FEAST OF TABERNACLES 2005

With a mix of new guests and traditional events, ICEJ’s 2005 Feast of Tabernacles plays host to thousands. Full coverage from pages 6-12.
The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ)

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

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

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

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

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

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Dear Friends,

As days of violence, anarchy, wars and natural disasters cover the earth – we are tempted indeed to give way to despair and wonder where it will all end. Add to this the degradation of the environment and the picture only worsens. Our world is in trouble!

The root of this trouble lies in humankind’s nature. To put it simply: There is something wrong with the human heart. It is in rebellion against God and His Word and is predisposed toward evil. The Prophet Jeremiah put it this way; “The heart of man is desperately sick and wicked above all things.” (Jeremiah 17:19)

The Psalmist David declared that, “There is none good, no not one,” (Psalm 14:1-3) and Romans 3:23 states that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. These notions of the fallen nature of man are of course universally rejected by the religious world and by the secular humanistic one. To these “worlds,” man is essentially good and all his problems are largely caused by his position in life and environment. He is a victim of circumstances outside of his control! The Bible affirms that he is not.

For those who love God, cast themselves on His redeeming grace and power and live in His Word there is a bright and blessed future. (Psalm 1:1-3) The key to rectifying our “broken and diseased hearts” is, and always has been, repentance. This means saying sorry to God and to man for all that we have done and become. Again, this notion is rejected by our proud and arrogant world. The fallen heart does not easily come to terms with its awful condition, but there is no other solution for it.

For those who have the courage to embrace God’s gift of repentance and atoning love there is waiting for them a pathway of hope, joy and eternal life. This is the unfailing promise of God and this is the only way out for a world that is falling apart fast. We have heart trouble and only the God of the Bible can rectify this condition. His word states that, “He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

As we enter the season of Hanukkah and Christmas we are reminded of God’s light and His willingness to shine it on a broken and dark world. This light first broke forth in Israel and has gone to the ends of the earth. It rekindles hearts and tells the world that God loves it and has made a way out for it. Thank God that in His Messiah He came looking for us and shone the light of His love on us. We are a blessed people!

May you have, enjoy and experience a very blessed Hanukkah and Christmas.

Yours in Jesus,
Malcolm Hedding.
The Brazilian contingent makes up the loudest and the most colourful contingent of the Jerusalem March during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Kingdom Glory

Feast of Tabernacles 2005 review

The 26th annual celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, themed “The Keys of the Kingdom,” centred in Jerusalem this year with a spectacular opening night celebration in the shadow of the Old City walls in Sultan’s Pool.

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem hosted several traditional events such as the Jerusalem March, but also added new and innovative displays of support for Israel, for example welcoming 150 evacuees from the Gaza Strip who are now living in government-sponsored housing or staying in hotels until they can build their new homes.

Minister of Tourism Avraham Hirchson welcomed Feast pilgrims from more than 80 nations and several hundred Israelis who were guests on the opening night. Sultan’s Pool was filled to capacity – 6,000 people.

“Our wonderful Christian friends have been with us during five difficult years,” he said. “You stood with us here and throughout Israel. The government and the people of Israel do not take this for granted.”

The speech was followed by thunderous applause confirming the support of Christians worldwide. The roll call of the nations also displayed the vast support as representatives of 80 nations streamed by.

A drizzle toward the end of the first service capped the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles, as the weather in Israel became Fall.

The remainder of the Feast continued at the International Convention Center Jerusalem with insightful seminars and festive evening celebrations. Highlights outside the regular meetings included an outdoor concert at Mini Israel, a classical concert, a night of ministry and bus tours to visit Gush Katif evacuees in their new abodes.

Way of Life, the Acrodramance team from Florida, made another appearance at the Feast, dazzling the crowd at the evening meetings with their dramatic acrobatics as they brought alive the Gospel message through their craft.
Honouring the Gaza evacuees

“Former Gush Katif residents become special guests at ICEJ Feast”

By Nicole Jansezian

“Don’t feel evacuated, I feel expelled,” said Mali Genish.

Genish and her 16-year-old daughter were some of the 150 Gush Katif evacuees that attended the Feast of Tabernacles one evening as guests of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem.

The evacuees have been living in caravans, tents or hotels since the disengagement in August. ICEJ invited representatives of the former Gush Katif community to the Feast to show them they had the support and sympathy of Christians from around the world.

Many of the former Gaza residents were surprised and elated at the thunderous applause and five-minute standing ovation that Feast pilgrims gave when they were introduced.

“I had no idea,” said Tal, a 15-year-old formerly from Neve Dkalim. “They give us hope to go on with our new lives.”

The ovation went on long after the guests sat down. They looked back in wonder and tears at the 3,000 Christians still applauding.

“This is very curious to me,” Genish told Hedding. “In history we see people trying to get our land and we see anti-Semitism. To see Christians for Israel is very interesting. We’re used to people who are against us.”

The evacuees, as they had been known in the media for the last several months, were treated to a banquet at the Crowne Plaza Hotel after they were introduced to Feast pilgrims and enjoyed some of the presentations during the Feast meeting. ICEJ’s Social Assistance Program treated the children present to gift certificates to a toy store.

Former Gaza residents enjoyed special performances for them at the Feast one evening.
With hearts of expectation, 120 young adults from more than 12 countries arrived on the shores of the Galilee for the start of the 2005 Grafted Feast of Tabernacles Tour – the third annual ICEJ-sponsored tour for young adults.

The atmosphere among the tour participants was charged with excitement as we started the tour walking where Jesus walked and hearing His word in the places He taught.

With the theme this year, “Thy Kingdom Come, The Keys of the Kingdom,” the Grafted team brought a unique message to the younger generation: to take up the challenge that we are called to embrace the kingdom; to heed the warning that we so easily neglect our relationship with the King; and to accept the invitation from Jesus who has the keys of the kingdom and can open doors that no man can close.

Lorenzo Agnes, a pastor from New York and the tour’s spiritual leader, taught the group as we toured from the Galilee into Jerusalem. He put into perspective the place that God, as our King, should hold in each of our lives.

The touring segment ended with a powerful night of God’s presence in...
Ten years ago ICEJ enlisted the help of Gene Little and Bill Trees to shuttle Feast volunteers around the maze that makes up Jerusalem streets and to take care of odd jobs that require innovation and creative problem solving.

They have since become regular Feast volunteers who leave a string of laughter behind them. Gene is known to break into spontaneous dance while Bill, donning his trademark T-shirts emblazoned with witty sayings, pops in a set of fake teeth or flashes his jumbo-sized sunglasses at Israeli drivers.

Amazingly, the two remain in such high humour despite the demands of their jobs – Bill and Gene make countless runs to the airport, 45 minutes from Jerusalem – many times driving back and forth through the night shuttling volunteers coming or going.

During their drives, one can be regaled with stories from Gene’s 10 years in the Navy, or how Bill was able to practise his one-liners during his 35 years of teaching.

Teresa Simila, ICEJ housing coordinator, works one-on-one with these Feast-favourites and assigns them their daily jobs.

“Bill and Gene have a unique way of using their humour to release the stresses and pressures of the week,” she said. “When they pick people up from the airport they use their jokes to unravel fears and anxieties from being in a foreign country.”

But these two jokesters aren’t always all fun and games. Bill is the author of Clock’s, and Gene has written three books, The Mystery of Islam, Wellspring of Wisdom, and To Love a Stranger.

The tour included ample hiking through waterfalls, mud packing and camel trekking. In Jerusalem, the group attended ICEJ’s Feast of Tabernacles and the Jerusalem March, a time when they enjoyed shouting – as only young adults can – words of love, comfort and blessing to the nation of Israel.

Having heard the warning and having embraced the challenge of the kingdom of God, the young adults on this tour learned how to be fellow-workers with God in the unveiling of His kingdom.

These young adults, full of passion and zeal for God’s purposes for them and for Israel, went back to their nations equipped with the keys of the kingdom.

The highways and the byways

ICEJ volunteer drivers go the extra miles

By Lena Kachinski

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The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem presented its first ever Nehemiah Award during the Feast of Tabernacles to Lance Lambert, well-known Israel commentator and Biblical scholar.

Lambert’s lifelong commitment to Israel, reflected in his ministry which has taken him to the ends of the earth, is a testimony to the grace of God in his life and sets him apart as an inspiration and role model for all of us.

The ICEJ established the “Nehemiah Award” to annually honour an outstanding biblical Zionist at the Christian Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. Nehemiah spearheaded the return of the Jewish people from the Babylonian exile to Israel and Jerusalem round about 536 BCE. He displayed courage and was a determined leader. The Biblical book named after him records his accomplishments in rebuilding the ruins of the city of Jerusalem and leading his people in spiritual renewal.

Lambert was born on 5 February, 1931 as Lance Judah Jair Lambert Dobski. His parents, both Jewish, made a pact to keep their religious identity hidden from Lance and his sister, fearing the Nazis and fascists would target them. His father was a count in the House of Savoy and worked for King Victor Emmanuelle III of Italy. Just before World War II, he sent his wife and children to Britain for safety. Their fears were justified: Lance’s father and 57 members of his family died in Auschwitz.

Lance became a believer in Jesus in 1943. He was educated at Emmanuel School and then the University of London where he graduated with degrees in Classical Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Mongolian, Oriental Philosophy and Far Eastern history at the School of Oriental and African Studies.

Just before his mother died, she told Lance and his sister of their Jewish identity. Lance became an Israeli citizen in 1979 and now lives in Jerusalem.

Lance has since become an internationally known bible scholar, teacher and lecturer on Jewish history and Zionism and is in much demand. He founded Halford House, the first modern era house church in 1952 and has authored a number of books such as “Battle for Israel,” “Uniqueness of Israel,” “Till the Day Dawns,” “Spiritual Character” and “Watch and Pray.”

“And I told them of the hand of God which had been good upon me, and also of the King’s words that he had spoken to me. So they said, ‘Let us rise up and build.’ Then they set their hands to do this good work.” Nehemiah 2:18.
A feast miracle

**God provides a way for Argentinian woman to attend Feast**

**By Lena Kachinski**

Nidia Demarchi didn’t think she would step foot on the rocky Jerusalem soil again after she attended ICEJ’s Feast of Tabernacles celebration five years ago. At that time, she said, “I left my heart in Israel and with the wonderful people from the Feast.”

Longing to return, Nidia emailed Monica Tamagnini, ICEJ Feast secretary, in July. From her home in Argentina, she wrote that she would like to volunteer for this year’s Feast.

But events at Nidia’s home took a turn for the worse: her son was in the hospital, her finances were low and her excitement to go to Israel had died down. She thought her dream to be at the Feast would stay just that - a dream.

She wrote back to Monica, “My son is in the hospital, and I need to take care of him. My heart is torn between Israel and my son ... I cannot come.”

Monica was drawn in by Nidia’s situation.

“I immediately laid my hands on the computer screen and began to pray,” Monica said.

Shortly after, things began to change. Nidia’s son was released from the hospital and during a visit to the ICEJ Web site she saw a bulletin advertising an ICEJ-sponsored contest to win an all-expenses-paid trip to the Feast. All she had to do to enter was sign up five people to receive ICEJ News or the bimonthly Word from Jerusalem magazine.

“God can make a way,” Nidia said. She signed up not five, but 35 of her friends.

Soon after, however the long-awaited miracle came. On Aug. 15, Nidia received an email from David Parsons, ICEJ spokesman, telling her that her name had been drawn out of more than 700 other applicants. She had won! Nidia could hardly believe what she was reading, and immediately praised God that He had found a way.

The Lord also eased Nidia’s worries about her son.

“Your son is not your son, he’s My son,” Nidia said the Lord told her. “You will go to the Feast and I will take care of him.”

She was greeted with flowers from ICEJ staff at the airport in Tel Aviv. Nidia, full of boundless energy, elected to stay with the volunteers at the Yitzhak Rabin Youth Hostel instead of the four-star Crowne Plaza Hotel, which was part of her prize.

Gene Little (left), Teresa Simila (right), welcome Nidia Demarchi (centre) to Israel at the Ben Gurion
Lord God of Abraham
Isaac and Israel
Let it be known today
That you are God
We offer up our lives
As a living sacrifice
Purify us with Your holy fire
Holy fire

INSIDE THE EMBASSY

WORD FROM JERUSALEM
Born and raised in Israel

Traversing the nations

BY NICOLE JANSEZIAN

Born in Israel to American parents, Anna King is no ordinary teen-ager. At 14-years-old, she is precociously mature. She speaks flawless English with an American accent and Hebrew with an Israeli accent. A picture of her at 4-years-old handing a wreath to the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has been memorialized in ICEJ nostalgia.

But it is her experiences outside Israel that have connected her even more strongly to the land in which she was born.

When Anna was 13, an opportunity arose for her to join friends planning a missions trip on the Rio Coco River in Nicaragua, where they visit schools and the impoverished communities.

“My mom always wanted me to go on a missions trip,” Anna recalled.

Martha, Anna’s mother, was a long-time staffer at Youth With a Mission (YWAM) and enthusiastically promotes missions. Anna’s father, Timothy King, is the financial director of the ICEJ. Martha and Timothy met and married in Israel.

“I used to feel like, I was born in Israel so I was sort of forced into it – my parents have a calling here so I had to stay here,” Anna said. “Now I feel like I have my own calling – I’m supposed to be here. I feel more connected with the Jewish people.”

The Kings sent Anna off on her first major transcontinental trip without them when she left for Central America in June 2004 – worlds away from her Israeli home in the town of Har Adar.

“I prayed for signs whether I should go. God provided all the money through bottles and cans recycling that paid for the trip,” Anna said.

The trip was so compelling and grounding for her faith that she decided to go on another trip this past summer.

“Every time I go on a missions trip, I get filled up with the Holy Spirit,” Anna said. “It’s very refreshing. You live (in Israel) under a lot of pressure and then you suddenly go out and do Christian things and you see the fruit instantly. This gives me a lot of encouragement.”

Anna went on her second missions trip in the summer of 2005, this time to Mexico. She prayed beforehand that she’d learn God’s call on her life. She believes God revealed the first part of His plan for her – to attend a Discipleship Training Session with YWAM when she turns 18.

But in the meantime, God has strengthened Anna’s connection with Israel and has made it her own personal calling, not just her parents’. Immersed in Israeli society as a 9th grader majoring in art in a specialized high school in Jerusalem, Anna has had to learn how to relate to her friends on a different level.

“It was very hard at the beginning – I wasn’t sure what to say and they’re not sure what to think of me,” she said about being the only Christian in her class. “I’ve learned how to be a Christian without forcing them to listen to me.”

Through several years attending Israeli schools as the only Christian among her peers, Anna has seen changes and greater acceptance among her peers.

“It’s a big issue because the Jews never forgot what Christians did to them,” she said. “They don’t know there are other Christians who care.”

Through Anna, they are beginning to learn.
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PUBLISHED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN EMBASSY JERUSALEM

JANUARY, 2006

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ICEJ opens pool in Ashkelon

German Christians raise half a million euros for disabled in the Negev

BY LISA RÜDIGER AND LENA KACHINSKI

ASHKELON - Leaders of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem and its German branch marked the opening of a new, state-of-the-art therapeutic swimming pool in Ashkelon designed to serve handicapped children.

The $1.3 million pool was the result of a joint project with ICEJ Germany, the municipality of Ashkelon and the Israel Insurance Institute. Former chairman of ICEJ Germany, Christian Stephan, and his wife Joliene initiated a donation drive for the pool in 2001 and eventually collected more than 500,000 Euros.

At the dedication ceremony, Ashkelon Mayor Roni Maatzni joined representatives of the Oranim School, where the pool is located, in thanking all the German Christians who had donated towards the pool.

Malcolm Hedding, ICEJ executive director, praised the municipality of Ashkelon along with the leadership of the school for their constant efforts to improve the lives of society’s weak and vulnerable.

“The strength of a society is measured by the way they deal with the weakest and most vulnerable members,” he said. “The social commitment of the school is an example to us all.”

Christians bless Israel

Planting of the Christian Stephan Forest in the Negev

BY LISA RÜDIGER

CHRISTIAN Stephan, long-time director of the ICEJ Germany branch, was honoured by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) in Israel with the planting of the first sapling in the new Christian Stephan Forest in Lehavim in the Negev.

About 30 friends, family members and representatives of the ICEJ and JNF gathered for the planting and unveiled a plaque in his honour. For his 80th birthday, he asked people not to give him gifts but to donate gifts to the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemeth L’Israel). Enough money was received to build a forest.

ICEJ Director Malcolm Hedding compared Stephan and his lifelong work for the benefit of Israel with the

Christian and Joliene Stephan plant first sapling.
Therapeutic pool for handicapped children opens in Ashkelon thanks to donations from ICEJ Germany.

Biblical tree in Psalm 1. He emphasized Stephan’s humility and his past, growing up in Nazi Germany.

“These two facts make his work on behalf of Israel even more remarkable,” Hedding.

JNF representative Zeev Kedem concluded the ceremony with a poem, the last verse, “A man like a tree,” saying it characterized Stephan for his long standing with Israel and the physical manifestation of that by donating trees.

Stephan, moved, emphasized his love and solidarity with Israel.

He closed with his one sentence in Hebrew: “I love Israel.”

Christian Stephan, his wife Joliene and their grandson Frederik at the tree planting ceremony.
OD – Elementary school Principal Ottman Sarsour was in the mall one day when he saw two former students – one Arab and one Jewish – drinking coffee together.

“I cried when I saw them together, living what we had taught them,” he said. “They invited me to join them.”

The two girls were products of “A New Way,” a project supported by ICEJ’s Social Assistance Program designed to introduce Arab and Jewish students to each other’s cultures and help them overcome racial divisions. “A New Way” has several projects, some of which are to support programs like this in the schools of Lod.

Sarsour himself, an Arab born and raised among Israelis, has been working for reconciliation between the two races. He welcomed the project in his school, an Arab elementary school, and works with a corresponding Jewish school.

In Israel, the school system is segregated with Arab and Jewish children attending different schools. Lod, a city on Israel’s coastal plain, has a population of 60,000, a mix of Jews, Christians and Muslims and a low socio-economic status.

The students go to each other’s schools once a month for activities and lessons in subjects such as science and drama. These are designed to bring the students to a deeper understanding of each other. The project is also at schools in Jaffa, Ramat HaSharon, Kfar Kassem, Tira and Kfar Saba reaching 500 students from kindergarten through high school. The goal is to open up the students’ minds to see how their cultural counterparts live, to enjoy their company and to learn of their differences.

The results are beginning to pay off. Just like the two girls Sarsour saw together in the mall who maintained a
friendship well after they finished the project, other students currently in the program spoke highly of it.

“It is good – we get a chance to be together,” said Leem Aleway, 11, an Arab student.

A Jewish student, Miri Lahmish, 12, said, “It’s a very beautiful program. It shows you there is another possible way to live.”

One mother who volunteers to help with the program said her daughter has made new friends and improved her Hebrew.

“There are places in this town for interaction, but not enough,” she said. “My daughter is very happy with this program.”

Yael, the manager of the Lod project, said that programs like this would not happen without outside support and she thanked SAP for partnering with them.

Sarsour also thanked the Christians who helped SAP support this program and said he’d like to have a sustained connection with the ICEJ and the Christian community.

“There is light, there is much hope,” he said. “I hope to continue this project. It’s good for all students.”

---

**Becoming a patron of the ICEJ**

After 25 years of comforting Israel the opportunities before us are even more numerous and exciting than ever.

There is so much we could do right now that would make a huge impact and difference in the lives of thousands of Israelis. To achieve this we need a sound and sustained financial patronage program and we are inviting you to become part of such an initiative.

Please prayerfully consider becoming a patron of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. Our Patron’s Programme has three categories or levels. These are:

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“Comfort ye, comfort ye My people .....”

Isaiah 40:1-2
The new borders – and boarders – of Gaza

Israeli politics, life still consumed with disengagement

By Nicole Jansezian

While the evacuation of settlers from Gaza went off with barely a hitch in August, the country is anything but disengaged.

New borders have been established and new Palestinian boarders have moved into Jewish towns and homes. Many Gaza evacuees are still living in temporary housing and entering the winter in mobile homes without heating or their winter clothes. Others are now being "evacuated" from the hotels in which they stayed temporarily. Almost all are still waiting for government compensation.

The Palestinians have dug their heels into the evacuated Gaza communities, moving within closer range of Israel to launch their Kassam rockets – which have already rained on the Negev town of Sderot – and to smuggle weapons from Egypt. Then, just eight weeks after the pullout, suicide bombing resumed, killing at least six in Hadera and ending the respite from terror.

The disengagement upset the political sphere, pegging Prime Minister Ariel Sharon with the left and solidifying a staunchly right opposition group within Sharon’s own party.

And lastly, the psychological wounds persist and won’t be fully known until a generation of evacuees grows up. Violence is on the rise in schools where evacuated children have been transferred and parents say their teenagers fared the worst of entire families, harbouring a barely concealed rage that many fear can erupt at any moment.

In 2005, Israeli life hinged on this one issue. Whatever may have been their position on the emotionally charged disengagement, Israeli politicians and the public at large are now dealing with the reality of the disengagement and its implications on several levels.

New borders for new boarders

Soon after Israel pulled out, US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice brokered a deal to allow the Palestinian Authority to run a border crossing between Gaza and Egypt. Under the terms of the new arrangement, the border crossing is the first to be transferred to full PA control, and was tentatively scheduled to open on November 25.

The entire agreement is a one-year trial and at the end, the Quartet, headed by the Americans must decide whether the arrangement has worked properly, and whether it is possible to rely on the Palestinians and to grant them greater control over the crossings.

But controlling a border is a central component of political independence. If the Palestinians receive complete control over the Rafah crossing, and eventually control over the Gaza seaport and airport, it will be possible to say for the first time that there is a territory under Palestinian sovereignty.

Rice herself said so, showing a flagrant lack of understanding of history.

“For the first time since 1967, Palestinians will gain control over entry and exit from their territory,” Rice said.

In 1967 Israel “occupied” Gaza and the West Bank, but Palestinian Arabs never controlled border crossings or, indeed, any territory before 1967.

Israelis on both sides of the political spectrum criticized the agreement. Israeli surrender of security renders futile the demand that the Palestinian territories be demilitarized. But there may not yet be cause for concern: The Oslo Accords also contained many ideas that were never realized.
Prior to his surprise victory as head of the Labor Party, Peretz was primarily known for organizing massive nationwide strikes that crippled the economy and dragged on for months. Now he has set off an earthquake in Israeli politics on several levels.

As head of the Labor Party, Peretz is in a stronger position to bring his near communistic social and economic agendas to the national stage, overriding the usual foreign affairs and security matters. He was chairman of the Histadrut, Israel’s labor federation, for 10 years, where he apparently reached rank-and-file Israelis – enough to vote for him over the elder statesman Peres.

Peretz’s win also invades Israel’s last bastion of Ashkenazi Jews (Western Jewish descent). Peretz, a Morroccan-born Jew, has pledged to bring Labor back to its egalitarian roots. Moroccans and other Sephardi Jews (of Middle Eastern descent) have traditionally felt disenfranchised by the Ashkenazi political elite.

Elections for a new prime minister have been moved up from November to March.

During the political arena

The fallout of the disengagement has spilled into politics as well, shaking the foundation of the two strongest parties: Likud and Labor.

The dovish Shimon Peres lost the chairmanship of Labor to the socialistic Amir Peretz. Sharon lost his unity government and then went on to start his own party, in hopes that Peres would join him.

Peretz may have been just as surprised to win as Peres was to lose.

The dovish Shimon Peres lost the chairmanship of Labor to the socialistic Amir Peretz. Sharon lost his unity government and then went on to start his own party, in hopes that Peres would join him.

Peretz’s win also invades Israel’s last bastion of Ashkenazi Jews (Western Jewish descent). Peretz, a Morroccan-born Jew, has pledged to bring Labor back to its egalitarian roots. Moroccans and other Sephardi Jews (of Middle Eastern descent) have traditionally felt disenfranchised by the Ashkenazi political elite.

Elections for a new prime minister have been moved up from November to March.

Living with wounds

Meanwhile, Gaza evacuees are still dealing with their move and the feeling that their own government and countrymen betrayed them. The evacuees have been living in caravans, tents or hotels since the disengagement in August. Many of the families packed during the summer so their winter clothes and blankets are in storage containers – expensive and difficult to retrieve. And without proper housing, they are all starting to get restless.

“I don’t feel evacuated, I feel expelled,” Mali Genish told Word From Jerusalem as she lived in a caravan waiting for permanent housing.

After she evacuated a few days before her grown children. It was several days before she was able to contact them.

Teenagers might be the hardest hit of the demographics. Esther Shimon, speaking to Word From Jerusalem, pointed to her 15-year-old daughter and whispered that she was handling the move the worst of the whole family.

“She is angry,” she said. It remains to be seen what will happen when the seeds of this anger come to fruition. But Israel will one day deal with a disgruntled portion of the population.

Teenagers have a harder time starting over, making new friends and adjusting to new surroundings. The ones moved from Gaza are no different.

“There is a big gap between them and the rest of their peers, especially in education,” Esther said.

A teacher in one of the schools near Gaza told ICEJ that violence has increased since the new children came in and the education gap between the evacuees and long-time residents was vast. Recognizing this need, many of ICEJ’s donations have gone to pay for psychological counselling for troubled youth. More requests to help the former Gazans are under consideration and will be carefully examined by ICEJ’s Social Assistance Program and allotted to evacuees in forthcoming projects.

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The current events in Israel have left many Christian Zionists puzzled and confused. Often we hear the question: Why does God not intervene? The Israeli Knesset decided to disengage from Gaza within this year, territory that according to the Bible belongs to Israel’s Promised Land. A few years ago Christian supporters of Israel were confronted with the same question when Israel withdrew its troops from Jericho and later on from large parts of Judea and Samaria.

Israel’s withdrawal from the biblical land and a possible Palestinian state on what the Bible calls “Eretz Israel” is a reality which does not correspond to the biblical understanding of many Christian Zionists.

In the following, we will address two key aspects of biblical doctrine relating to the “land question” which can help us to understand the current events in Israel.

**AN UNSHAKEABLE PROMISE**

Israel’s right to possess the land of Canaan is founded upon divine promises. Not just once, but time and time again God assured Abraham that he would give him and his descendants a land of promise.

He said to lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land, which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. (Genesis 13:14)

The same divine promises are given to the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob. They were confirmed to Moses, repeated in the Psalms and can be found throughout the prophetic writings. They are biblical promises, which cannot be surpassed in strength and commitment.

In Genesis 15 we find that God defined the borders of the Promised Land and corroborates this promise by making a covenant with Abraham.

On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates. (Genesis 15:18)

It was customary in biblical times, that the establishment of a covenant was accompanied by the slaughtering of an animal. It was divided in two halves with each half placed opposite each other. Both covenant partners would together pass through the halves, confirming their intention of commitment (see also Jeremiah 34:18).

However it is important to note that when God made this covenant with Abraham, He alone in the form of a fiery furnace and a burning torch passed through the animals while Abraham was sleeping (Genesis 15:12). The covenant God made was thus a one-sided covenant through which God expressed: “No matter what you and your descendants will do, today I make a covenant with you Abraham, to give you and your descendants this land as inheritance.”

It is this divine covenant and a multitude of promises on which biblical Zionism is founded. It is the faith in a covenant keeping God, which is the bedrock of our support of the Jewish people and the land of Israel. “My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.” (Psalm 89:34)

**AN UNSHAKEABLE CONDITION**

The Bible, however, not only teaches about the right to possess but also about the right to inhabit the land. The book Deuteronomy, which records the last message of Moses before Israel conquered Canaan, stipulates more than any other book that there are firm conditions to living in the land of Canaan. Like a red thread these conditions are found through the whole book of Deuteronomy.

Therefore you shall keep every commandment which I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land which you cross over to possess, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the LORD swore to give your fathers, to them and their descendants. (Deuteronomy 11:8)

If Israel wants to enter the Land and dwell there for an extended period of time, they need to live there as a holy people. That means: the right of possession is clearly anchored in the word and promise of God. The land is forever hers. But the right of domicile is based on the spiritual condition of the Jewish people.

Deuteronomy 28, the chapter of “blessings and curses” sums this up in a rather dramatic way: If Israel walks in the ways of their God “He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you” (V.8) but if she consistently refuses to walk according to his word and follows other gods, the ultimate consequence will be: “You shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess.” (V.63)

In the book of Joshua we find this powerfully illustrated: When Joshua was about to conquer Jericho he went out into the desert to seek the face of God before this first and decisive battle. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him. Joshua asked what at first seemed to be a purely rhetorical question: “Are You for us or for our adversaries?” Of course God must have been with Israel! But the answer of God’s messenger must have been rather sobering for Joshua. “Neither, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come. […] Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” In other words: I am not necessarily with you. But if you want me to be on your side, take your shoes off, because this is Holy Ground. God in his sovereignty chose this piece of land between Jordan and the Mediterranean for his redemptive purposes. For that reason he expects the people living on it to be holy and obedient to his kingship.

If Israel wants to live on this land today, she needs to take her shoes off.
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