It was the first day of Israel’s new school year, when a Kassam rocket scored a direct hit on a daycare in the besieged Negev town of Sderot. Children were thrown into shock by the explosion in the playground as they heard glass windows shatter all around them.

Parents in the embattled community were quick to respond to the missile volleys with a public protest outside the Prime Minister’s Office in Jerusalem, vowing to keep their children home from school indefinitely until the government and army could take steps to ensure their safety.

“I am a man of peace and I want Sderot to be like any other city in the world... Any other city would not agree to be bombed for seven years,” the grandfather of one 8 year-old exclaimed at the protest.

“We live in fear and anxiety and it is very difficult to live in Sderot. Every night, every day is very, very serious and dangerous because we are going in the street and we have only 15 seconds to find a shelter,” said a father of four children. “This is the situation and it cannot go on.”

Three months have passed since the parents’ protest in Jerusalem and still the rockets rain down on the fast depopulating Gaza ‘frontier’ town.

With the world’s attention firmly fixed on the latest Israeli-Palestinian deal, there is little cause for optimism in the once-thriving Negev communities that surround the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

It has been this way for more than seven years in Sderot: woken almost daily by the whistle of incoming rockets crashing into residential areas. With every Kassam strike, the missiles become more accurate, more powerful and more deadly. Most believe only the hand of God has prevented more casualties.

Nevertheless, 12 Israelis have lost their lives since 2004, and 7 more civilians and soldiers in the now-emptied Jewish settlements of Gaza. Three of the dead have been toddlers, alongside an unverified number of Palestinian child victims of the rocket squad’s so-called ‘friendly fire.’

The psychological effect has been catastrophic. “Every morning when I leave the house to buy milk and bread I wonder if today it will hit me,” confided one man to ICEJ AID Director Nicole Yoder.
Dear Friends,

Welcome to the new Word from Jerusalem which now combines news from our Jerusalem headquarters with that of your national branch. Beginning in January it will be a monthly publication, enabling you to be more regularly updated on our ministry while being better connected to your USA Branch.

We hope you will find the enclosed reports on our assistance to the residents of Sderot, as well as articles about the upcoming Annapolis Summit, and the plight of Bethlehem’s Christians, to be helpful as you pray for and seek to bless Israel.

Yours in Jesus,

Malcolm Hedding, ICEJ Executive Director

This Christmas, Remember Bethlehem...

By Susan Michael

While the Christian world celebrates the miraculous birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, one can not help but be amazed that 2,000 years later there are still those who are worshiping Him in the town of His birth.

And today, they are in great danger of becoming extinct!

Since 1948 the Christian community in greater Bethlehem has dropped from 80% to 20%. What’s more, many Palestinian believers are afraid for their lives! They are complaining that their lands are being stolen by Muslims, they are being threatened and harassed, and the Palestinian authorities have provided no protection.

Just last month, an Arab American evangelical pastor was threatened by a Palestinian security official in Ramallah who demanded $30,000 in protection money to keep his life. In October, Rami Khader Ayyad, the 32-year-old director of Gaza’s only Christian bookstore, was kidnapped at gunpoint, beaten and killed, leaving behind a pregnant wife and two young children. He had regularly received death threats and his bookstore had been firebombed more than once.

As we gather this month to remember Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, let’s pray for His followers – our brothers and sisters in Christ – in Bethlehem and throughout the Muslim world. They need our prayers and our support.

Not only will the ICEJ provide Hanukkah baskets for needy Israelis this holiday season, but will be providing Christmas baskets for needy believers in Bethlehem. We will also be providing Christmas meals and fellowship to some of the South Sudanese Christian refugees who have crossed into Israel, fleeing terrible religious persecution with nothing but the shirts on their backs.

Your support of the ICEJ will bless many Israelis and will allow us to be an answer to prayer for many believers in need.

Susan Michael serves as ICEJ’s USA Branch Director
In These Last Days

God’s Final Message to the Nations

By Malcolm Hedding

No term invokes more argument and contention than, “the last days.” Without a doubt those who hear it stated think immediately of Doomsday, Armageddon and the end. Naturally, with these thoughts also comes the accusation that those who use this term are religious crazies and cultists.

In actual fact the biblical term “the last days” has very little to do with end-time thinking and scenarios. From a Christian perspective the term has everything to do with God’s message to the world.

Before the coming of Jesus, the Light and Revelation of God was “restricted,” largely to the people of Israel. The Hebrew prophets, however, did all the while foresee a day when this would change. That is, according to Isaiah the light of the God of Israel would fall upon the nations and the prophet Joel foresaw a day when “all flesh” would be redeemed and anointed by the Holy Spirit. This would constitute the consummation of God’s purpose as it would see His salvation impact all nations. It would thus be the last days!

It was in the light of this understanding that Peter stood up in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and said that the “last days” had come. As the Spirit of God fell on that day in the form of fiery tongues, the languages of all nations were heard.

There would now be a “breaking out” of the purpose of God that would reach all nations, even those in the uttermost parts of the earth. The last days had finally arrived, bringing light, joy and salvation to the ends of the earth.

The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews echoes this thought when he opens his book with the words, “In these last days God has spoken to us in His Son ...”. Thus, the term “last days” means, in effect, God’s last message to the nations.

For two thousand years then we have been living in the “the last days.” This one single unchanging message has gone from nation to nation so that at the recent Christian celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, seven thousand Evangelical Christians from nearly one hundred nations, some of them at the very ends of the earth, came to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel. This is amazing and confirms, yet again, that we are living in the last days!

And what of the end time? Well, according to scripture, no one knows the day or hour when this will descend upon us. Most of all it would be best to be vigilant and watchful and leave the speculation to others. In the meantime we rejoice in the message of the last days that has impacted the world.

The term “last days” has very little to do with end-time thinking, Doomsday or Armageddon, but everything to do with God’s final message of salvation to the world...

Rev. Malcolm Hedding serves as ICEJ Executive Director in Jerusalem
“For years I have enjoyed being part of this great event... I want to thank you because when you come, when you parade through the streets of Jerusalem, when you express your love for this city, you strengthen us and help us to protect the values which are common to you and us... You must understand for us to see you here in this great city coming from almost 100 different nations with always the same enthusiasm, joy, and happiness makes an enormous impact on the life of this country.”

ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER EHUD OLMERT
Feast of Tabernacles 2007, by video greeting
Welcome Christian Friends

Record Numbers Attend the Feast

BY DAVID PARSONS & MICHAEL HINES

With a record attendance of over 7,000 pilgrims from 100 nations, the ICEJ’s 28th annual Feast of Tabernacles Celebration spilled out onto the streets of Jerusalem in unprecedented fashion this past October.

Some 30,000 Israelis ignored a rabbinic ban on Jewish participation in the annual pilgrim march and walked side-by-side with their Christian friends while 50,000 more lined the streets and cheered. It was as though ordinary Jerusalemites finally had a chance to express their full appreciation for the love and concern that has been demonstrated by the ICEJ’s worldwide constituency for so many years.

Against this backdrop, the strength of the solidarity shown by Israel’s leaders was remarkable. Perhaps the most moving welcome came from Broadway star and noted Jewish cantor Dudu Fisher, performing at the Feast for the first time.

“How can I tell you how happy I am to be here with you guys! I mean really it’s such a pleasure, such an honour to see you come to this country with so much love. I just want to thank you,” said Fisher.

The only Jewish performer on Broadway ever permitted to take Shabbat and Jewish holidays off, Fisher’s words of welcome and gratitude carried extra special meaning for this year’s Feast of Tabernacles audience.

Another Feast highlight was the Watoto Children’s Choir, a group of Ugandan AIDS orphans whose hope-filled message and energetic style thrilled the Feast pilgrims as they have audiences across the world. This year’s guest speakers included Dr. Jack Hayford, Jane Hansen of Aglow International and Arab Zionist leader Nonie Darwish. Memorable extracts are reprinted here.

Order 2007 Feast audio CDs online at www.icej.org/resources.

“Beginning with Abraham, continuing with Isaac, and proceeding through to Jacob, the Lord says, ‘I am giving you the land with an everlasting covenant’... We read in Galatians 3 that the Bible makes very clear that the covenant that was made with Abraham has implications for those who are committed to Messiah; that if you are Messiah’s, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise that God had made to Abraham. So the spiritual implications have application to the details of our personal life…”

DR. JACK HAYFORD
Feast of Tabernacles 2007

“Islamists are blinded by envy and can’t understand Israel’s success. They say it must be due to conspiracy and not merit... They have forgotten that Jewish success is due to a culture that promotes excellence, and is blessed with self-discipline, education, dedication and a quest for leaving this world a better place. There is no conspiracy there! If Arabs want to compete with Jews let them do it in the realm of innovation and education and not by terrorizing and eliminating the opposition. Muslim preachers have done a tremendous disservice to their people by promoting envy and hatred from the pulpits of mosques. Arab mistakes are blamed on Israel, the West, past injustice or colonialism. Looking at a map of Israel in relationship to the Arab world tells us that Arabs don’t need land; they need tolerance. There is no shortage of land. There is a shortage of freedom…”

NONIE DARWISH
Feast of Tabernacles 2007
There is a struggle in all people—the battle between staying within one’s comfort zone and the drive to find something more. What stops us is the risk of being wrong, getting hurt, or being let down. When I signed on to come to the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem last summer, I had that fear. The time I spent in Jerusalem as a media intern, however, was the right choice. It fulfilled my desire for something more in every way and was worth pushing through my fear.

No amount of travel, reflection, research, or advice could prepare me for this journey. I was unsure of my place in Jerusalem and what I could bring such a significant place. After only hours, however, it became clear to me that my time would be well spent. The staff calmed my fears, allowing me to fulfill my calling and learn all I did. From visiting the Gaza border crossings to touring the Negev desert interviewing Bedouin tribes, this experience was a ‘give-and-take’ process between Israel and me. I was given the opportunity to express the ideas of people who are changing this nation. This internship allowed me to gain hands-on experience in journalism and international studies. On only the second day, I was tracking down a religious activist in order to write a feature article for The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition. I learned to appreciate the history, culture, and importance of this country, in a way books and television cannot convey. I have more confidence in myself and an appreciation for Israel.

Those things we pursue are not always easy, but they are worth it in the end. We are meant to serve a purpose and the first step to finding it is to push through fear, embrace your capabilities, and discover more.

By Brooke Sammon

GET INVOLVED!
2008 internships are still available with the ICEJ in Israel and the USA. For application details call: (615) 895-9830 or go online to: www.icejusa.org/interns

New Arrivals

Michael and Bonni Hines first arrived in Jerusalem on honeymoon at the height of the intifada in 2002. Five years and four children later, the Hines family left Jerusalem this past summer to continue their journey with the ICEJ in our USA Branch office in Murfreesboro, TN.

In Israel, Michael was an integral part of the ICEJ’s media and publications team in charge of the daily ICEJ News service, and assisting the production of Word from Jerusalem, The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition and the Embassy’s weekly Front Page Jerusalem radio broadcast. He has now taken up the post of USA Media Director, retaining responsibility for producing the new American edition of Word from Jerusalem, and helping to implement the US Branch online development strategy.

Originally from England, Michael attributes his love for America to Bonni, who was born in Illinois and grew up in California. “There is nowhere on earth quite like Jerusalem,” he admits, “yet we still feel like we’ve come home.”

Michael & Bonni Hines with their four children on the Mt of Olives in Jerusalem: (Left to Right) Aaron (2), Judah (1), Karin (3) and Rebekah (4).
After his predecessor’s involvement in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations left the region in flames, President Bush has spent years trying to be the un-Clinton. But Bush has now given Condoleezza Rice leeway to rush a Palestinian state into being.

She prodded Ehud Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas into producing a statement on the conflict’s “core issues” ahead of the upcoming Annapolis Summit. What remains hidden is the price the Arab states have been demanding of Israel in order to help the West confront the Iranian crisis.

Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and Hamas have been making advances on several fronts – edging towards the nuclear threshold, bogging down American troops in Iraq, destabilizing Lebanon and seizing Gaza. To secure their cooperation against this Iranian axis, Arab rulers are demanding progress on the Palestinian front.

So Olmert and Abbas are being asked to forge an agreed outline for final-status talks, even though both are considered politically weak. Olmert faces criminal probes and a withering report on last year’s war. Abbas would like a pact for creating a Palestinian state to present in order to start rolling back Hamas in Gaza and prevent a take-over of the West Bank.

The parameters of a final deal have been apparent to most Israelis for sometime. In a trade-off, Israel would retain the major settlement blocs, while the Palestinians would get the remaining 95% or so of Judea and Samaria for a Palestinian state, with Israel making up for the other 5% by ceding lands inside its borders.

The Palestinians would also get some sort of shared sovereignty in Jerusalem in exchange for abandoning their insistence on the “right of return” for millions of Palestinian refugees.

However, the same Israeli consensus has been sobered up by the Oslo fiasco and knows it is too risky right now to accede to a Palestinian state that will likely be overrun by Hamas. Even Rice acknowledged before leaving recently that IDF withdrawals from Lebanon and Gaza have only brought Katuysha and Kassam rockets closer, and Israel cannot afford the same results from a West Bank pullout.

Some are speculating this may be the “false peace” warned of in Scripture. Others see movement towards a Russian-Iranian alignment as signaling the battle of “Gog and Magog” of Ezekiel 38-39.

I would caution against both conclusions. The Bible is clear that the “son of perdition” is “revealed” only once there is a rebuilt Temple (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelations 11). And it is pent-up anger over that Temple that drives the nations to come up against Jerusalem one last time.

Secretary Rice is playing mid-wife to a still-born Palestinian state that has been still-born several times. But there is a more important birthing process going on, and it has to do with Israel birthing the world into the Messianic Age. Israel has known many labor pains, and we can expect many more birth pangs in the days ahead. But the end is not yet!

David Parsons serves as ICEJ Media Director in Israel and Contributing Editor of ‘The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition’
“Every morning when I leave the house to buy milk and bread I wonder if today it will hit me”

On the ground offering practical support to the people of Sderot since the first rockets struck in the Fall of 2000, Nicole and her team returned to the town this October accompanied by ICEJ National Directors and Representatives from around the world.

“We heard from one couple,” Nicole recalled, “who spoke about the struggle they faced after the husband was hit in the chest by rocket shrapnel. With his stomach ripped apart by the blast, he lay in the hospital for six months hovering between life and death because of injuries to his vital organs.”

This winter, in addition to the ICEJ’s partnership with Operation Lifeshield to fund bomb-proof bus shelters for the children of Sderot, the Embassy is re-doubling its efforts to help a local youth center expand its limited facilities to accommodate the growing number of teens in need of expert counseling and care.

“With the many challenges facing Israel,” Nicole recalls, “the expression of practical Christian care is deeply encouraging and much appreciated.”

“Young lives are at stake,” added ICEJ Executive Director Malcolm Hedding. “It’s time to act and show God’s love to the embattled Israelis of Sderot.”

Support the ICEJ’s ‘Help Sderot’ campaign to fund urgently needed bombproof ‘Lifeshield’ bus shelters and to enable the ‘Keren Orr’ center for youth-at-risk to expand its vital work with traumatized teens.

Give Online Today!
www.icejusa.org/sderot