Saved by Christmas
One man’s vow not to forget the day he was due to die

Rev. Malcolm Hedding

Some years ago I was sitting on the patio of the YMCA in Jerusalem, opposite the King David Hotel. It was a warm winter morning a few days before Christmas and I was meeting with ministerial colleagues to plan our festive season events.

As we talked over coffee, enjoying the December sunshine, one of the managers of the hotel approached and inquired if he could join us. He was Jewish.

“Could I attend your Christmas Eve service,” he asked. We were somewhat surprised and, knowing that he was Jewish, tried to find out what would make him want to celebrate Christmas with us. His reply was amazing. He did so, he confessed, to keep a lifelong vow he made in 1944, while still a teenager in Hungary at the height of the Second World War.

He was stripped naked, pushed up against a wall and facing a machine gun. It was Christmas Eve.

Just before the killing started another Gestapo officer arrived and commanded the slaughter to be stopped. He argued that as Christians the soldiers could not kill these teens on Christmas Eve. “How can you go to Church after this,” he scolded them. “Rather do it after Christmas!”

After much argumentation the executioners decided to accept the reasoning of the high-ranking officer and the teenage children were released into his custody. Within moments they had been driven to safety in an army truck.

The truth is; the SS officer was a courageous ‘imposter’ called Raoul Wallenberg, the famous Swedish Diplomat, who saved many Jewish lives in Hungary during this bleak and desperate time.

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Dear Friends,

Scripture declares that the world is in the grip of a demonic fist (1 John 5:19). Generally speaking the human race walks, “according to the prince of the power of the air,” (Ephesians 2:2) and indeed, as Paul affirms, the devil is the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). We should therefore not be surprised at the darkness and evil that envelopes our world.

Nevertheless, at this time of the year we remember with much joy that God’s light dispels the darkness and will ultimately conquer it. Hanukkah - the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22) - reminds us that the Lord of Glory, by His love, penetrates the darkness by the strength of His love and does great things for Israel and all those who love Him.

The very first Hanukkah celebration took place some 160 years before Christ. Israel was overrun by the evil Seleucid Antiochus Epiphanes who committed the abomination of desolation by placing a statue of Zeus in the Temple in Jerusalem. He was finally defeated by the Hasmoneans and the Temple was cleansed and rededicated with a miracle that kept the Menorah burning until oil, from the Galilee, could replenish it.

The message was clear; God’s light will deliver Israel and save her. Today Ahmadinejad of Iran and others threaten Israel as Antiochus did but they will also fail because they have not reckoned on Israel’s light! Time will most definitely prove this to be true!

Also, at this time of the year, we celebrate the birth of the Light of the World. Jesus has dispelled the darkness in countless millions of lives down through the centuries and in the world today.

In short, His star has brought real hope and joy to the world. Rightly then do we celebrate His birth and thus join the choir of Angels in their songs of praise. This we do with the great expectation that very shortly He will inherit the throne of His great grandfather David and rule forever and ever (Luke 1:30-33).

May the God of Israel shine His light on you and your loved ones at this special time of the year and fill you with His love and joy!

In Jesus,

Rev. Malcolm Hedding
ICEJ Executive Director
**Educating the Church**

2009 saw the Embassy’s flagship US seminar, *Discerning the Times*, reach eight states from Alabama to New England; the launch of a new Holocaust education initiative, *For Such a Time as This*; and expanded teaching tours in the Southeast and Texas. In total the US Branch held 14 individual seminar events this year in addition to a Memorial Day weekend teaching conference that impacted over 6,000 people in the greater Nashville area. We are continuing to draw on the expertise of a ever-widening pool of pastors, speakers and advisory board members to reach out to churches with the timely message of God’s purpose in Israel in these days. Why not host an ICEJ event or speaker in your church community in 2010? Call us on: (615) 895-9830.
Relief Under Fire
When Israeli forces were ordered to combat the intensifying Hamas rocket threat just a few days before the New Year, the ICEJ moved swiftly to come to the aid of the besieged Israeli communities along the Gaza border. Our efforts, co-ordinated with local social workers, enabled hundred of battle-weary teens, seniors and low-income families to experience a reprieve from the rocket war with breaks far away from the terrors of the front-line in the Galilee and Eilat.

Solidarity from the Nations
Within days of the start of the Gaza conflict in January protestors across the world began to flood the streets driven by a sense of deep hostility to Israel, fueled by highly distorted media coverage. Thankfully, Israel’s many Christian friends also took to the streets, staging solidarity rallies on every continent, including Costa Rica, the Philippines, Denmark, Finland and the UK.

In Oslo, Norway, riot police had to come to the defense of the supporters of the ICEJ’s local branch using tear-gas to disperse a violent pro-Palestinian counter protest. In Nashville, TN, the US Branch was represented at peaceful pro-Israel rally, speaking up forcefully from the platform for Israel’s right to self-defense.

Meanwhile, US friends of the ICEJ swiftly responded to our appeals to ‘Help Israelis under Fire,’ supporting our relief efforts in Israel while recruiting their friends and family to do the same using our new online Facebook tools.

Shoulder to Shoulder
The Kaplan family immigrated to Israel several years ago from a small Jewish community in Peru, fulfilling a dream to ‘come home’ to Zion and escape rising anti-Semitism in their native land. But like many immigrants, their dream of life in Israel soon began to crumble as they struggled with language barriers, misfortune and debt.

This year, ICEJ AID partnered with an Israeli mentoring initiative to help new immigrant families like the Kaplans adjust to their new life in Israel, by paying off debts, purchasing basic household items and finding work.

Provision for Passover
As the recession in Israel claimed 20,000 jobs in March, the ICEJ was on hand to help hundreds of struggling families celebrate Passover with dignity. From Dimona to Karmiel, ICEJ Passover baskets were given to disadvantaged Ethiopian immigrants, Holocaust survivors, and those suffering from mental illness. This year we also provided food and financial assistance to help needy Lebanese Christians celebrate Easter.

ICEJ immigrant assistance programs such as these have become increasingly important this year with the global economic downturn prompting heightened interest in aliyah. This, coupled with a 50% upsurge in Israeli citizens living abroad now seeking to return home, has led us to redouble our efforts to meet the rising needs. Your generous donations in 2009 have enabled us to expand our North American aliyah grants program, and ensure that help is readily available on the ground in Israel when new immigrants first arrive.
Hope for Holocaust Survivors

This year we have stepped up the ‘race against time’ to show Christ’s love to aging and impoverished Holocaust survivors in Israel before their generation passes away. The ICEJ AID ‘adoption’ program provides help for practical needs such as food and bills, while sponsoring regular in-home visits by local student volunteers. This unique program offers both companionship for the elderly survivors and life-changing encounters for the Israeli youths.

Reviving Mavqi’im

Four years after Israel’s painful withdrawal from Gaza, the ICEJ has been privileged to witness a turning point in the efforts of the displaced Jewish communities to rebuild their lives again. A $40,000 ICEJ AID grant to the small farming community of Mavqi’im this spring, enabled the former pioneers of Gush Katif to transform a disused community center and breathe new life into a village that was first founded in 1949 by Hungarian Holocaust survivors (learn more on p.8).

20 Years of Aliyah

2009 has seen Israel welcome a fresh wave of Russian-speaking Jews from the Former Soviet Union, with the ICEJ stepping in to assist once again by sponsoring flights from Moscow and St. Petersburg for nearly 350 newcomers.

This latest influx comes as the ICEJ marked 20 years of involvement in the great aliyah from ‘the north’ prophesied in Jeremiah 31, having helped more than 103,000 Jews come home since the first ICEJ-sponsored flight hit the tarmac in Tel Aviv in May 1990.

New Life in Jerusalem

A $22,000 bequest made in the will of a loyal supporter of the ICEJ in Finland enabled the purchase of two high-tech infant warmers for Jerusalem’s busiest maternity ward. The gift followed a $25,000 grant to the new Ashdod Emergency Medical Center earlier in the year. The facility is the first hospital to be built in Israel’s fifth city, and will serve the communities most at risk from Hamas rocket fire from Gaza, significantly shortening the perilous journey for the critically injured.
Jerusalem United

At our annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration this year the ICEJ marked 30 years of standing with and advocating for a united Jerusalem under Jewish sovereignty. More than a thousand feast pilgrims from dozens of nations proudly wore Jerusalem United soccer-style shirts through the streets of the Israeli capital.

Our stance made a deep impression on local Israelis who keenly feel the international isolation and hostility directed towards them as a result of their 3000-year old claim and connection to the city.

Meanwhile, hundreds of US families representing several thousand individuals watched our hard-hitting 2-minute video and pledged their support for Jerusalem United on our website at www.icejusa.org/jerusalem.

Standing Against the Tide

The ICEJ is called to stand against the rising tide of hostility that threatens the nation of Israel and the Jewish community worldwide. Whether it is our strategic partnership with Yad Vashem aimed at helping Christians better understand the roots of the Nazi Holocaust; the launch of our new seminar series For Such a Time as This, our successful campaign to ensure that the US did not participate in the anti-Semitic ‘Durban II’ racism conference in Geneva this Spring or our ongoing Jerusalem United campaign to defend the Jewish people’s right to live in peace in their ancient capital, the ICEJ is committed to standing against the hatred and injustice that threatens our world. We do this all in the name of Christ, on your behalf and thanks to your faithful prayers and generous financial support.

ICEJ Campaigns

2009 Advocacy & Prayer Initiatives

Durban II

On April 20th, Hitler’s birthday, the world’s most powerful Holocaust denier, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, took to the podium to open the United Nations second global conference against racism in Geneva dubbed ‘Durban II.’

The ICEJ is proud to have played our part in the chorus of voices that called on US President Barack Obama to stay away, backed by the grassroots support of more than 5,000 online activists who signed up in support of our ‘Boycott Durban II’ petition on Facebook.

In Geneva ICEJ directors from Switzerland, France and Russia took part in city-wide protests while in the Czech capital of Prague, ICEJ director Dr. Mojmir Kallus organized a protest rally that prompted the Czech delegation - then occupying the rotating EU presidency - to stage a dramatic walk-out.

Battle for Israel

In response to the rising threats to Israel posed by a nuclear Iran, Hamas in Gaza and Hizbullah in Lebanon, ICEJ Executive Director Rev. Malcolm Hedding issued a powerful call to prayer over the summer that resulted in thousands of our US supporters responding each week to seek the Lord on Israel’s behalf.

“Prayer is hard and demanding work,” he wrote, “and yet it constitutes the mighty power of God when discharged faithfully. Paul, writing to the Church at Philippi said, ‘in all things by prayer...’ (Philippians 4:6).”

The ICEJ remains committed to placing prayer at the heart of our efforts to confront the principalities of destruction and deception that threaten Israel and God’s people around the world (Ephesians 6:10-12). Thank you for joining with us in this vital ‘Kingdom’ work!

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JERUSALEM
A Praise in the Earth

FEAST OF TABERNACLES XXXI
Sept 23rd-29th, 2010

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Our friend was one of these children! He had been saved because of Christmas Day and thus made a vow to the God of Israel that from that time forward he would go to Church, once a year, on Christmas Day. He was not a Christian.

One can imagine the stunned silence that overcame our breakfast table. We did not know what to say and realized that anything we said would be hopelessly insufficient. In fact tears rolled down our cheeks as we looked into the face of this survivor. We graciously agreed to welcome him on Christmas Eve and being lost for words just hugged him and parted. He came, kept his vow and left. In fact, after that, we never saw him again.

This is a true story and it is filled with remarkable lessons. Christmas is a time to meditate on remarkable and mysterious things because, well, it’s the season!

I will then leave this story with you and I do so humbly requesting that you think carefully about it and draw some conclusions that may change and guide your life in the days to come. It certainly did this for me and I will never forget it. It was a life changing moment and I thank God for it.

Most of all it tells me that Jesus was born into a Jewish world and it is impossible to love Him and hate His people. Our friend was saved because of Christmas Day but he nearly died because of it. It is the season to extract these dark contradictions from our lives. I count it a privilege to wish you a very joyous and blessed Christmas.

WAY OF ESCAPE (Cover Photo): A path through the snow outside the notorious Auschwitz-Berkenau death camp in Poland. Sweden’s Raoul Wallenberg (left) forged a way of escape from Auschwitz for over 100,000 Hungarian Jews.

Raoul Wallenberg 1912 - ?

A descendant of a wealthy and prestigious Christian family in Sweden, Wallenberg studied architecture in the United States in 1936 before working for a European trading company, whose president was a Hungarian Jew.

After the Germans sent SS units into Hungary in March 1944, Wallenberg, persuaded the Swedish Foreign Ministry to send him back to Budapest on a diplomatic passport. There, he sheltered tens of thousands of Jews in “protected houses” by granting them Swedish citizenship. He rescued many more from the midst of Nazi deportations, executions and death marches, including the late US Congressman Tom Lantos.

When the Soviet Army entered Budapest in early 1945, Wallenberg disappeared. Conclusive attempts to determine his fate have failed, though it appears likely that he was executed by the KGB in Moscow’s notorious Lubyanka prison in 1947.

In 1981 Wallenberg became the first person after Winston Churchill to receive honorary US citizenship. In 1986 he was similarly honored by Israel and designated as a ‘Righteous Gentile’ by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

“In this age devoid of heroes, Wallenberg is the archetype of a hero – one who risked his life day in and day out, to save the lives of tens of thousands of people he did not know whose religion he did not share.” - Rep. Tom Lantos, 1997.