I will declare Your name to My brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.

Psalm 22:22
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The ICEJ headquarters in Jerusalem

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.
Dear Friends,

“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practises righteousness is born of Him.” 1 John 2:29

Those of us who love and know Jesus are called Disciples or followers of His life. This constitutes the great challenge to all who claim His name. John in his first epistle declares that if we know Him, we ought to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6). Jesus Himself said that His true disciples would be known by their “fruits”. That is, the fruits of righteousness flowing from their hearts. Those not demonstrating these fruits are just not His followers. It is as simple as that!

In addition, we hear a lot about righteousness imputed to us by Jesus’ finished work on the cross, and of course we should. But sadly we hear very little about righteousness imparted to us. Jesus not only brings us into right standing with God the Father, but He also changes our lives, cleans us up and empowers us to walk in sanctification and holiness. In short we are to be a holy people, since without that no one shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

The challenge then to every Christian is to have the Word of God built into their lives. This is what it means to fully come under the Lordship of Jesus, since it is through His Word that He reigns and rules over us.

Jesus once said, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46) Again, John in his Gospel, recording the words of Jesus, states: “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32)

Paul writing to the Corinthians declares that we should be walking epistles for all to see. That is, the Word of God must take root in our lives, change our behaviour and thereby impact others. The early disciples were recognised as those who had been with Jesus.

As we journey through this year with all its challenges, let us ensure that we are true followers of Jesus. Let us crown Him afresh as Lord of our lives and set out to walk in holiness and truth. Only this type of commitment will make our works for Him real and powerful. Paul said, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Let us then ensure that we walk in newness of life! This is the desire of all of us at the International Christian Embassy.

Malcolm Hedding

Malcolm Hedding
Executive Director of the ICEJ

PASSOVER APPEAL

Dear Friends:

Imagine that it is your family’s biggest holiday gathering of the year, and the table is nearly empty.

That is the prospect for more Israeli families than ever as Passover approaches this spring.

The urgency of this situation was recently brought to our attention by none other than an ultra-Orthodox member of the Knesset, when the new Christian Allies’ Caucus was formed. (see page 4)

We are asking all our members and friends worldwide to respond generously to the Knassset’s sincere appeal to Christians for help in funding the distribution of Pessach baskets to poor and destitute Israeli families this April.

Knesset members have taken an extraordinary step in admitting the nation’s lack and reaching out to their Christian friends for help. We must step into the gap.

The funds will go to buy matza bread, Shabbat wine or grape juice, and basic food staples that families will need to keep the Passover.

This collective Christian/Jewish effort will be given a high-profile launch from the Knesset at Passover. So not only will thousands of hungry families benefit materially and spiritually, but the whole nation of Israel will be informed of your compassion.

Please use the attached response device to send your gift at once.

In the name of Jesus,

Malcolm Hedding
ICEJ Executive Director
Inside the Embassy

Seven Knesset members from parties left and right participate in a more recent follow-up meeting of the Christian Allies’ Caucus, presided over by MK Yuri Shtern, center. Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin later addressed the packed session, attended by several dozen Christian Zionist leaders.

It is just one of the latest signs that Israel’s predicament is drawing the Jewish people closer to their Christian friends than ever before: The Israeli parliament has established a collective forum to engage directly with Christian leaders.

Christian Zionist ministries were invited in January to the inaugural meeting of the new Knesset Christian Allies’ Caucus to launch what co-chairman Dr. Yuri Shtern termed a “political upgrade” of relations between Israel and its Christian supporters across the globe.

“We were surprised by the enthusiastic response to the announcement of this Knesset caucus,” said Malcolm Hedding, Executive Director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. “I can assure you that the eyes of the Christian Zionist world are upon what you are launching here today.”

The historic moment, the first time the Knesset as an institution has officially acknowledged and engaged with the growing Christian pro-Israel movement worldwide, featured not only warm mutual greetings, but also a very unusual plea.

The co-chair of the newly formed caucus, MK Yair Peretz of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, who represents a segment of society that normally shuns contact with Christians, made a sincere and urgent appeal for Christians worldwide to help
Inside the Embassy

fund the distribution of Passover baskets to needy Israeli families this spring.

Peretz explained that three years of terror attacks and economic recession have forced the nation to make deep cuts in welfare spending, and concerned lawmakers are now looking to Christians to help fill the gap.

The Knesset Christian Allies’ Caucus is the outgrowth of an idea that had been brewing over recent years among some Israeli legislators, but through MK Shtern’s efforts the caucus was rushed into being after a number of Christian expatriates residing in Israel ran into difficulties renewing visas in the second half of 2003.

Shtern apologised for the visa situation, citing last autumn’s long civil servants’ strike and Israel’s restrictive policies in dealing with security concerns and illegal workers.

The Christian ministries present applauded the founding of the caucus, noting that scores of followers abroad had also welcomed the news of its formation in phone calls, emails and letters to their offices.

Among the organisations represented at the caucus launch were the ICEJ, Bridges for Peace, Christian Friends of Israel, The Ebenezer Fund, the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, the National Unity Coalition and the Jerusalem Summit.

In an attempt to broaden the effectiveness of the informal committee, Shtern (of the right-wing National Union) and Peretz selected six other Knesset members from an array of factions to join the caucus, including from the ruling Likud, Labour, NRP and Shinui.

“We will not be demanding that Christians adopt any particular political viewpoint on the conflict here,” said Shtern in clarifying the goals of the caucus. “We simply are reaching out to Christians to support Israel on the basis of our fundamental right to live here in peace and security.”

The main thrusts of the caucus will be to raise Israeli awareness of the unconditional support of Evangelical Christians, launch joint welfare projects for the needy in the land, and enlist Christians in efforts to improve Israel’s standing internationally, with an urgent need to focus on Europe.

The Knesset members were encouraged to learn that the formation of their caucus coincides with the founding of the first registered pro-Israel lobby at the European Parliament in Brussels, a Christian initiative called the “European Coalition for Israel”.

The ICEJ is partnering with the Holland-based group Christians for Israel and other Christian ministries to establish a permanent presence in Brussels to engage with EP members on Israel’s behalf. The Coalition will be formally launched in early March during the European Commission’s upcoming special conference on anti-Semitism, organised in tandem with the European Jewish Congress.

In yet another indication of closer Jewish-Christian collaboration, the Jewish officials involved in the anti-Semitism conference specially invited Christian leaders from the Coalition to attend and speak at the landmark event.

In the meantime, Coalition members in Holland assisted the Israeli emergency response group Zaka in obtaining official permission to put on public display in The Hague an Israeli bus recently blown apart by a Palestinian suicide bomber in Jerusalem, killing 11 people. The bus was shipped there as hard evidence of the need for Israel’s security fence around Judea/Samaria, which was the subject of hearings at the International Court of Justice beginning February 23.

The decision to send the charred remains of the bus came when Keren Hayesod, an arm of the Jewish Agency, summoned some 30 European Christian leaders to Jerusalem in early February for an emergency summit on how to fight mounting anti-Semitism in Europe.

These developments all signal unprecedented levels of Jewish cooperation with Evangelical Christians to defend Israel and the Jewish people. Christians have offered a hand of friendship for many years and the mainstream Jewish community is now reaching out to take that hand as never before, overcoming deep historic wounds and suspicions over Christian motives.

In an age when Israel and the West are confronting the threat of mass terrorism and Jews are scapegoats once again for all the world’s ills, Israelis and the Jewish Diaspora are increasingly realising that Bible-believing Christians are the best friends they have.
Inside the Embassy

Surrounded by snapping cameras and curious reporters from the Hebrew and foreign press, ICEJ staff member Svetlana Milchiker boldly proclaimed that the power of God had saved her life.

“It was God. God wanted to show that He loves me. He wanted to show that He kept me. I know 100 percent it was Jesus. The first word I was able to say was ‘Jesus’”, Svetlana said while lying on a hospital bed in the emergency ward.

Only three hours earlier on that morning of January 29, Svetlana was riding bus No. 19 in Jerusalem when a loud and powerful blast behind her shattered her routine commute to work.

“A sound wave hit me in my back”, she recalled, demonstrating how the force moved her body forward. Then all she saw was black.

Svetlana slowly regained consciousness but remained in a grey fog for several moments. She saw her arms in front of her as if from a distance. Unable to move at first, Svetlana concentrated on her hands, trying to move them.

“I was still sitting next to the window”, she said. “When I finally realised I could move, I got out.”

All of the windows on the bus were blown out. Many people still on the bus scrambled to get out. The top of the bus was peeled back and the frame was charred. People and their personal belongings were hurled onto the street. Eleven people were killed, plus the suicide bomber.

Svetlana immigrated to Israel 11 years ago from the Ukraine through a bussing project sponsored by the ICEJ, which helped bring new immigrants from the former Soviet Union to Israel. Now she assists new immigrants in her present job.

On the day of the blast she climbed out of the bus through the blown-out windows to find another ICEJ staff member, Jim Schutz, who had raced to the scene from his nearby home.

“Suddenly, I turned and I saw Svetlana walking up to me in a daze and shock, and her face was covered with blood. I couldn’t believe it, and she started to say she was on the bus”, Jim said.

Another ICEJ volunteer had just gotten off the bus at the previous stop before the explosion and was slightly injured, while three other Embassy workers happened to be nearby and assisted their two injured colleagues – friendly faces at the right instant.

Svetlana remained in the hospital for five days and continues to see a doctor for partial hearing loss. But she survived with hardly a scratch or bruise. She said it is only because of God that she is alive.

“God is good”, she said. “He protected me. I’m thankful to God for everything.”

Svetlana sat two or three rows from the suicide bomber, a Palestinian policeman from Bethlehem. Although the bomb was loaded with metal fragments to achieve maximum damage, amazingly she had only one minor cut behind her ear.

Her friends believe somewhere within the sovereignty of God, Svetlana survived, and within the miracle lies a reason.

“Somehow in God’s supernatural way, He appointed her actually to be on the bus and to protect her”, Jim said. “In order to make a testimony, and that He would be glorified and that we would see that His promises are true.”

Svetlana knows that for herself. “I know if I receive a new life from the Lord, it’s for a certain reason.”
Inside the Embassy

“Roll Cameras”
ICEJ Sponsors Lively TV
Debate On Middle East

From the opening salvo, it was clear this was a forum designed to ask the tough questions.

“Has Israel forfeited its sovereignty to the United States?” posed popular American radio talk show host Janet Parshall.

While visiting Jerusalem in January, Parshall was invited to moderate a spirited debate sponsored by the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem and videotaped for future broadcast.

With TV cameras rolling and an attentive audience watching, Parshall engaged a notable panel of guests on a wide range of political and religious topics, from removing settlements to God’s calling of Israel.

While Knesset Member Rabbi Michael Melchior stressed the need for innovative inter-faith dialogue with Islamic leaders to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, fellow panelist Rev. Malcolm Hedding, ICEJ executive director, urged Israelis to trust their future to the faithfulness of God.

Remaining panel members, Israeli journalists David Horovitz (editor of The Jerusalem Report magazine) and David Zev Harris (bureau chief for The Media Line), preferred sticking to more temporal issues, like the merits of the Geneva Accords and the failure of Israeli leaders to muster an effective public relations campaign in the world media.

Horovitz said Israelis will be facing critical decisions in coming months over the government’s plans to unilaterally disengage from the Palestinians, even though it might reward terrorism and produce “bitter confrontations” between IDF soldiers and Jewish residents of Judea/Samaria and Gaza over the removal of settlements.

There was a consensus among the panelists that the conflict had reached this point because the Palestinian leadership resorts to terrorism and refuses to accept Israel’s right to exist.

Hedding, however, wondered why it took so long for the majority of Israelis to come to that conclusion. “In 1994, when the [Oslo] process was just getting underway, here was a man that stated clearly and openly... that he is committed to the total destruction of the Jewish state. Now I have to ask the question: If we as normal people... don’t have to be rocket scientists to work out that [Yasser Arafat] is a terrorist, what is the world doing trying to push Israel into a peace agreement with him?”

The panel also shared a pessimism concerning the mainstream media, especially for refusing to hold Palestinians responsible for their violent actions. But the Israeli government shares some of the blame for Israel’s negative press worldwide, they concurred.

“I just read that yesterday alone Israeli security were dealing with 50 active terror alerts”, injected moderator Parshall. “But that will never appear in the American papers.”

When the Washington-based Parshall mentioned that some Democratic presidential hopefuls in the US are suggesting the United Nations should mediate the conflict, Hedding dismissed the idea.

“The recent situation that developed over the question of [Israeli and Palestinian] children being subjected to violence, demonstrated there is this offhanded attitude towards Israel in the United Nations”, said Hedding. “The whole thing was so lopsided... And if Israel’s future is handed over by an American administration to the United Nations, I think we need to be praying more than we have ever prayed before.”

At times electrifying, the debate was produced by The Media Line, a Jerusalem-based multi-media firm, which hopes to broadcast it on Christian television later this year. The ICEJ will also have a video of the debate available soon for purchase from our Resource department.

One Jewish couple in the audience noted with some surprise that there was less disagreement among the varied panelists than they have come to expect in Israel. But they added, “Future viewers of this debate are in for a real educational experience.”
ICEJ Rallies For The Fence

The ICEJ led a group of Christian residents of Jerusalem to a rally in support of Israel’s security fence that took place on the southern outskirts of the city on the same day the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands, opened hearings on the legality of the fence.

“We Christians came here today not with a political message; this is personal”, ICEJ media officer David Parsons told hundreds of Israelis and a throng of journalists gathered at the rally.

“Our families live here among you in Jerusalem. We ride the buses, eat at the cafés, and get invited to your bar mitzvahs. As Christians we also have a stake in this Holy Land and a right to live and work here in peace. And we are all going to feel safer for ourselves, our spouses and children as this fence gets built”, he said.

Much like a simultaneous pro-fence rally in The Hague at that very hour, the gathering on the Gilo ridge overlooking Bethlehem drew Jews and Christians together around the twisted hulk of a bombed-out city bus and enlarged photos of Israeli victims of terror.

The victims’ faces were held aloft by 150 Jewish students from a high school in the French Hill neighbourhood that has been hard hit by terror over recent years. So far, the violent Palestinian intifada has claimed the lives of 22 people associated with the school, including faculty, students, parents and close relatives.

In fact, one student lost her mother only the day before when a suicide bomber exploded on bus No. 14 at a traffic light astride Liberty Bell Park, claiming eight lives.

To stress the message “The Fence Saves Lives”, the rally took place along a newly completed section of the security fence where 3 weeks earlier, another Palestinian bomber had snuck into Jerusalem at night and targeted bus No. 19, killing 11 people. If that same bomber tried to cross there today, he would not make it.

ICEJ Appoints New Director For Mexico

There are some exciting new developments for the ICEJ in the Spanish-speaking world, according to International Director Michael Utterback. In one example, an incredible door opened quickly in the country of Mexico when Michael visited there in December to meet and install a new national director, Pastor Felipe Garcia.

Pastor Garcia is one of most prominent leaders of the rapidly growing Evangelical movement in Mexico. He has now caught the vision for Israel with such fire, that he has delegated day-to-day responsibilities for his
New Danish Rep

Rev. Stig Christensen, a prominent Evangelical church leader in his native Denmark, has recently been appointed national director of the ICEJ’s Danish branch. Stig brings a broad array of experience to this position, having served as a parish minister in the Lutheran state church, chairman of the ecumenical magazine The Challenge, and founder of “Oases” – a fellowship for those in the charismatic renewal movement within the Lutheran church in Denmark.

Stig started his career as a lawyer practising in Copenhagen, but began studying theology and entered the ministry. He had dramatic encounters with the Lord in the early 1970s, and was increasingly drawn to Israel. He has visited Israel more than 20 times and has led tours to the Holy Land on many of those occasions. Stig and his Scottish wife, Rhoda, have three grown sons who are all involved in Christian ministry.

USA VISIT

IN DECEMBER, ICEJ Executive Director Malcolm Hedding travelled to the United States for meetings with several major American Christian leaders. Most of these discussions took place in Colorado Springs. Here under the backdrop of beautiful mountain peaks, Malcolm and Dennis Mansfield, a key ICEJ-USA team member, met with the leadership of Focus on the Family, David Shirk, Dutch Sheets and Coach Bill McCartney, founder of the “Promise Keepers” movement.

All these meetings centered on the importance of understanding Israel’s biblical role in the divine plan for world redemption. The meetings were very fruitful and relationships were forged that will no doubt be built upon in the years to come.

Malcolm also had the privilege of having dinner with Barbara Byerley, the former spiritual leader and US President of Aglow International. This remarkable lady has a real heart for Israel and especially for the urgent call to intercession on her behalf. She is a member of Harvest Springs, the fellowship pioneered by Dutch Sheets, who has authored some inspiring books on prayer. His Little Book: Tell Your Heart to Beat Again is a must for all those facing trials and tribulations. Malcolm then preached in Dutch’s church, where his message was well received. He has been invited back in 2004.

The Kingdom of God is all about building relationships. This in turn leads to unity and ministry. The Christian Embassy places a high priority on these values and especially in the order of friendship, unity and then ministry. When our endeavours are built upon these foundational pillars they will be lasting, fruitful and a blessing.
In Nizhni Novgorod, on the road east from Moscow to the mighty Ural Mountains, the people were different, but the story was much the same.

There, Michael met Ivana [not her real name], a Jewish woman in her 40s suffering from an extremely rare neurological disorder that racks the body with the most unimaginable and unstoppable pain. She too spoke of her hope of moving to Israel. “Please pray for me”, she begged.

“People with this condition don’t usually live more than six months”, Michael was told after visiting Ivana in her dreary fourth floor apartment. “Most commit suicide”.

The very next day, a changed woman rang Masha – a local Christian helping Russian Jews make aliyah to Israel. Ivana confessed that she had been preparing to kill herself even as Michael came to visit the previous day. But not any more.

“The pain is still here but something has happened in my heart”, she exclaimed over the phone.

Boris and Ivana are not alone. Countless thousands of Jewish communities were scattered across vast Russia by the Stalin regime. Many are still unaware the passage is open to the Promised Land.

“I was shocked that so many Jews still don’t know”, Michael reflected as he travelled with Howard and his team to promote the Embassy’s new media information campaign: “Let my people know!”,

And there is an urgency to the task, Howard insisted, while preparing the final costly details of getting bed-bound Boris on his long-dreamed flight to freedom.

As President Vladimir Putin’s “creeping coup” gathers pace, the iron doors that so miraculously flung open in the early 1990s could be about to creak shut. In the face of rising Chechen terrorism and widespread mafia rule, Russians once again are
seeking the security and familiarity of greater government control, and Putin offers it.

After four years in power, the enigmatic former KGB chief has cunningly imposed his will. The economy has stabilised, crime has fallen and Putin has restored the Kremlin’s traditional hegemony over media, commerce and politics.

When his United Russia party emerged from recent parliamentary elections with an unassailable two-thirds majority, it gave him enough votes to change the constitution on a whim.

Putin shies away from talking of such measures, preferring to run in the upcoming presidential elections as an “independent” above the political fray. But his power is unquestioned and growing.

With polls registering over 80 percent support and no challenger mustering more than four points, Putin loyalists in the Duma are openly wondering whether the nation needs another presidential election in four year’s time.

“I have this sense that we are seeing the doors closing now”, Michael observed. “Darkness has risen over that land”.

It was a dream back in 1985 that first stirred Michael’s heart for freeing Russian Jewry. Then, he recalls, the message was clear: “It’s not time yet”. Still, God was preparing the ICEJ for their part in the great exodus of Soviet Jews in the 1990s.

This time, on a cold Siberian night in Omsk, a more disturbing image kept Michael awake.

“Every time I would close my eyes I kept seeing these distorted figures and faces”, he recalls, even as he tried to block the thoughts. “And I felt the fear.”

“They weren’t faces or figures of men as we would be used to”, he continued, “but they were like mountains. They peaked almost like hooded black creatures... And I saw them moving extremely slowly across the land from west to east.”

“I kept saying ‘Jesus’, ‘Jesus’, but I knew that my voice alone was not enough to stop them.”

Michael believes he saw a picture of the forces or “principalities” of darkness now loosed across the former Soviet Union. And nowhere are they more evident, Howard asserts, in Siberia, a vast region with a bitter legacy as the graveyard for over 4 million victims of Stalin’s labour camps. Today, ten percent of the population is Jewish.

Why now?

“I think the Holy Spirit, within the framework of God’s plan in the early 1990s, may have locked these spirits up for a season”, Michael resolved. “To get God’s Word in and the Jews out”. Developments in Moscow merely reflect the changing spiritual reality.

Michael also senses a new urgency to raise up a prayer covering for the work of Aliyah and “fishers” like Masha on the front lines of a deepening spiritual battle.

“Everywhere we went, they needed spiritual as much as financial support”, he recalled.

The challenge for Western Christians is to give both, while the doors are still open... while “the blind and the lame” left behind in the 1990s still have a chance to return as the prophet Jeremiah promised.

For Boris Amikov, the chance cannot come soon enough. By early March, he and his mother will be safely in Israel, staying at Beit Hatikvah - the ICEJ-sponsored home for welcoming new immigrants. Here, the Embassy will ensure Boris receives the transforming medical therapy he has been lacking for so long.

Yet over a million more like him remain in Russia – some by choice, others not even knowing they are free to come home to Israel.

For them, as for Boris and Ivana, the chance to come can mean life from the dead.
In Tunisia not long ago, anti-Semitism spawned a terrorist attack in which a Jewish man was blinded, irrevocably changing his life at the age of 60. David decided to leave his hostile land and immigrate to Israel with his elderly mother. Winter arrived soon after they did, and in their new apartment building heating is sparse, coming on for only a few hours in the evening. Because of their health problems both David and his mother are house-bound, making the days long and cold. This is the painful story of only one of several families that an Israeli Absorption Center recently referred to the ICEJ’s Social Assistance program, asking for urgently needed heaters.

A single Jewish man moved to Israel alone several months ago with little money. After he arrived, he was diagnosed with a debilitating sickness that will eventually severely restrict his mobility. Already he can hardly move his fingers. The cold worsens his situation. Before he received a heater from our Social Assistance department, there were days that he would wake up partially paralysed from the cold. From his point of view, the heater we gave him is life saving. Although his physical condition is deteriorating, the warmth brings welcome comfort and impedes the progression of this disease.

SPREADING WARMTH

From the northern Golan Heights to the southern Negev, on the coastal plains and within Jerusalem, the winter requests have poured in to SAP. Thanks to those who gave, families with little children and those with very elderly members received warmth this winter.

“You have warmed hearts as well as bodies”, said a community worker in the Galilee, home to dozens of new immigrants where many needy families received heaters and blankets.

“It is with great pleasure that I would like to thank all of you for your kind donation to buy blankets for needy families in Dimona. Your kindness and willingness to give has brought a
happy smile on the faces of these needy children...thank you again and God bless you for your deeds””, writes the head of a Social Services Department in the Negev.

“Thank you for such a prompt response”, said a director of a Community Day Center in a religious neighbourhood of Jerusalem, after they received 50 blankets for the elderly who come each day in search of friendship and a hot meal.

“When I heard that the ICEJ had approved my request for funding for winter blankets and heaters, it made my day...like a light in the darkness. I can't thank you enough for seeing the distress and need of the residents of Beit Tsafafa and doing what you could to help.” This from a social worker expressing her joy and excitement when SAP staff delivered blankets to a nearby Israeli Arab community in southern Jerusalem, home to a mainly Muslim population.

SPRING

We asked you to help us say “yes” to requests for warmth in winter and are very grateful to those who responded. Please help us to continue to meet needs this spring.

Over the recent years of violence and terror, the number of those living under the poverty line in Israel has tripled.

People who once gave to others are now in desperate need of help themselves.

Social workers are now given much less money to work with.

Recently, 5,000 families have been taken off welfare payments due to government budget cuts and stricter criteria.

In a recent phone conversation, the director of several health clinics in Jerusalem voiced her concern: “Mothers are coming to the clinics in Jerusalem and we’re finding that their babies are malnourished. In order to save money, mothers are making up the formula to feed their babies with only one spoon instead of the five required. We are seeing children arriving for treatment with rashes on their skin because the laundry is being washed without soap as a means of cutting corners and saving a few precious shekels. Other women with low iron have been advised to eat liver but we’re hearing from them that they can’t afford to buy it. As health professionals, we are looking for ways to help meet the basic needs of those who come to us. Can you help us?”
PASSOVER APPEAL

The blossoming of spring heralds Passover, a festival of freedom. Throughout Israel, homes will be thoroughly cleaned to remove the “leaven” and preparations made to enjoy this wonderful time of celebration. This is a time of remembering God’s deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt. Families will sit together around tables laid with shining settings. The familiar Exodus story will be told, culminating in a bountiful meal. Special activities will abound to make this a season to remember.

However, many Jewish families here remain in bondage - the bondage of poverty. As Passover approaches, they are struggling to put food on the table and sink even deeper into despair. As in other societies, it is hard to face a bare table at the biggest annual family holiday. In Jewish thought, Passover is a particularly important time to help the poor. Christian giving at this time is doubly appreciated.

In fact, several Members of the Israeli Knesset are so concerned with the situation they have issued a special emergency appeal to Christians worldwide to help fund the delivery of Pessach baskets to needy families across the land. Please respond generously.

Please help us turn a winter of despair into a spring of hope. Urgent funding is needed to meet the many requests for food packages at Passover, as well as to continue to touch despairing lives and hearts around the country in the months ahead. Countless Israelis have learned through the work of the Social Assistance Program that there are Christians worldwide who love them. In our visits or by letter, they tell us what our giving has meant to them. The encouraging message it brings goes far beyond the worth of the practical aid given. It says clearly, “You are not alone”.

WE NEED YOUR HELP TO CONTINUE:

Help us to be able to continue to meet requests from Israeli social workers for individual families in desperate circumstances.

Help us to continue to fund or contribute to programs that assist new immigrants, abused women and children, the elderly and sick, lonely soldiers, struggling communities, victims of terror, and others in dire need.

Help us to continue to say to Israelis in this very difficult time: “Christians care for you!”

SAP provides many poor Jewish families with the matza, wine and other basics needed to observe the Passover each year.
Once a legendary warrior and patron of ideological settlements, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has now aged into a pragmatic, centrist politician poised to uproot Jewish communities he helped to plant deep in Judea/Samaria and Gaza. With the Palestinian camp as intractable and lawless as ever, most Israelis appear ready to follow his lead in redeploying behind a new defensive line and waiting out the enemy.

EXODUS FROM GAZA: Ever since Sharon announced last fall he was considering a “unilateral disengagement” from an unceasingly hostile Palestinian population, Israelis have been curious as to exactly what he has in mind. The security fence under construction around Judea/Samaria gives them some sense of where the separation line between the two societies might be drawn in the West Bank. But what will be the fate of isolated settlements beyond the fence? And what about the Jews of Gaza?

Sharon then triggered an uproar in January when he told his Likud Knesset faction that he had ordered a top advisory team to draft plans for evacuating the Gaza settlements. Roughly half the Likud MKs immediately queued up against any such plan, while further to the right the National Union and NRP threatened to quit the coalition. The Israeli left and Palestinian Authority officials dismissed the bold move as just another bluff, but others closer to Sharon insisted he is serious.

“This time it’s not media spin”, said Ze’ev Hever, for many years Sharon’s pointman inside the settler movement.

Within weeks, Sharon unveiled more concrete plans to evacuate 17 of the 20 settlements in the Gaza Strip, and to re-route the “seam-line” security fence closer to the pre-1967 “Green Line” to ease Palestinian hardships and tensions with Washington.

Sharon said he is working under the assumption that there will be “no Jews sitting in Gaza” in the future and polls show most Israelis agree at least in principle with the idea, although they know the drawbacks are enormous.

The evacuations – not likely to start until after November’s US elections – would take two years minimum to relocate 7,000 Israeli civilians and their miles of productive greenhouses from Gaza. The huge costs could require substantial funding from an international community already hit with donor fatigue and increasingly preoccupied elsewhere.

More ominously, senior Israeli security officials were quick to warn that a Gaza pullout would be seen as a victory for terrorism, re-invigorating the Palestinian militias right when the IDF has them weakened and on the run. Indeed, Hamas and the Fatah-linked Al-Aqsa Brigades responded to Sharon’s announcements by assuring the Palestinian public “we’re winning” and promising to intensify their attacks.

REDUCING THE RISKS: To counteract the apparent “reward for terror”, various measures have been proposed to enhance Israeli deterrence in other areas.

The centrist Shinui faction insists that the vacated Gaza settlements be turned into IDF bases for anti-terror operations until a permanent deal is concluded with the Palestinians. Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz tends to agree, arguing for a residual IDF presence in the Gush Katif bloc and Philadelphi corridor along the border with Egypt.

Rising Likud MK Yuval Steinitz would accompany a Gaza pullout with an uncom-
promising war on the Palestinian terror infrastructure.

Perhaps closer to Sharon’s thinking, others suggested that the withdrawals from Gaza be offset by strengthening or even annexing the main settlement blocs in Judea/Samaria.

Before submitting a plan to his cabinet for debate and approval, Sharon first dispatched envoys to sell his “disengagement” concept to the Bush Administration. He presented it as actually advancing the “Road Map” to Palestinian statehood in the best way one could hope for right now, considering the chaotic state of Palestinian affairs.

Currently, criminal gangs and vigilantes run the streets of most Palestinian cities, unchallenged by uniformed police. The PA administration is inept and widely despised for its rampant corruption, whereas Hamas has gained popularity for its cleaner image, better welfare services and higher Jewish body count. It could take the Palestinians a generation to sort out their house and return to the peace table.

Given these conditions, American officials appear to have already given up for now on negotiating peace with the Palestinians, but do not want to be seen as abandoning the Road Map. And they too are concerned an Israeli retreat from Gaza would leave a vacuum that would be filled by the Islamic radicals in Hamas, just as Hizb’Allah did in south Lebanon.

Further, the US has made clear that annexing parts of Judea/Samaria or relocating Jewish residents of Gaza there is inconsistent with Israel’s obligations under the Road Map.

Finally, while accepting the need for the security fence, Washington still objects to its encroachment into lands envisioned as part of a future contiguous Palestinian state, as well as its extension all the way around the West Bank, cutting off Palestinians from the Jordan Valley.

NO FENCE HIGH ENOUGH: The challenge now facing Sharon is to navigate between these American restrictions and a brewing rebellion to his right. At one point, he had hoped to stay in power by possibly bringing the Labour party into the coalition if the more hawkish elements bolted, but that scenario is increasingly unlikely due to the personal scandals stalking the prime minister at the moment.

Waiting in the wings is Sharon’s chief Likud rival, Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who finally weighed in on the disengagement debate after weeks of silence by saying that he opposes any unreciprocated pullouts from settlements. Netanyahu, however, has reportedly told Sharon he would support the redeployment plan if it includes “something in return” for Israel.

Such give-and-take is indeed already underway with the Bush Administration, a process referred to in the latest diplomatic jargon as “coordinated unilateralism.” The Sharon government is bending the security fence and Gaza exodus to American wishes, while probing for some sort of recompense that will reduce the security risks and improve the plan’s marketability among the Israeli public.

As this new strategy unfolds, there are serious Arab fears that unilateral Israeli withdrawals might at long last trigger a bloody showdown for supremacy between secular warlords in Fatah and the Hamas-led Islamists, fracturing the Palestinian nationalist movement and destabilising the region. Ironically, such prospects might actually bring the PA begging for renewed talks.

Meanwhile for Israelis, eventually there could be benefits if less daily friction with the Palestinians causes their motivation for terror to drop. And besides, it is valuable for Israel to set a precedent for unilateral action that is acceded to by much of the world and is inherently reversible.

But a worst-case scenario is that retreat from Gaza will leave behind a Hamas stronghold brimming with missiles and rockets like the 12,000 now deployed by Hizb’Allah in south Lebanon. And no fence has yet been built that will stop them.

Using Palestinian youths as cover, a Hamas militiaman prepares to launch a makeshift mortar at IDF troops during a recent anti-terror sweep in Gaza City. An Israeli withdrawal from Gaza could spark a battle between Hamas and Fatah for control of the Strip.
The Decaying ‘International Norm’
by David Parsons

Ordinarily, you would think the wrong guys got arrested.

Instead of sitting in judgement over the malignancy of Palestinian suicide terrorism, the International Court of Justice in The Hague opened hearings recently on the legality of a fence Israel is erecting to protect the lives of its besieged citizens.

The case arose last December when the Palestinians narrowly pushed through the United Nations General Assembly a resolution asking the world court for an advisory opinion on the “legal consequences” of Israel’s construction of a security barrier in Judea/Samaria.

A sharp division of opinion has since emerged between Western democracies that fear the case will “politicise” the court and Arab/Islamic regimes that want the tribunal to declare the fence – and indeed Israel’s entire presence in the disputed territories – illegal under the Geneva conventions on warfare.

Israel contends the court lacks jurisdiction in the case, since the UN Charter (in Article 12) bars the General Assembly from taking up a matter already under consideration in the Security Council. Further, UN Security Council resolution 242 is still operative in its explicit call for resort to negotiations – not litigation – to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Regardless of how the court eventually rules, the proceedings already mark a low point for the international community and a dangerous milestone in the Palestinian campaign to de-legitimise the Jewish State.

SPRINGING THE TRAP: The Palestinians have long dreamed and schemed of this moment, when they could haul Israel into the world court to legally enshrine its pariah status. Such was the fate of South Africa’s apartheid regime in the “Namibia case” 30 years ago and the PLO has eyed that precedent ever since.

The principal Palestinian claim is that the fence violates the 1949 Geneva Convention on protecting civilians in times of war – ironically a treaty enacted to outlaw specific atrocities committed against Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II. This convention requires that civilians under foreign occupation be treated humanely and that private property not be confiscated unnecessarily.

Israel contends that the Geneva conventions are not binding in the “disputed territories”, since these areas were never widely recognised as belonging to any other nation. Nonetheless, Israel has voluntarily applied its humanitarian provisions to the local Arab population. For example, a compensation process has been established for Palestinians who have lost access to farmland due to the fence.

Even so, Israel anticipates a court ruling against the fence that, while non-binding, will seriously alter the contours of the dispute with the Palestinians.

In one fell swoop, the Court could declare the Geneva Conventions fully binding in the territories, potentially rendering numerous Israeli actions there illegal, while also fixing the 1949 armistice lines (the “Green Line”) as the de jure border of Israel. These would be huge propaganda coups for the Palestinians and entice them to seek the Court’s judgment on every other matter of contention with Israel.

Such rulings would harden Arab positions and hamper genuine peace efforts for years to come. If the territories are indeed declared “occupied” Palestinian domain, Israel is stripped of the main currency it needs (land) to exchange for Palestinian relinquishment of the “right of return”. Thus the one grand trade-off that many think might actually resolve the conflict falls by the wayside.

SINGLED OUT: On the merits, Israel insists the fence is a temporary and legitimate act of self-defence against suicide terrorists. Article 27 of the Geneva conventions would expressly give Israel the right to use such “control and security” measures as might be “necessary as a result of the war”.

Certainly, raising fences and walls for self-preservation is one of the oldest and most universally accepted instincts of man. For proof, one needs to look no further than the ancient walls that today grace central Jerusalem and Damascus.

At present, the US-led coalition in Iraq is building security barricades in Baghdad and elsewhere, just as India has completed a security fence in “disputed” Kashmir to keep out Pakistani terrorists. Even Saudi Arabia began erecting a fence in the disputed border area with Yemen to block terrorist infiltrators, while the UN itself maintains a fence that splits Cyprus in two.

Yet for some reason, only Israel’s security barrier is the subject of an urgent, UN-mandated judicial inquiry. Once again, there seems to be one set of laws for the Jewish State and another for the rest of the world. Meanwhile, Israelis are targeted daily by a jihad terrorism that the UN refuses to condemn for what it truly is – “crimes against humanity”.

Sadly, such anti-Semitic double standards have now become the “international norm”; or, as the Palestinians like to call it, “the resolutions of international legitimacy”. How did this moral rot ever get mistaken for justice?
SHARON STALKED BY SCANDALS
A pair of family scandals continues to hound Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. In the so-called “Greek Island affair”, wealthy Likud backer David Appel was indicted recently on charges of paying Sharon’s son Gilad hundreds of thousands of dollars in bogus consultant’s fees to secure his father’s help in winning Greek government approval for a huge island resort project. The bribery case also involves lands Appel wanted rezoned for development near Tel Aviv. New Attorney General Menachem Mazuz must decide soon if sufficient evidence exists to indict the prime minister. Meantime, Gilad Sharon is fighting a court order to hand over documents relating to a suspicious $1.5 million loan from personal friend and millionaire Cyril Kern that prosecutors allege was used to pay back illegal campaign donations to his father’s 1999 Likud leadership bid. Opponents left and right assert that Sharon recently proposed removing Gaza settlements to divert attention away from these scandals.

PAINFUL PRISONER EXCHANGE
A glaringly one-sided prison exchange with Hizb’Allah in late January has become even more agonising for Israelis, as authorities sort out what has been dubbed the “Tannenbaum affair”. Trying to close a three-year ordeal, Israel handed over 430 Arab prisoners and the bodies of 59 Lebanese fighters in exchange for the bodies of three dead IDF soldiers and kidnapped Israeli businessman Elhanan Tannenbaum. Original reports said Tannenbaum was nabbed by Hizb’Allah and taken hostage to Lebanon, but Israeli security now suspects the IDF reserve officer with access to classified military secrets was lured to Beirut in pursuit of shady business deals. Israeli media have openly speculated about drugs or weapons smuggling. The jailed Tannenbaum is being interrogated to determine if he divulged state secrets to the radical Shi’ite militia.

ARAFAT’S BANKING WOES
Yasser Arafat’s notorious corruption and terror links may finally be catching up to him. While his people suffer, embarrassing reports have exposed the $16,000 per night paid for his wife, Suha Arafat, to stay in a luxurious Paris hotel. The endemic sleaze and cronyism in Arafat’s regime recently led hundreds of young Fatah members to resign in disgust. Nearly half the international aid to the Palestinian Authority is now being withheld due to concerns over corruption and diversions to terror. In a major policy shift, the European Union has embargoed $50 million in aid until Arafat starts paying PA security forces by traceable bank transfers, rather than in cash. The PA cabinet has agreed to the measure, but Arafat refuses to give up his main means of buying loyalty. IDF forces just raided four Ramallah banks after reports indicated Hizb’Allah and Iran were sending in funds to sustain his Fatah-linked terror militia Al-Aqsa Brigades, which carried out the two latest suicide bus bombings in Jerusalem.

EARTH TREMORS
A sizable earthquake was felt all across Israel in mid-February, causing little significant damage but forcing the Knesset to evacuate due to a crack in the ceiling of parliament. The epicenter of the 5.3 tremor was located in the northern Dead Sea, along the active Great Rift Valley fault line. Days beforehand, a geological survey had warned that Jerusalem’s Old City and Temple Mount could suffer extensive damage in a future major earthquake expected within the next 50 years. Besides sitting atop a maze of cisterns, quarries and tunnels, the elevated Temple Mount and much of the walled Old City rest on layers of debris and rubble left by conquering armies, and not solid bedrock, the survey explains. The last major earthquake in the region hit in 1927 near Jericho, killing 300.

“It was always my wish to turn my body into deadly shrapnel… and to knock on the doors of heaven with the skulls of Zionists.” - Farewell message of Reem Raiyshi, mother of 2 infants and first Hamas female suicide bomber. After having an affair with a Hamas activist, she was forced by her husband and lover to atone by blowing herself up at a Gaza crossing, killing 4 Israelis on January 14.
15 December 2003: Hamas Canadian citizen indicted for planning to attack Israelis, Jews.
16/12: Settlers plan to resist removal from homes; Egypt renews effort to secure Palestinian ceasefire.
17/12: Dr. Pat Robertson: ceding east Jerusalem would be “stab in the heart”.
18/12: Four Palestinians killed in IDF sweeps in Gaza; Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon threatens unilateral action if Palestinian Authority keeps ignoring Road Map.
20/12: Libya promises to destroy WMDs.
21/12: Israeli hostages in Colombia released.
22/12: Two IDF officers killed in Gaza; Palestinians attack Egyptian foreign minister on Temple Mount.
23/12: IDF raids terror nests in southern Gaza, 9 Palestinians killed.
24/12: IDF demolishes Gaza tunnels.
25/12: Christmas Day suicide bombing kills 4 Israelis near Petah Tikvah.
28/12: Sharon signs order to dismantle more settlements.
29/12: PA dismisses settlement removal plan as “victory”.
30/12: Two Israeli Arabs arrested for aiding Hizb’Allah.
31/12: Swedish MP arrested at security fence protest.
3 January 2004: Five Palestinians killed in clashes with IDF; Palestinian NGOs refuse to sign anti-terror pledge.
4/1: Israel rejects Hague court’s authority over security fence; PA Finance Minister threatens to resign over lack of reforms.
5/1: 100-day Israeli public sector strike ends; Knesset forms “Christian Allies’ Caucus” to liaise with pro-Israel Christians.
6/1: Sharon government readsies list of 60 Jewish outposts for removal.
7/1: Knesset approves 2004 state budget; 3 Palestinians killed in West Bank raids.
8/1: Sharon says Israel will not negotiate with Syria while Assad regime supports terror.
10/1: Secretary of State Colin Powell says US wants two-state solution; PA threatens to declare state.
11/1: 150,000 Israelis protest dismantling settlement outposts.
12/1: Syrian dictator Bashar Assad rejects Israeli President Moshe Katsav’s invite to Jerusalem.
13/1: Palestinian gunman kill Israeli motorist, father of 5.
14/1: First Hamas female bomber kills 4 Israelis at Gaza crossing.
16/1: Israel ambassador to Sweden protests museum display glorifying female suicide bomber who killed 21 Israelis.
18/1: Hizb’Allah rocket kills IDF soldier; Palestinian gunman wounds Israeli.
19/1: Sharon says opposition leader Shimon Peres met secretly with PA Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei.
20/1: IAF jets target Hizb’Allah positions in Lebanon.

Bodies and wreckage lie strewn around Jerusalem bus No.19 just moments after a Palestinian policeman blew himself up on board, killing 11 people on January 29. Israel has used the shredded bus frame and graphic images of the carnage to more assertively expose the grisly results of terror.

21/1: PA chairman Yasser Arafat orders embezzlement probe of PA ministries.
22/1: Palestinian boy killed by IDF gunfire; Sharon unfazed by possible indictments in family scandals.
24/1: Israel-Hizb’Allah prisoner exchange deal finalised.
25/1: Hizb’Allah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah threatens to kidnap more Israelis; Jordan urges Arab states to condemn “suicide” bombings.
26/1: Poll shows Europeans think Jews are “different”, should stop playing “Holocaust victim games”.
27/1: The US to support Israel in Hague fence case.
28/1: Ten Palestinians killed in Gaza.
29/1: Suicide bomber kills 11 on Jerusalem bus No. 19; Israel exchanges 430 Arab prisoners, 59 Lebanese bodies for 3 dead IDF soldiers and kidnapped businessman Eli Tannenbaum.
30/1: Three Palestinians killed in Gaza clashes.

2 February 2004: Sharon says Gaza settlements cannot remain.
3/2: Hague court will not recuse Egyptian judge from fence case.
4/2: Palestinian terror groups view Sharon evacuation plan as “victory”.
5/2: Sharon questioned by police in scandal probes.
7/2: Islamic Jihad leader terminated in targeted killing in Gaza, 12-year-old boy also dies.
8/2: Israeli Arab Knesset faction linked to Hizb’Allah cell.
9/2: Washington receptive to Sharon’s unilateral disengagement policy.
10/2: IDF chief, US officials say Gaza pullout will breed more terror.
11/2: Earthquake rocks Israel, cracks Knesset building in Jerusalem; 15 Palestinians killed in Gaza City anti-terror sweep.
12/2: Israel on high alert as Hamas threatens revenge.
13/2: Israel to boycott Hague court hearings on fence.
14/2: Washington sets limits on Sharon disengagement plan; Ramp embankment falls near Western Wall plaza after heavy snowfall in Jerusalem, recent earthquake.
Q: What is your definition of Replacement theology?

REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY is the idea that the special relationship that Israel had with her God in terms of her national destiny and her national homeland has been lost because of her rejection of Jesus’ Messianic credentials, and therefore the Church has become the new Israel of God. And by that we mean the sole expression of God’s purpose upon the face of the earth. It holds that the Jewish people as a nation no longer enjoy a relationship with God based on the call that God placed over them in Abraham, to become the vehicle of world redemption, the means by which God gave redemptive products to the world... That idea has now been considered rejected, forgotten, and the Jewish people have no other destiny other than that which would be in the Church. The Church has then inherited all the blessings promised to Israel and naturally, as we have heard very often, the judgments and curses over Israel are reserved still for the Jewish people. This in essence is Replacement theology...

Q: There are obviously theological consequences to this theory?

I THINK THE ESSENTIAL one relating to Replacement theology has something to do with the great covenants of the Bible. God’s relationship with man is built on covenant. We know that, especially we who have been based in the New Covenant, in the once-for-all death of our wonderful Saviour, Jesus. But the New Covenant does not appear in a vacuum. The New Covenant is the consequence of one of the great covenants of the Bible called the Abrahamic Covenant, which is mentioned in every portion of the Bible extensively, including the New Covenant scriptures. Perhaps more extensively there than anywhere else, which may be surprising to many Christians.

The Abrahamic covenant is important because it constitutes God’s decision to save the world. God comes to Abraham and says, “In you all the families of the earth will be blessed”... If God’s purpose for the Jewish people has been removed and they no longer have a national destiny, a national future related to their homeland, then the whole covenant falls. You cannot have it both ways, or as we say, “You cannot have your cake and eat it too”.

And so, if God’s purpose to save the world is true, and that is why the Abrahamic covenant is an everlasting covenant, then God’s purpose for Israel must continue. If God’s purpose for Israel is a national identity in their homeland, and it is abrogated or taken away, then God’s decision to save the world also falls on its head. And that is the issue. The issue is not prophecies concerning Israel. The issue is not how we interpret prophetic statements concerning Israel. Many do that. Prophecies only confirm the covenant with Abraham and the peculiar national destiny that God gave to Israel.

...Even after they had rejected Jesus’ Messianic credentials, the writer of the book of Hebrews says that we know God will be faithful to us in Jesus because when He entered into a covenant with Abraham and the Jewish people, He has been faithful to them forever. [Hebrews 6:13-18] So, Replacement theologians are in effect accusing God of lying. They are laying an accusation against the character of God when they claim that the purpose of God for the Jewish people, in terms of a national destiny, in a national homeland, has been removed.

To order the entire interview with Rev. Malcolm Hedding on Replacement Theology in DVD or video format, please see the Resource page in this magazine.
The ancient ruler Nimrod, called “a mighty hunter before the Lord” in the Bible and considered the founder of many modern cults, also left his legacy on the geography of Israel.

Many sources credit Nimrod with attempting to build the tower of Babel and then establishing a religious system, with the help of his parents, which eventually became known as Baal worship.

And according to other non-biblical legends, Nimrod dwelled on the summit where a fortress named after him now stands in northern Israel.

Today, Nimrod’s Fortress, in the northernmost finger of the Golan Heights, stands majestically above the mountainous terrain, 815 meters above sea level.

Overlooking the fertile Hula valley from the shadow of towering Mount Hermon, the fortress’ impregnable stone towers jut from the side of the hill creating an intimidating vista. Below lies the road linking the Galilee region with Damascus – once a vital, narrow passage to the ancient Via Mare trade route.

Seen from the roads below, the impressive appearance made for a foreboding military fortress back in the Middle Ages. Today a national park, visitors can inspect all corners of the well-kept ruins and enjoy amazing views, from the Sea of Galilee on one side to the snow-capped Hermon on the other. Hikers can trek up to the fortress either from the park’s entrance or from the nearby Banias National Park.

The Crusaders were likely the first occupants of the fortress, built in the Middle Ages to defend the city of Banias, nestled in the valley below. Later, the Muslim rulers of Damascus rebuilt it to defend themselves against the Crusaders. During the 12th-13th centuries, the fortress changed hands several times, but it was maintained and strengthened mainly by the Muslims, as attested to by the numerous Arabic inscriptions found on the building.

One walks through the cavernous fortifications starting at the northwest tower. Within that tower and the southwest and western towers is a reservoir, several archery positions, Arabic inscriptions and spiral staircases made of huge stone slabs.

Visitors follow a guided path with descriptions at each numbered post that explain the history of each of the main segments.

Continuing up the slope, one comes to “the keep”, a fortified location that stands above and independent of the fortress. In case the fortress was overrun, defenders retreated to the keep and continued the fight there. The keep served as living quarters for the commander of the fortress.

During 1993-94, debris blocking the tower-gate on the western side of the fortress was cleared. On this side was found a deep moat cut into the rock, probably with a drawbridge, that protected its entrance.

A large cistern was hewn in the rock beneath, and a narrow staircase connected the tower’s different stories. A 27-meter-long stepped, secret passage led from the gate tower to the outside. It would have enabled the defenders of the fortress to launch a surprise attack on besiegers or, if necessary, to flee from it.

At the end of the 13th century, the Muslim conquest of the port city of Akko on the Mediterranean coast signalled the end of Crusader rule in the Holy Land. The Nimrod fortress lost its strategic value and fell into disrepair.

“Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, ‘Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.’ And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city). Genesis 10:8-12
THE INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN EMBASSY’S 25th Anniversary celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles is expected to bring many new participants to exciting new places, geographically speaking.

“We are receiving very encouraging indications from the nations that this landmark Feast could double last year’s attendance”, said Malcolm Hedding, ICEJ executive director. “They will arrive to a very special calendar of events, with many anointed speakers and some impressive new venues.”

The way the Succot high holy days fall this year forced some changes in the format, but ICEJ music director Chuck King said the time also was right for adding some fresh variations at the Feast.

“It keeps the event alive”, he said. “And it is innovative for the core group that returns every year.”

The most noticeable change is that for the first time in more than 20 years, the first night of the Feast will be celebrated in the Galilee, not the wilderness along the Dead Sea.

“ICEJ has never had a major presence in the northern part of the country”, King said. “To move the event to this area brings a whole new thrust to our celebration’s dimension.”

In keeping with this year’s Feast theme, the first night (28 September) will open in the beautiful Beit She’an Ancient Amphitheatre with a musical of the same title, “Thy Kingdom Come”. This inspiring worship concert, composed by Steve Fry, will feature a choir and orchestra.

Two performances are planned for that afternoon and evening. Entrance into the amphitheatre is included in the full Feast registration, but this will be a ticketed event. The following day remains open in the Feast schedule so that groups may tour before moving on to Jerusalem for the continuation of the Succot gathering.

Another noticeable change will be the variety of programs on Friday evening (1 October), the start of Shabbat. The offerings include a ministry service, a classical concert and a special program (for a small charge) at the Mini-Israel Theme Park near Latrun where concerts with folk dancing, possibly with Israeli dance companies, will be featured. The additional fee will include a tour of the Park, which has become a major attraction for both tourists and Israelis.

Now is the time to register to attend or to apply to be a volunteer. The new format and an anticipated larger crowd may require dual volunteer teams for two possible venues. Positions remain open for the Feast Worship Team (vocalists, orchestra members and dancers) and many other departments.

For more information on the Feast schedule or for volunteer forms, visit our Web site at: http://www.icej.org/feast/index.html.
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In this book Malcolm Hedding lays the biblical foundation for God’s dealings with Israel and shows how God is still working out His covenants and purposes. US$15

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In this four-lecture series, Professor Moshe Sharon examines the resurgence of radical Islam and the many religious conflicts it has fueled across the globe, particularly over the Land of Israel.

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In this interview with Rev. Malcolm Hedding, he outlines the special relationship between God and Israel concerning the national destiny of the Jewish people in their national homeland.

**TEACHING VIDEO**
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**TAPE SERIES**
In this six-part lecture series, noted Bible teacher Rev. David Pawson aims to educate and awaken the Christian world to the growing challenges and dangers posed by militant Islam.
Following last year’s successful debut tour of Ha Brit ("The Covenant") in Hebrew, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem is sponsoring an encore tour of the musical, with performances in seven cities throughout Israel this coming March. This dramatic presentation reminds Israelis, in their own language, of their great biblical heritage, and thus has been a wonderful instrument of encouragement during very difficult times. Its impact has been phenomenal.

We need your financial help to take this anointed musical to a wider audience in Israel. The March tour includes stops in Haifa, Jerusalem, Kfar Menahem, Lod, Nazareth Illit, Ra’anana and Tel Aviv. We will be staging afternoon performances for school children and soldiers, and evening shows for the general public.

A recent warm-up performance was filmed by a professional camera crew at a special showing in front of a live audience in Jerusalem’s largest auditorium. More than 2,000 specially invited guests packed the hall for yet another memorable performance. The tears and cheers among the 200 IDF soldiers in attendance was just one of the amazing highlights. This performance was captured brilliantly on film and can now be purchased on DVD or Video format from Embassy Resources Ltd (see previous page).

We invite you to be a part of bringing this message of biblical hope to this entire nation. There is no better hour to bless Israel with God’s Word than now! Please prayerfully consider making a generous donation to this project.

For more on The Covenant, visit our Website at http://www.icej.org/covenant/index.html.