"I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted..."

Amos 9:15
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 among 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 website at http://www.icej.org/get-involved/ to send your gift. All donations are tax deductible according to the law of your country.

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ON THE COVER: Jewish residents of Gaza rally against plans to force them from their homes.
Dear Friends,
Over the last few weeks a passage of Scripture “tucked away” in the book of Isaiah has repeatedly come to my mind. This passage is Isaiah 54:1-3:

1“Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not laboured with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman”, says the Lord.
2Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes.
3For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited.

No matter how much I ignored it, it kept coming back to me until I got the message. The Lord was trying to say something to me. That is, not to me personally but to the ministry of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. While I fully recognise that the passage, in context, refers to Israel; as a principle it is an exciting word to our work and ministry.

There are three major sections to this little passage:

- A reference to the labouring years (v.1);
- A reference to the immediate future (v.2);
- A reference to the consequences (v.3).

As regards verse one, the prophet speaks of a time of labour and longing. While our ministry has been greatly blessed and most certainly placed upon a firm foundation by its founding fathers, our full potential lies ahead. A day of “birthing” is around the corner. However, to harness the full potential of this day certain foundations have to be laid. These are given in Verse 2. They are:

1. **“Enlarge your tent”**
   That is, embrace blessing and prepare for it. Or, to put it another way, increase your capacity so as to cope with the harvest of blessing that is coming.

2. **“Stretch out the curtains of your dwelling”**
   That which you have will have to become more! God always multiplies what He has. This challenge is directed toward the Jerusalem office with all its precious workers. A day of stretching is upon us and though it will be challenging, it will be a blessing!

3. **“Do not spare”**
   This has to do with vision. I believe with all my heart that God has great things in store for this ministry. Our vision must therefore be positive and big. You cannot limit a limitless God!

4. **“Lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes”**
   Here we are called upon to dig deep spiritual foundations. Our ministry cannot be built on professional administration, though we do strive for it. It can only be built upon a real relationship with the Lord that is characterised by a life of prayer and dedication to His word. The spiritual values of the Kingdom of God will determine the future in terms of the blessing that God is going to pour out upon us.

If we can embrace these four steps, the consequence for the ICEJ will be a new impact upon the nations. This is the promise of verse three.

I have shared these thoughts with our staff and I share them with you because we value your prayers and support. We are definitely determined to lay the foundations that will ensure a harvest of blessing, not for ourselves, but for the people we have been called to serve.

Yours in Jesus,

Malcolm Hedding

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Malcolm Hedding
Executive Director of the ICEJ
From the 19th to 22nd of May, ICEJ National Directors from some thirty nations of the world converged on the Bolger Center in Washington, DC for their annual Directors and Representatives conference.

This year’s gathering exceeded all expectations as it was the most well attended event of this type and was marked by a wonderful sense of unity, vision and teamwork. From the very beginning, a tangible anointing of God’s Spirit fell upon the worship sessions that carried with it the affirmation of heaven.

“In this atmosphere of blessing, it was easy to pray, preach and share. So for four whole days, this is what we did”, reports ICEJ Executive Director Malcolm Hedding.

Malcolm stressed yet again the theological boundaries of our ministry; Finance Director Timothy King unveiled the ever-present financial challenges that we face; and International Director Michael Utterback gave an exciting and comprehensive overview of our work in the nations, and as regarding Aliyah. Thereafter participants shared news from their respective Branches, giving each national director an opportunity to talk about their recent efforts and accomplishments.

“This year’s gathering drew over 100 key members of the ICEJ’s global leadership team, with several national directors leading entire delegations of vital staff and supporters. The ICEJ welcomed two special guest speakers at the meetings.

Above all, we prayed and broke bread together”, Malcolm adds.
For more than a year, the ICEJ’s German branch has been collecting funds for a home for the handicapped in the Jerusalem suburb of Gilo. In June, German branch director Dr. Jürgen Bühler handed a check of $60,000 for the Ilan Home for Handicapped People to Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupoliansky, bringing their total contribution so far to $120,000.

The mayor assured Jürgen just how important the home is for the city. “Since Jerusalem is the poorest city in Israel, very often sufficient funds are missing to finance educational and care-taking services for handicapped people”, Lupoliansky said.

The project has been carried out in cooperation with the New Jerusalem Foundation, founded by former Mayor Ehud Olmert.

Zvi Raviv, director of the Foundation, described the dire situation in which many handicapped people find themselves in Israel. “Handicapped people don’t have a voice in our society or a place which focuses on their needs”, he said. He urgently asked the ICEJ to continue supporting this specific home.

The facility is in a beautiful location in Gilo. The staff cares for about 70 handicapped people of every race and age, both Jews and Arabs. Every resident determines their own daily schedule and work conditions.

A recent visit to the home demonstrated the unique way the handicapped can make a home for themselves in the Ilan Center, Jürgen said. Computer facilities with Internet access, workshops and a swimming pool with a physiotherapeutic center designed specifically for the handicapped, allow residents to lead a ‘normal life’.

Moshe Fox, Minister of Public Affairs of Israel’s Embassy in Washington and a close friend of our ministry, addressed the group. And Solly Kaplinski, the English-language director for International Relations at Yad Vashem, enlightened us on new construction and programs taking place there.

The Bolger Center for Leadership Development, set on 88 acres of magnificently manicured grounds, provided the perfect setting for these substantive meetings. The site originally housed a convent and school for the Sisters of Mercy, but is now owned by the US government and is tailored for business seminars and leadership training.

One highlight of the conference was the in-depth theological discussions that took up most of one day. The group agreed that this type of theological fine-tuning is most necessary and was worth the whole trip.

Another highlight was the day of outings on Friday. Part of the group had the distinct privilege of touring the White House, while the others had a fascinating tour of the US Capitol Building led by the staff of Congressman Joseph Pitts from Pennsylvania. Afterwards everyone met up aboard the Odyssey Cruise Ship for a lunchtime site-seeing cruise up the Potomac River, providing fantastic views of Washington’s many historic monuments and landmarks.

It was a very special time and everyone left most thankful to God for His presence and appreciative of the USA Branch that made it all happen!
like so many Christians elsewhere, believers in Finland have despaired at the way much of the world seemingly expect Israelis to just lie down and die.

On May 16, the ICEJ Finnish Branch brought together three other pro-Israel Christian organisations for a large march and rally in the city of Turku on behalf of Israel’s right to defend herself against terrorism.

The event started out with a long column of thousands of Christians from all over the country marching through the city streets, led by the flags of Finland and Israel, a golden Menorah, and a large banner reading, “Israel, you are not alone, we stand with you!”

The march ended at the Turku Concert Hall, where Dr. Ulla Järvilehto, ICEJ-Finland national director, opened the rally as 11 large posters were brought to the platform lined with photographs of the nearly 1,000 Israeli victims of Palestinian terrorism over recent years. A moment of silence was observed as the capacity crowd pondered the many faces peering out at them from the poster boards.

For many, the most moving part of the day was the testimony of Keren Milchiker, a Ukrainian Jewish immigrant to Israel and member of the ICEJ staff in Jerusalem, who recounted those first bewildering moments after she miraculously survived a suicide bus bombing in January.

“When I opened my eyes, I saw a lot of wounded people”, Keren recalled. “After a while, when I could move myself again, I realised that God had protected me.”

“I saw a man who sat next to me, not knowing whether he was dead or alive. In his eyes, however, was an expression of death.”

“What was most moving for me were the people who came in a hurry to help us. I am proud of our nation for not giving up and always being ready to help”, she said.

“On the one hand I am glad I was spared, but on the other hand it is terrible that among the dead, for instance, was a father of 11 children”, Keren told the gathering. “It is painful that so many were killed or injured. There are those who will have to suffer from this attack for the rest of their lives. I wish this had never happened! Israel has the right to protect her citizens!”

Following a musical program by the Popov family and other artists, the Israeli Ambassador to Finland, Mr. Shemi Tzur, expressed warm thanks to those attending the rally.

“With friends like you, we know we are not alone... With your help and with the help of people like you, we are saying that we will not accept the carnage of terror and the denial of our right to defend ourselves through the security fence and other means”, insisted the Israeli envoy. “Together we will see the fulfilment of the prophet Isaiah: ‘They will beat their swords into ploughshares... nor shall they learn war anymore’. This is our message to the whole world”, he said.

Mr. Hannu Takkula, a member of the Finnish parliament, noted that because of the security fence more than 70 suicide bombers had been stopped so far. To remove the security fence will not bring about peace, he insisted.

The rally concluded with a generous love offering for victims of terror in Israel.
The emphasis of the ICEJ’s extensive speaking tour throughout North America over recent weeks was forging new relationships with local pastors and churches.

Embassy directors Malcolm Hedding and Michael Utterback conducted more than 25 meetings coast to coast, reaching over 15,000 people in ten different states. Accompanied by ICEJ music director Chuck King, Malcolm and Michael were able to introduce thousands of Americans to the work of the Christian Embassy.

Several nationally recognised ministries welcomed the ICEJ. These included: Pastor Harry Jackson and Hope Christian Center in Washington DC; Pastor Ken Hansen and Living Water Community Church of Chicago, Illinois; Pastor Carl Toti and Trinity Church of Lubbock, Texas; Pastor Mike Bickle and the International House of Prayer in Kansas City; and Pastor Tri Robinson of the Vineyard Fellowship of Boise, Idaho.

Powerful meetings also were held in regional churches, where hundreds more were touched with the message of God’s purpose for modern-day Israel and the role of Christians in her physical and spiritual restoration.

“That was the best Bible teaching I’ve ever heard”, one pastor told his congregation afterwards. “They are a balanced ministry with balanced teaching.”

A couple attending a service at Hillcrest Church in Dallas, Texas later remarked: “[Malcolm’s] message was powerful, meaningful to us personally, and provided answers to many questions we had regarding Biblical Zionism versus political Zionism, the seemingly relentless conflict in Israel, and obedience and discipline. We also had some time with Chuck King, whose ministry was equally as powerful in conveying comfort, peace, humility, and a steadfast commitment to God and to Israel.”

Highlights from Michael’s schedule included a gathering of over 3,000 Brazilian-Americans and the annual Governor’s Prayer Breakfast in California.

“Michael Utterback is a man who is committed to his cause”, reflected Pastor Robinson. “He is an enthusiastic speaker that inspires people to sincerely pray for Israel.”

The USA tour coincided with a period of national mourning for former President Ronald Reagan, the heated presidential election season and the continuing efforts of American and Coalition forces to stabilise Iraq. These factors all contributed to a deep sense of national reflection for the American people, giving the ICEJ team’s efforts added significance as they encouraged and strengthened the local church with solid Biblical teaching and challenged many to stand with Israel in prayer and support: a key to America’s blessing.

ICEJ-USA National Director Susan Michael and her hard-working staff arranged these speaking schedules while also preparing to host the international gathering of ICEJ National Directors and several other Branch events in Washington, DC over recent months.

In that regard, our USA affiliate played a key role while serving on the host committee, along with seventeen other ministries, for the third annual Christian Solidarity Event for Israel at the Israeli Embassy in Washington on May 7. The embassy’s Jerusalem Hall was filled to capacity with 200 guests for the day-long gathering. This year’s main speakers were Israeli Ambassador Daniel Ayalon and popular Christian radio talk show host Janet Parshall. Seminars also helped train the attendees to take more effective public stands for Israel.

ICEJ-USA also hosted a Pastors’ Luncheon at the prestigious John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, overlooking the Potomac River and many Washington monuments. This event, sponsored by Ruth Sims, Shai Baitel, WAVA Radio and the ICEJ, was underwritten by Wayland Coker of Coker Logistics Solutions, Inc.

Almost 200 pastors, spouses and special guests gathered to hear Pat Robertson, founder of CBN and the 700 Club, and Ambassador Ayalon. They both were very appreciative of the opportunity to address the impressive gathering of Christian supporters in the heart of the nation’s capital.
“Out of this world” is not the typical reaction one hears to an interfaith dialogue meeting between Christians and Jews.

But that is how Rose Ziner, a Holocaust survivor, described the recent interfaith encounter in Toronto’s Beth Tzedec Synagogue, organised by the ICEJ’s Canadian branch as part of its May speaking tour for our Executive Director, Rev. Malcolm Hedding.

Judging by reactions reaching ICEJ-Canada national director Donna Holbrook, Malcolm’s lively discussion with Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl, senior rabbi of the host Conservative synagogue, was not only a highlight of the tour, but also a high point in the lives of many in attendance.

“I cannot remember another evening as wonderful, fulfilling, sensitive, emotional and loving”, wrote Harriet, a Jewish activist.

“I had the sense no one wanted to leave”, noted Michael, a Jewish community leader.

“One has a choice either to muddle through the answers and leave both the Jews and Christians present suspicious or to be honest. I chose the latter.”

The approach worked.

“Tetroipned with Rabbi Frydman-Kohl – his questions were poignant and informed and substantive and relevant”, recounted a Canadian pastor, Rev. Dr. John Howarth. “And boy! Did Mr. Hedding ever do a SUPERB job of answering! His replies were astute, biblical, wise, and diplomatic!”

Besides the candid dialogue that served to dispel lingering pockets of mistrust, the evening included an outstanding musical program, featuring performances by ICEJ music coordinator Chuck King, Ruth Fazal, violinist and composer of the Oratorio Terezin, tenor Mark DuBois, and Jewish child soloist Jakie Young.

One Christian in attendance remarked that it was “the worship in which we could all, Jew and Gentile, participate that elevated the gathering to a different level”.

Rabbi Frydman-Kohl summed it all up when he later thanked Donna “for birthing this program. Throughout the next day, I heard positive responses from members of the Jewish community about the content and the music”.

During his weeklong Canadian tour, Malcolm also delivered what many remarked were “powerful” messages at Canada Christian College, Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, Community Church PAOC Oshawa, and the Friends of Jesus Christ congregation, among other venues. A senior pastor at the internationally known Toronto Airport fellowship even instructed his 50-plus cell group leaders to listen to Malcolm’s taped message on Israel.

Donna Holbrook said she is certain the inspiring effects of this tour will be felt in Canada for some time to come.
Swiss Branch
Turns Twenty

I
raeli Ambassador to Switzerland Aviv Shir-On thanked Christians for their love for Israel and the Jewish people as the ICEJ-Swiss branch celebrated its 20th anniversary in April.

Swiss Member of Parliament Christian Waber also spoke, encouraging Christians to stand up and to represent themselves in the political world.

Bischof recounted a number of milestones in the history of the Swiss branch, including their sponsorship of seven flights of Soviet immigrants to Israel starting in 1991, as well as their long-running transportation efforts taking Jews from western Ukraine on the way to Israel. Also in 1985, the Swiss branch hosted the first Christian Zionist Congress in the same Basel casino where Theodor Herzl convened the initial Zionist Congress of 1897.

ICEJ-IRELAND

A VISIT TO THE “Emerald Isle” is always a great blessing, as the rolling hills and scenic pastures with their ever-changing shades of green are a delight to the eyes and soul.

In late April, ICEJ Executive Director Malcolm Hedding and Chuck King, our music director, visited this fair island to further strengthen the work of the Christian Embassy in that part of the world.

Our Irish Branch is ably led by Brian and Anne Silvester. It was officially launched in Belfast last year and since then the work has taken root in the north and south of the country. The speaking tour began in Dublin, where Malcolm addressed a gathering of Christians and Jews in the Central Orthodox Synagogue. The Chief Rabbi of Ireland was in attendance, as was the Israeli Ambassador and a government minister. It was a very special time and everyone left encouraged and “built up”, as Malcolm emphasized that Israel’s preservation and protection is guaranteed by the God of Heaven. His Word, which is above His name, reflects this guarantee.

Thereafter, Malcolm and Chuck led a number of weekend meetings in the Carryduff Elim Church, situated in the suburbs of Belfast. These gatherings, which included a seminar on worship, a pastors’ breakfast and Bible teaching sessions, were well attended and very fruitful.

In addition, Liesl Hedding, coordinator of our “Grafted” program for young adults, introduced the gathering to this new and dynamic ministry of the International Christian Embassy.

Other features of the visit to Ireland were a meeting with the Anglican Bishop of the region and a very positive meeting with several members of the Executive Council of the Elim Church, a pillar of the Evangelical body in Ireland.
For over two centuries, America has beckoned as a great ‘melting pot’ of all nationalities, and the port city of New York has been its main gateway. This includes scores of beleaguered European Jews and, in fact, the famous tribute to the Statue of Liberty was penned by Jewish poetess Emma Lazarus in 1883 after witnessing the mass influx of fellow Jews, broken and destitute, streaming into the Hudson harbour.

Over the last century or so, Israel has also become an incredible melting pot of Jews from over 100 nations, speaking as many languages. Since its modern rebirth in 1948, it has served as the rightful refuge and home for the scattered Jewish community abroad.

Ever since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989 and persecuted Jews were finally free to leave, more than 900,000 have streamed home to Israel. Yet tens of thousands of others chose to move elsewhere, with many opting to melt into the large Jewish community in New York.

In recent years, with Palestinian terror stalking Israeli streets, many Russian Jews are also being attracted to Germany by Berlin’s offer of generous benefits to Jewish immigrants. Last year, around 19,000 former Soviet Jews immigrated to Germany, as opposed to only 12,000 who came to Israel.

Such figures have concerned the Jewish Agency, and renewed efforts are underway to try to steer many of these Jews to Israel. The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem has joined in this effort and is now offering incentive grants to Russian Jews in the New York area to move to Israel.

In May, a special ICEJ delegation representing our Dutch, Finnish, Norwegian, Russian and Swedish branches paid a visit to New York to consult with Jewish Agency officials on how we can assist in this effort. The visit was organised by Howard Flower of ICEJ-Russia and led by ICEJ Board members Leif Wellerop and Dr. Ulla Järvillehto (national directors for ICEJ-Norway and ICEJ-Finland, respectively).

The Jewish Agency’s efforts to ‘fish’ the transplanted Russian Jews in New York have been spearheaded by Lev Mendelevich, a longtime friend of the Christian Embassy. Lev is a legend in the Aliyah story, having pioneered in 1989 the very first route for Soviet Jews heading home to Israel, through St. Petersburg and Helsinki. The ICEJ and especially our Finnish branch has assisted
over 14,000 Jews along this route ever since.

Three years ago, Lev moved to New York for a heart operation and joined his son living there. Now he is active in fishing Russian Jews who detoured to America but now are interested in moving on to Israel. Since last autumn, he has managed with support from the Jewish Agency, the ICEJ and the Finnish “Exodus Committee” to arrange for several dozen Russian Jews to make aliyah. Lev expects many more to make the move in the coming year.

While visiting New York, the 15-member ICEJ delegation was hosted by Lev and Jewish Agency officials and toured the city and its extensive Jewish community.

They also had the privilege of meeting and handing over incentive grants to two Russian Jewish fathers who are in the process of moving their families to Israel with ICEJ assistance.

During the New York visit, ICEJ-Finland national director Dr. Ulla Järviilehto (center) presented a grant check to Jacov Raffi, originally a “mountain Jew” from Baku in central Asia, who is moving his family on to Israel in June. Lev Mendelevich looks on.

Soon, thousands of Jews in Russia will be learning about the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem even as they are learning the Hebrew language in their own country.

The ICEJ has agreed to sponsor the distribution of an easy-to-read Hebrew-language newspaper in Ulpan classes in four regions of the former Soviet Union. The weekly newspaper, Sha’ar Lamat’hil (Gate for the Beginner), has been widely available in Israel for many years and has proven popular among Russian immigrants. Now it will serve as a learning tool in absorption center classes even before these potential olim make the journey to Israel.
Aliyah & Absorption

The ICEJ logo will be on top of the newspaper masthead with a note in English, Russian and Hebrew saying, “This is a gift of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem”.

The four regions are in and around St. Petersburg, Nizhni-Novgorod, Georgia, and Irkutsk in Siberia. The ICEJ will sponsor 2,000 copies a month for a three-month pilot project.

ICEJ International Director Michael Utterback said the newspaper will do a job that the Embassy hopes to accomplish anyway.

“They get a taste and a feel of Israel”, he said. “It nurtures Zionism in them.”

*Sha’ar Lamat’hil* is a 24-page weekly consisting of Israeli news articles, religious news, crossword puzzles, features on the cultural scene and on immigrants who have made *aliyah*.

The Russian Hebrew students are not necessarily planning to make aliyah, but Michael said these classes are geared to encouraging them to do so.

“It can stir up this homing mechanism in their hearts”, he said. “They also will see the ICEJ logo and know that Christians are the ones helping out.”

Michael said no Hebrew courses existed before 1991 in the Soviet Republics, but there are now 300 Jewish absorption centers with 28,000 Hebrew students, many of whom end up moving to Israel.

Boris Arnikov, paralysed since 1983 after breaking his neck hang-gliding in Russia, made aliyah to Israel with his mother in May and has been staying at Beit HaTikvah, a guesthouse set up by the Jerusalem Support Center for new Jewish immigrants. The ICEJ assisted the family in preparing for the difficult journey home to Israel and is now helping them locate and settle in an apartment built to his unique needs.

Boris is Home!
Seeking Help
And A Miracle

Ludmilla Zilber hopes for a miracle to continue her cancer treatments

Ludmilla Zilber’s vibrancy and hospitality belie a somber fact: Her body is wracked with four types of cancer and she has little money to treat it.

Doctors hope an experimental treatment at Erasmus Hospital in Rotterdam, Holland will help Ludmilla overcome the various strains of cancer in her body. But getting there has been the challenge.

Visiting her and her husband Leon at their home after her first treatment, ICEJ staff from the Jerusalem Support Center saw a much healthier Ludmilla in April than the one who first approached the Christian Embassy for help last fall. Ludmilla went for a second treatment in May. The ICEJ hopes to raise money for further treatments as well.

The Zilbers, both esteemed Jewish artists, emigrated from the former Soviet Republic of Belarus in 1991. The couple found a new expression for their creativity in the Holy Land. From playground dinosaurs and sculptures to wall murals, the Zilbers have left colourful impressions on many Israeli neighbourhoods.

But the economy began slumping within the past few years, drying up the well of work lined up for the Zilbers.

In the midst of their financial downturn, Ludmilla, 55, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer five years ago. Then last year, she was further diagnosed with liver, spinal and endocrinal cancer. Her insurance would not cover the best medical prospect for her advanced illness: A multi-chemotherapy treatment in Rotterdam.

Each treatment takes about seven to 10 days and costs 2,500 Euros, not including travel expenses. And from the small moshav of Bat Hefer east of Netanya, Rotterdam is far away.

The Zilbers first approached the Christian Embassy in the fall, when they heard that Christians in the land were there to help Israelis in need. Jerusalem Support Center took on her case.

JSC was able to jump-start Ludmilla’s cancer treatments by raising the money for her first treatment. It required a team effort. Keren Milchiker met with the family and opened a case file. Corrie Van Maanen, a homecare nurse on the ICEJ staff and a native of Holland, found an apartment in Rotterdam for Ludmilla to stay for free during her visits.

The ICEJ also gave Ludmilla and Leon a Hebrew Bible. She has been reading Psalms lately and fasting for her healing.

She is maintaining a bright perspective and energetic lifestyle as the unofficial family secretary, driver and photographer.

“In my life, I don’t worry about anything”, Ludmilla said, as Leon sat next to her with tears in his eyes. “I have no choice, I have to be like this.”
Despite the occasional terror tragedy, there are so many signs that Israel is beating back the Palestinian threat, one has to wonder if talk of leaving Gaza is the only thing keeping the militants’ hopes alive.

Ignoring the Likud referendum results in early May, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon pressed on with his disengagement plan from Gaza. After removing the more hawkish elements of his coalition, he mollified key Likud ministers by agreeing to a staged withdrawal that puts off the really tough votes on settlement evacuations until March 2005. The moves weakened Sharon’s power base, but his exoneration in the “Greek Island” bribery scandal opened new options for shoring up his coalition, via a national unity government with Labour or renewed handouts to ultra-Orthodox parties.

Meantime, the international Quartet endorsed disengagement and began using Egypt as “front-man” for an ambitious plan to secure and rehabilitate Gaza after Israeli withdrawal and to eventually revive final-status talks. Cairo pledged to send 200 security advisors into Gaza to retrain Palestinian Authority police, but first insisted on PA reforms and ceasefire guarantees from all parties, among other far-reaching demands. But PA officials accused Egypt of wanting to “run” Gaza, while Palestinian terror militias feared a weapons roundup was looming. Showing similar mistrust, Israeli leaders balked at Cairo’s bid for a mediator role and rejected any attempt to tie the IDF’s hands should terror continue from the Strip.

While the Gaza front remains active, there are hopeful signs that the Palestinian terror campaign is waning, especially in Judea/Samaria, and more and more Israelis sense the intifada genie is slowly being put back into the bottle. The reasons for optimism:

- The partially completed security fence has greatly reduced terror attacks (and crime) emanating from the West Bank. Many parts of Israel now have zero attacks, although the lack of fencing around Jerusalem still leaves the city vulnerable. But even Israeli Arabs are praising the increased security, drop in crime and economic boost spurred on by the barrier.

- The IDF has severely weakened Palestinian terror militias, capturing or killing scores of key operatives over recent years. Most of those left in the field have gone underground, expending much of their energy evading arrest.

- Improved intelligence has thwarted the vast majority of terror plots this year, including over 70 suicide bombings. Tips are coming from prisoners as well as more cooperative Palestinians desperate for calm. Among the major attacks averted of late: A plot to blow up the prime minister’s office, an assault by six suicide bombers at once from Gaza, and two teenage girls planning to blow themselves up with their fathers.

- Terror funds are running dry. Hamas admits Saudi money has slowed to a trickle, while Fatah militiamen complain PA chairman Yasser Arafat has cut them off. Both are due to increased international scrutiny of the financing of terrorism. Backed by Syria and Iran, Hizb’Allah is trying to step into the gap, but with limited success so far.

What makes the noticeable drop in terror even more remarkable is that Hamas in particular has been under pressure to avenge the deaths of their two top leaders, Ahmed Yassin and Abdul Aziz Rantissi. The radical group has become almost apologetic in explaining to the Palestinian public why it has yet to “shake the earth” under Israel, as it once vowed. Hamas may even join Arafat’s “Oslo” cabinet soon, a move formerly viewed as tantamount to surrender.

At this point, the main incentive for Palestinian militias to fight on appears to be Israel’s readiness to leave Gaza. They see it as a chance to declare victory and boast about driving out the Jews. Israel has to be careful not to oblige them.

A military salute on the Mount of Olives: Israel is slowly putting the genie of the ’al-Aksa intifada’ back in the bottle.
A Little Respect

By David Parsons

The debate now raging in Israel over whether to leave Gaza has brought back some unpleasant memories of Oslo. Once again, the left is blaming the ‘settlers’ for costing Jewish lives and the ‘occupation’ for warping Jewish souls. Meanwhile, right-wing rabbis are warning the nation’s leaders once more not to cede an inch of the Land of Israel, with some re-asserting that it is din rodef – deemed worthy of death, according to Talmudic ritual law.

As the Diaspora re-enters the fray, many Israelis still bristle, arguing that no Jew should have a say in what Israel does unless they live and vote here, pay taxes and serve in the IDF. Those arguments hold some weight, although a new blue-ribbon study points out that – with anti-Semitism on the rise – Israel’s actions and policies have an impact on Jewish communities abroad and therefore all Jews must be taken into consideration, not just those residing in the land.

The international community also has its views on the Sharon government’s disengagement plan and is pressing ever forward to impose its own concepts of a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

What about us Christians? Do we have a say in the Gaza debate?

The Board of Trustees of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem took up these questions at its recent annual meeting, after taking notice of a number of media reports examining evangelical Christian reactions to the proposed withdrawal from Gaza. The general thrust of the articles was that, in the main, evangelical leaders resent or disapprove of disengagement, though their support for Israel will remain steadfast. There was concern, however, that certain evangelical leaders were quoted as using very strong, if not offensive language in this respect.

Therefore, the ICEJ Board released a statement that reads, in part:

“Our constituency stands by Israel and is determined to tell ‘her story’ faithfully and truthfully, fully recognising that the issues facing Israel are not simple but highly complex and difficult.

Our understanding of the Bible leads us to believe that though the land of Israel is promised to the Jewish people as an everlasting possession, this promise has never yet been fully realised and will work its way out through history in the timing and purpose of God.

We therefore pray for Israel, comfort her and bless her, knowing full well that it is not our right or position to meddle in Israel’s political developments. The God of Israel, Who has brought her so far, is not now going to fail her, even if she does withdraw from land eternally bequeathed to her.

We recognise that this is a very emotive issue for all Israelis and we will stand by all segments of Israeli society as they grapple with it and make their decision.”

Taking it further, the Bible refers to Israel as a “mystery”, and there is cause to rejoice that her hidden calling is being “revealed” to millions of Christians around the world in our day. But elsewhere we are exhorted to be good stewards of the mysteries of God, and how much more so when it comes to His eternal purpose for Israel.

Being good stewards means right-ly handling the Word of God, and not misapplying Scripture to fit our immediate political agenda. It means getting the mind of the Lord and not adopting worldly tactics in order to bend politicians to our viewpoint.

We certainly are entitled to our own views and to exercise our rights as citizens of our respective countries to express them. But we do not like it when world rulers try to dictate to Israel and her leaders, and we cannot presume to do it either.

What we can do is respectfully encourage biblical faith. God will respond to our faith, but He is interested in the faith of the Jewish people as well, especially when it comes to what they believe about Him and the Land of Israel. We can take comfort that the Bible promises us that one day these issues will be resolved.

For the present, He is watching over them. In the meantime, there is a vast majority in Israel approaching this current Gaza debate with their eyes wide open to Palestinian threats and their hearts equally open to finding a way to peace for the sake of both peoples.
Disengagement Is “An Illusion”

The Digest recently interviewed Israeli cabinet minister Natan Sharansky, the noted Soviet Jewish dissident, about his opposition to the disengagement plan and other issues. Following are excerpts:

DIGEST: Events in Gaza since the Likud referendum have turned rather bloody. Has this swayed your position against disengagement in any way?

SHARANSKY: Of course every tragedy, every terror attack brings back the passionate debate in Israel. But this debate is not between those who are ready to make concessions to the Palestinians and those who are not. In fact, Israel has proven again and again that for real peace we are prepared to make extreme sacrifices. The problem is we have reached a condition where we have no partner for peace in the Palestinian Authority. They have not done anything to cooperate with us in the struggle against terrorism. To the contrary, again and again we see that they view terror as a tool for pressing us. So, what is the way out of this?

DIGEST: Mr. Sharon brought you into this government, yet now you oppose his unilateral withdrawal. Was he disappointed in you? I know he called you right after his exchange of letters on disengagement with US President George W. Bush.

SHARANSKY: Yes, he called me, and I said it was a very important letter he received from President Bush. But I told him my opposition was connected to this very principle of making one-sided concessions when we have no Palestinian partner. To think that we are disengaging ourselves from the Palestinians, I don’t agree with this. I believe it is an illusion to think that we are disengaging ourselves from anything.

DIGEST: As the disengagement debate heated up, some Christians strongly criticised the Government for abandoning part of God’s land given to you. Is that a proper role for Christian supporters of Israel?

SHARANSKY: First of all, I am sure our Christian friends appreciate the unique moral struggle of Israel in this very difficult part of the world. We are standing for moral values, for principles of human rights and democracy in the toughest place in the world. And they have to give us credit that we are making difficult decisions together. It is not a matter of “good Jews” versus “bad Jews” here. It is a very difficult, unique struggle of a Jewish, democratic state against Arab/Islamic totalitarian regimes that want to destroy us. And there are no easy solutions. I wish there were. But we are at the forefront of a confrontation between the world of evil and the world of good, and we need all the support and comfort and love and solidarity of our friends.
Jews Welcome

The UN held its first-ever seminar on anti-Semitism in June, with Secretary General Kofi Annan saying developments in Israel should never be used to justify anti-Semitism and that Jews must feel “the United Nations is their home”. Jewish leaders welcomed his remarks, but criticised the UN’s systemic bias against Israel and Jews. The one-day academic conference was convened after Columbia University law professor Anne Bayefsky penned a series of prominent essays indicting the UN as “the leading global purveyor of anti-Semitism — intolerance and inequality against the Jewish people and its state”. In but one recent example, UN envoy to Iraq Lakhdar Brahimi called Israeli policies “the great poison in the region” and boasted he had never knowingly shaken hands with a Jew.

Saudi Excuses

Staggered by a recent wave of terror attacks, capped off by the grisly beheading of a kidnapped American worker, Saudi Arabia finally launched a crackdown on al-Qaeda cells seeking to drive out foreigners and undermine the royal family. But Crown Prince Abdullah saw a dark conspiracy behind the homegrown terror, saying on Saudi TV that, “It is not 100 percent, but 95 percent [certain] that the Zionist hands are behind what happened”. The Saudi Interior Minister concurred that “Al-Qaeda is backed by Israel and Zionism”, while a Saudi spokesman in Washington insisted Zionists “share the same objective as Osama bin Laden”. Polls have shown such myths are popular in the Arab/Islamic world, including that the Mossad was behind the 9/11 attacks and Monica Lewinsky affair.

Olympic Duty

Israel has been made a major partner in the multinational security team safeguarding the upcoming 2004 Athens Olympic Games from terror attack, together with Greece, the US, EU and NATO. Known for its expertise in securing mass public events, Israel’s role includes posting an officer in the NATO ‘war room’ in Italy and dispatching naval ships to patrol the Greek seas.

Building Freeze

Palestinian threats against work crews in the Jenin refugee camp recently forced the UN to suspend a major project, funded by the United Arab Emirates, to rebuild homes destroyed by Israeli forces in 2002. UNRWA has nearly completed 500 upscale homes in the Jenin camp, but local gunmen have repeatedly threatened crews and even fired inside UNRWA offices. They charge the new houses are too small and the camp’s streets were widened to accommodate Israeli tanks. More likely, they fear they stand to lose their refugee status by moving into the beautiful new flats.

Turkish Tantrums

Israel’s carefully cultivated strategic alliance with Turkey recently has taken a nosedive. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan charged Israel with “state terrorism” following the IDF targeting of top Hamas leaders and anti-arms smuggling operations in Gaza. Erdogan accused Israel of “raining down bombs” on civilians and treating Palestinians the way Jews were treated in the Inquisition. When Ankara recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv, Israeli officials dismissed it as a passing bid to placate Muslim dissent at home. But then long-term talks on Israel’s purchase of Turkish fresh water were suddenly cut off, El Al was forced to cancel flights to Istanbul when its security agents were banned from the city’s airport, and the Turkish foreign minister reportedly leaked rumours that Mossad agents are again working with Kurdish militias in northern Iraq.

Israeli soldiers take a break from searching the sands of southern Gaza on their hands and knees for remains of five fallen comrades after an attack on their APC near Rafah in mid-May. Palestinian terrorists managed to blow up two IDF armoured vehicles in Gaza and ran off with body parts from 11 soldiers killed in the powerful explosions. After frantic IDF searches and outside pressure, the Palestinian Authority persuaded Hamas and Islamic Jihad to return the remains, rather than hold them for ransom and bragging rights.
Children are the future of Israel. They are growing up in this old/new nation with a unique heritage and history. They live in an area of the world fraught with tensions and conflict, and like their parents before them will serve in the army before they build their own lives. But within this precious part of Israeli society are those who face added difficulties. Many of the appeals for support that come to our Social Assistance department are for programs designed to help children overcome particular problems in their young lives, and give them hope for the future.

**HOPE IN SPITE OF DIFFICULT FAMILY SITUATIONS**

According to Israeli social workers, many children are growing up in families that, in increasing numbers, are ceasing to function in a healthy way because of the tensions in the country.

In the picturesque community of Karnei Shomron, in Samaria, family life for some children is not always ideal. However, every afternoon these children go to the warm, loving environment of after-school clubs where they are provided with a hot lunch upon arrival and an evening meal before they go home. Supervised homework and other activities help them to overcome emotional and educational difficulties. The coordinators of the schools were thrilled to learn that Christians care about these children who are in need of a helping hand. The provision of three computers to enhance their education
demonstrated this. SAP staff visited one of the clubs and saw the computer installed in the cosy environment of the clubroom, and heard how excited and happy the children were to have one. SAP was presented with a delightful book of drawings and thank-you letters prepared by the children.

One of the thank-you letters read:

To the ICEJ.

Thank you very much for the wonderful computer that you gave us and also for the great games that came with it, and especially thank you that it was one of the latest computers.

I thank you very much, from the bottom of my heart.

You are wonderful people. It was really great that you thought about us. You are simply wonderful and I wish that everything you do will turn out well.

With love from Stav

HOPE IN THE FACE OF POVERTY

In a poor neighbourhood of Holon, there are many families caught in a cycle of trauma and poverty from which they struggle to break free. Sometimes a second and third generation remains welfare dependent and suffers from poor education and even illiteracy. To enable their children to move beyond this cycle towards educational excellence, a program was designed for first grade children to open up possibilities beyond what their home environment offers. The intention is to continue to follow their progress and provide aid in the future. SAP contributed to this vital program by funding the study materials. Our staff enjoyed a wonderful welcome from the social workers, teachers, parents and especially the students themselves when we joined a group of ten children in one of the sessions.

The strength of the program is in parental involvement. For these parents, their own lack of education and achievement may have limited their ability to help their children learn, but within these supervised surroundings there is much joy as they work together and gain the great satisfaction that comes with seeing their children progress. SAP staff members Yudit Setz and Nicole Yoder witnessed one mother hugging her daughter with enormous pride after she heard her recite from her Reader. The children talked excitedly about their activities and displayed their artwork, while the parents shared about the tremendous advancements they are seeing in their children’s schoolwork. They all have high hopes that there will be a budget for the program to continue next year.

Those involved in the program learned something else as well that day - some for the first time - that there are Christians around the world who love and support Israel.

HOPE FOR ARAB CHILDREN TOO

In an Arab town in the Galilee, an after-school club for 30 children was launched in February, thanks to funding from the Social Assistance Program. The social workers and psychologist selected the children according to their particular difficulties, located qualified staff, and found high school students to volunteer their time. When SAP visited this well-run program, several mothers spoke with enthusiasm about the difference the club has made for their children. One said her son loved going and it had already changed his behaviour. They especially look forward to the parents’ group, formed in connection with the program designed to teach parenting skills. Due to severe budget restrictions, this valuable program would have never taken place without our gift. The social workers were tremendously thankful that they could help these children and their families.
HOPE TO OVERCOME MENTAL CHALLENGES

A visit by SAP to a kindergarten in Eilat brought a warm welcome from the local Director of Education and even the Mayor, among others. They wanted to express their gratitude towards Christians, whose gifts have meant that an urgently needed kindergarten for autistic children could be initiated. Our funding covered nearly all the indoor equipment needed for this special kindergarten. Its aim is to prepare these first and second grade-level children to be able to attend regular school. Our staff observed the children in the structured environment of this unique kindergarten, where every day follows a familiar routine necessary for these special-needs kids. Their families often struggle with the extra burden these children can sometimes place on them. One mother was even contemplating suicide, but having her daughter at this kindergarten has helped enormously. In fact, it was her daughter who, when asked to draw her family, included her fellow pupils as part of that family.

Pnina Ziv, Director of Education for Eilat, who was new to working with Christians, said, “I had no idea whom I would be meeting, but this has been a great privilege for me”.

YOUR GIFTS ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES AND HEARTS OF MANY ISRAELIS, YOUNG AND OLD

SPECIAL APPEAL

SCHOOL SUPPLIES FOR IMPOVERISHED CHILDREN
A Joint Project with the Israeli Knesset

More than 20,000 Israeli children entering first grade this coming autumn will fall in the category of “below the poverty line”.

Imagine how it would feel for one of these children to look at his new classmates with their new clothes, new backpacks and new books, none of which his family can afford.

In our continuing efforts to assist poor and needy children in Israel, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem is joining with the Knesset and several other Christian ministries in a collective project to benefit underprivileged youths throughout the land. The goal is to supply all Israeli children entering first grade from impoverished families with quality schoolbags and much-needed school supplies.

The well-known Fila sporting goods company in the Philippines has committed to providing thousands of their popular kid’s backpacks, at discounted rates. The ICEJ and other participants in the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus are jointly funding their purchase and will fill them with vouchers towards the purchase of required school books, plus a supply of pencils, crayons, rulers, erasers, notebooks and other school supplies.

Israeli President Moshe Katsav will launch the distribution at a special reception at his official Jerusalem residence later this summer.

The book vouchers in particular will prove most valuable, since the average costs of books for a first-grader is nearly $100 per student. Most families do not have that in their budget.

Please help us to fund this project and bring a smile to a first-grader who otherwise will probably start his education without the proper tools for learning. See the attached response device to direct your gift to the School Supplies project.

... And remember, the first day of school will be upon us very quickly.
Chaplain’s Page

In the second epistle to Timothy, Paul gives his valedictory. That is to say, he delivers his final exhortation and summary of his ministerial career. This is all recorded in verses six to eight of the fourth chapter.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. II Timothy 4:6-8

All in all, Paul says four things:

• That he has poured his life out sacrificially for the work of God (verse 6). For him this was a joy and not a burden and as a consequence, he had an abiding sense of satisfaction. The lesson is clear; it is as we fully serve God and His Kingdom that we experience full contentment and joy.

• That he has fought a good fight, run a good race and kept the faith (verse 7). As Christians we have decided to “swim against the stream of life”. This does most certainly bring its challenges and conflicts, but it is all worth it because if we “stay the course”, the benefits are eternal and blessed and brought to us by the grace and favour of God. Also, our conflicts and struggles provide our precious Lord with an opportunity to prove His faithfulness. Those who have travelled through the fires of testing have always found the “fourth man” (Daniel 3:25) to be present with them.

• That he knows that his life has reached the potential that God, in His grace, had always planned for it (verse 8a). Coronation awaited Paul and with it the heavenly confirmation that he had done well and had pleased His Lord. What a way to end! This most definitely constitutes a challenge to all of us as we seek to live for and please our Lord.

• That he not only looked for but loved his Lord’s appearing (verse 8b). Whether Jesus comes today, next year or in a hundred years is not the issue. The thing that matters is that we keep our “sights” on this certainty, since this will enable us to live holy lives, handle the things of this world with godly circumspection and keep our relationships right. Far too many Christians have abandoned the excitement of looking for Jesus’ coming. The consequences of this “sleepiness” are everywhere to be seen. These are apathy, materialism and failure.

Paul’s short exhortation is then timely for this generation. His words encourage us to be faithful. We must take Paul’s words fully to heart and be as determined as ever to fulfill our calling and our God-given mandate to Israel.

Rev. Malcolm Hedding

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Before 1960, travellers would have traversed the Beit She’an plain perhaps wondering about the tops of two lonely columns jutting out of the flat, desert-like Jordan Valley town 30 km. south of the Sea of Galilee.

The years since have revealed centuries of past civilizations – 18 successive cities in all – each one conquered, rebuilt and then buried in time.

Now Beit She’an stands as a national park with one of those eras revealed – an impressive classic Roman city that served as a thruway between the sea and the East.

Once a main hub of the Decapolis, digs have unearthed about 10 percent of the city, a feature of which is the Roman theatre still used today with some of the greatest acoustics in Israel, according to Nissim Bados, park manager. Bados said the acoustics were actually better in ancient times, when bronze cupolas – empty rooms with a window – sat at the top of each aisle. The sound rushed up the empty aisles into the bronze rooms, swirled around and then back into the theatre, creating a surround-sound effect.

This year’s ICEJ Feast of Tabernacles opening night will put these acoustics to the test with a rendition of “Thy Kingdom Come”, a musical by Steve Fry. About 2,000 people fit into the theatre now, compared to 7,000 in Roman times.

Feast pilgrims will have an opportunity to tour the elaborate archaeological site, replete with a Roman forum and cardo, mosaics that were the street-paving décor of the day, and a network of homes, shops, public baths and colonnaded walkways.

One can climb the hill for commanding views of the Golan Heights, the eastern plains and Jordan. Atop the hill, called Tel Beit She’an, is a solitary tree in the shape of a cross. It was used for the crucifixion scene in the movie “Jesus Christ Superstar”.

The city was so large at one point that it has taken 16 years to unearth only one-tenth of what archaeologists believe exists there. Canaanites, Philistines, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans were just a few of the conquerors at varying points in history. Then came the Byzantine era, followed by the Muslim conquest.

The Bible mentions Beit She’an as one of the Canaanite cities not conquered by the Israelites under Joshua (Joshua 17:1-12; Judges 1:27). The city is again mentioned after the Philistine defeat of King Saul's army on nearby Mt. Gilboa, when they hung the bodies of Saul and his sons on the city walls (I Samuel 31:10-12).

Beit She’an is also mentioned as an important administrative city of King Solomon (I Kings 4:12). From this period administrative buildings were uncovered. Oddly though, the twelve tribes of Israel never settled there and Assyrian armies destroyed the city to its foundations when they conquered Israel in 732 BC.

Centuries later, an earthquake in 749 AD destroyed the city and the fate of its Muslim residents is unknown. The Crusaders built a small fortress in the 12th century to control the crossroads, but the city was never rebuilt. Only a small Arab village existed there in later periods.

Between 1921 and 1933, major excavations on the 10-acre hill exposed remains from the Roman-Byzantine period on top and the Bronze and Iron Ages on the southern slope. The city itself remained buried until the 1960s, and excavations were renewed again in 1983. By 1996 the work had uncovered what we see today, particularly the classic Roman city center.

The city reached its maximum size and prosperity during the Roman-Byzantine period when 40,000 people lived there.

Modern-day Beit She’an has only 17,000 residents, many of Moroccan Jewish origin.
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