deadlocked and American intelligence intercepted an Iranian operative’s laptop computer crammed with nuclear warhead designs, the International Atomic Energy Agency finally referred Tehran to the UN Security Council in early February, but both Russia and China could yet veto any meaningful sanctions on Iran.

Tehran greeted the resolution with a combative announcement that it would cease all cooperation with IAEA inspectors and resume full uranium enrichment activities.

Iran’s firebrand president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, called IAEA members “stupid” and demanded that Western leaders remove Israel from the world map before the Palestinians and their allies did it for them. “On the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian nation, numbering in the millions, calls upon those governments to worship Allah,” he insisted.

Speaking that same week at a Damascus mosque, Hamas political leader Khaled Mashal made a similar call for submission to Islam, saying: “Today, the Arab and Islamic nation is rising and awakening, and it will reach its peak, Allah willing... It will regain the leadership of the world... We say to this West... By Allah, you will be defeated... Tomorrow, our nation will sit on the throne of the world.”

Such brash rhetoric reflects a new-found confidence rising in the Muslim world that they are winning the ‘war’ against Israel and the ‘Crusader’ West. Islamic insurgents have stood up to the US-led coalition forces in Iraq. Al-Qaeda is still alive and carrying out deadly terror attacks in diverse places. Millions have rioted in protest of a Danish newspaper’s publication of unflattering caricatures of the prophet Mohammad. The Palestinian people have made Hamas the first extremist Islamic group to be democratically elected into power in the Arab world, demonstrating that the Arab/Muslim street actually wants fundamentalist Islam.

Topping it all off, Iran is defiantly racing for nuclear status, an achievement that would forever alter the strategic balance in the region, if not the entire world. Covered by a nuclear umbrella, Iranian-backed terror militias like Hamas and Hizb’Allah could engage in a whole new level of adventurous attacks against Israel.

**LIMITED OPTIONS**

Judging by the slow pace of the current election campaign thus far, it seems Israelis are conditioned to discounting the portentous developments taking place around them. The new centrist Kadima faction led by Ehud Olmert keeps hinting at further withdrawals that would unilaterally define Israel’s final borders. Polls indicate this platform could secure them a controlling bloc of as many as 40 Knesset seats, while leftist Labour and nationalist Likud will struggle to win that many mandates combined. Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu is talking tough on terror and finally gaining some ground, but has little time left to sway enough voters into his camp to pull off the upset.

Under the circumstances, Israel’s best options are to speed up construction of the security fence, continue pinpoint strikes against active terrorists and mobilise international pressure on Hamas and Iran. The race against both threats is still on, and it looks to have turned into a gruelling marathon.
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