Last month, Christians around the world responded swiftly to an ICEJ appeal to help fund Israeli relief efforts in the devastated Caribbean island of Haiti. The donations were collected to support the rescue team rushed to Port-au-Prince by the ZAKA emergency relief organization as they worked feverishly to treat the wounded and extricate victims buried under tons of rubble by the massive earthquake.

One of the first search-and-rescue teams to arrive on the scene, the six-man ZAKA unit was quickly deployed at a collapsed multi-story university building and managed to free eight students in a 38-hour operation over the initial days after the quake hit Haiti.

Team leader Mati Goldstein described the scene in stark terms. "Everywhere, the acrid smell of bodies hangs in the air. It's just like the stories we are told of the Holocaust - thousands of bodies everywhere...in numbers that cannot be grasped. It is beyond comprehension."

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Paul’s Prayer

Christianity is not about what we get from God, but what He is looking for in us

By Rev. Malcolm Hedding

In opening his letter to the Ephesians, Paul first sets out the work of the triune God in the redemptive initiative and then expresses the content of his prayers for the believers at Ephesus. In this regard he prays for three things to happen in their lives:

1. That they would have a spirit of revelation (1:15-17);
2. That they would have an understanding of God’s inheritance in them (1:18); and
3. That they would have an appreciation of what it means to be identified with Jesus (1:19-23).

Spiritual revelation means understanding the heart of God and His purpose in us. This seems regular and general in nature but my experience has been that most Christians are in need of a spirit of revelation. Our spiritual lives are weak and impoverished because so much of our Christianity is consumed with what we get from God because we are saved. It is an ‘I’ centered Christianity that is very often nothing short of ‘self improvement schemes.’

On the contrary, Paul states that we should understand our Christian walk is all about what God gets from us! He is looking for His inheritance in us and this means that He is looking for the emerging of His image in our character. This is what should concern all of us. Sanctification and Christ-likeness is ‘the name of the game.’ This means we need to understand that what Jesus did on the Cross was God-ward in nature with manward results. That is, Jesus didn’t die to get man out of hell into heaven but He died to get God out of heaven into man!

As a consequence of this reconciliation, we are saved from a lost eternity. His death is thus termed a propitiation in Scripture (see Romans 3:25). This was also signified in a dramatic fashion because the veil in the Temple was split from the top to the bottom and not from the bottom to the top when He died.

Christians also need to understand the nature of the power of God that works in them. We need to see that we have been raised up in Christ and are seated already in heavenly places. We are set apart far above all principalities and powers. Why would Paul ask us to take this position? Because Jesus died in our place, and when we understand this we also recognize that no flaw in our characters or sin can resist His power in us! Sin’s grip and dominion over our lives has been destroyed and we are truly free. Positionally, we are in heaven and we just have to work this out on earth!

Hence in this same letter, Paul commands us to put off the old man and embrace the new. We don’t need anything more than Jesus and we have no excuse for our sinful habits and addictions. In his letter to the Romans, he says, “Sin shall not have dominion over you.” We can truly walk away from our problems if we believe this, but how many of us do?

There is no doubt that Paul’s remarkable prayer for all of us needs to be answered in our lives. Will you, together with me, ask God to make it so?

Rev. Malcolm Hedding serves as ICEJ Executive Director in Jerusalem.
Preparing for the Next War

By David Parsons

When the word first hit our ICEJ News bureau last March, it was quite alarming. A Christian nurse working at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem tipped us that the large soccer field at nearby Teddy Stadium was going to be used as a mass triage area in an upcoming emergency drill simulating a barrage of enemy missile strikes.

The exercise eventually took place in May, one of many such national emergency drills that Israel has held over the past year. In fact, the unprecedented series of nationwide exercises have become so common-place, they no longer hold any shock value for the Israeli public. The most recent of note was the world's largest-ever simulation of a biological terror attack on the crowded Tel Aviv and Gush Dan region.

The heightened level of civil preparedness is borne out of the fact that Israel over the past decade has been confronted by enemies deliberately targeting its civilian heartland, first through a brutal suicide bombing campaign, and then in more recent rocket wars with Hizbullah in the north in summer 2006 and against Hamas in Gaza last winter. It is the growing threat of massive rocket barrages on Israel’s cities, perhaps armed with non-conventional warheads, which has the nation scrambling to prepare its population for the next conflict.

The simulations have sought to expand and improve the interaction between a number of government and private emergency response agencies, and have focused on a variety of potential threats, including nuclear, biological and chemical attacks.

The head of the IDF Southern Command, Gen. Yoav Galant, recently warned that the year-long ‘quiet’ in the south may be over soon. Hamas has used that time to rebuild its arsenals by smuggling in longer range rockets through border tunnels from Sinai, and to increase the range and payload of its own homemade rockets.

In the north, Hizbullah has been re-supplied by Iran and its ally Syria with over 40,000 rockets and missiles, three times as many as it possessed in the Second Lebanon War. In a pincher-like move, both militias now claim to have missiles that can reach Tel Aviv.

And Syrian President Bashar Assad has vowed to join sides with Hizbullah next time, bringing Syria’s vast missile arsenals and its deadly stockpiles of gas and nerve agents into the equation.

While no one can predict with certainty if a renewed conflict will break out in 2010, it is the looming Iranian nuclear threat that has everyone the most on edge, trying to calculate how the effort to stop Tehran short of possessing a Bomb might play out this year. Israeli leaders are worried that the closer Iran gets to achieving nuclear status, the more likely they are to create ‘diversions’ in the region.

So Israel’s preparations for a rocket war on its main cities have been in full swing. And the state-of-the-art missile defences the nation will rely upon have been fully tested as well, including the Arrow and the new Iron Dome system for defending against shorter range rockets.

Eventually, Israel always seems to close the chinks in its armour. But for now, a renewed and expanded rocket war is a real possibility and could inflict many civilian casualties. No one is taking that threat lightly, given that twice in the past three years, Israelis have woken up to find themselves in just such a conflict.
Defending the Home Front

By David Parsons

The 39 Iraqi Scud missiles launched at Israel during the 1991 Gulf War prompted several major changes in the way the nation has prepared for future wars. In one major development, the IDF set up the Home Front Command to oversee the nation’s civil preparedness.

ICEJ Israeli Liaison, Doron Schneider, also serves as an officer in the Home Front Command and spends part of his reserve duty engaged in exercises to prepare for civilian crisis management in the event of war. These nationwide emergency drills have picked up pace over the past year.

“We normally had emergency drills once every two years or so. But in recent years it’s been two or three times a year,” said Schneider. “I used to be told of the date and time for an exercise days in advance, but now I get an hour’s notice and must drop everything as if it were the real situation.”

Schneider is responsible for a mobile detection unit in the Jerusalem area that must don special protective suits and rush to the scene of a missile strike to determine whether it is a conventional warhead or if chemical or biological agents are involved.

“My team goes to the very spot where the rocket fell down and tests first-hand just what kind of threat it is, so we can give commands on how far to protect the population...This is the first line of defence.”

His open jeep is equipped with modern detection equipment that sniffs the air for chemical agents even while the vehicle drives through the streets. Laptop computers help direct them exactly where to go. Orders and test results are also sent out on the wireless laptop to instruct headquarters on wind direction and where to draw a perimeter around the missile strike, or whether to sound the all-clear.

Schneider said he has to take his job very seriously. “Definitely yes, we have been told that in the next wars there will chemical weapons used against us.”

David Parsons serves as ICEJ Media Director and lives with his wife and son in Jerusalem.
As 2009 drew to a close, the ICEJ was given an unique opportunity to help expand a community home for dozens of Holocaust survivors in Haifa. Our German branch was quickly able to respond with a donation of $25,000 to allow a local non-profit group, Yad Ezer L’Haver (Helping Hands to Friends), to take possession of the ground floor of a building next door to their current respite home. After renovations are completed next month, their enlarged assisted-living facility will be able to house and care for another 26 Holocaust survivors in a warm family environment.

Nearly a third of Israel’s some 250,000 Holocaust survivors are impoverished, struggling with illness, or living alone. The ICEJ has been giving new emphasis in our ministry in recent years to helping ease their suffering as this unique group of people reach their twilight years, whether through adoption programs, special assistance at holidays, or investment in initiatives like Yad Ezer’s assisted-living home in Haifa.

Yad Ezer was started in 2001 by brothers Baruch and Shimon Sabag. Shimon was a successful businessman before suffering a serious car accident. After his recovery, the two brothers wanted to give more to Israel’s poor and needy, and began providing food and shelter through a hostel that cares for Holocaust survivors, most of whom are now well into their 80s or older.

By Taylor Innes

Yad Ezer was started in 2001 by brothers Baruch and Shimon Sabag. Shimon was a successful businessman before suffering a serious car accident. After his recovery, the two brothers wanted to give more to Israel’s poor and needy, and began providing food and shelter through a hostel that cares for Holocaust survivors, most of whom are now well into their 80s or older.

The charity also sponsors soup kitchens, home food deliveries, homeless shelters, free legal representation, psychological counselling, after-school children’s homes, home visits, blankets and heaters to the elderly, a free dental clinic, and an annual Passover Seder meal for the disadvantaged. But their greatest passion is for their unique hostel where 14 Holocaust survivors currently live free-of-charge and receive care from volunteer doctors, psychologists, and social workers. The Embassy’s donation will now allow room for three times as many survivors.

"It is my heart’s desire to give those people who suffered so much some dignity and joy as they live out their last years. Time is running out for them", said Shimon Sabag as he received the gift from ICEJ International Director, Dr. Jürgen Bühler.

The waiting list of people applying for a place in the new facility is already up to 850 people, mostly survivors of Nazi death camps in Poland and Germany.

Yad Ezer needs another $160,000 to buy two more floors in the building so fifty more survivors can get help they desperately need. It’s the only place in Israel where survivors can live and get medical treatment at no cost and spend their waning days in dignity. A wealthy Holocaust survivor in his 80s has pledged to donate $50,000. Please consider a generous gift yourself to this incredible work.

Taylor Innes serves as a staff writer with the ICEJ Media Team in Jerusalem.

Make an online gift to the Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors: www.icejusa.org/HaifaHome
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Amid the chaos and death, the ZAKA team took time out to recite Shabbat prayers - a surreal sight of ultra-Orthodox men wrapped in prayer shawls standing on the collapsed buildings. Many locals sat quietly in the rubble, staring at the men as they prayed facing Jerusalem. At the end of the prayers, they crowded around the delegation and kissed the prayer shawls.

Other Israeli medical and rescue teams operating amid the massive devastation also earned praise for their heroic efforts. The IDF Home Front Command’s mobile field hospital was hailed as only the foreign aid mission able to do complex surgical operations in the disaster zone and other missions were reported to be transferring patients in critical condition to the Israeli base.

Israeli medics also performed a difficult surgical technique on a young woman giving birth that saved both lives. The mother named her new-born son "Israel" as a token of gratitude.

A 15-member IsraAID team, working in partnership with CBN’s Operation Blessing, began administering an emergency medical aid center in a soccer stadium that was quickly inundated with 2,000 wounded people.

Meantime, another Israeli search-and-rescue team carried out "back-breaking" efforts to extricate a trapped man, fearing he might die from dehydration.

Thank you to those who responded so quickly and generously to help Israel have such a positive testimony of care and compassion in the midst of this humanitarian disaster.

"We were there almost alone"
US Branch Raises $10,000 for Haiti Rescue

On January 13, in the hours following the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that devastated the Caribbean nation of Haiti a highly trained Israeli rapid response team had just finished a gruelling 18-hour recovery operation at the scene of a fatal helicopter crash in a deep forest ravine outside Mexico City.

It was 3am when they received a call from Israel telling them about the earthquake. “We were the closest ones” said Dovie Maisel from the ZAKA international rescue unit, “so we were told to start getting organized.”

In the end Maisel and three colleagues were able to hitch a ride to Port-au-Prince on a Mexican military transport plane, making them the third or fourth international search-and-rescue delegation on the ground in the quake zone. “We were there almost alone,” Maisel said.

Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem, the ZAKA leadership made an urgent phone call to ICEJ Executive Director, Malcolm Hedding, asking the Embassy’s worldwide family to partner with them in their search-and-rescue operations in Haiti. Within hours of Maisel’s team being dispatched on their first assignment, more ZAKA paramedics arrived in Port-au-Prince with the 200-strong delegation from the IDF, Magen David Adom and IsraAID.

The Embassy’s friends and supporters around the world were equally swift in responding to our plea for assistance. Within a week of the earthquake the ICEJ hosted ZAKA founder, Yehudah Mesh-Zahav, at our Jerusalem headquarters and presented him with a check for 50,000 Shekels (approx. $14,000) to help underwrite his team’s life-saving efforts in Haiti.

But as the remarkable work of the Israeli teams continued in Port-au-Prince, so the ICEJ family kept giving. By the end of January the US Branch alone had raised nearly $10,000 towards the costs of sending ZAKA rescuers to Haiti, enabling us to demonstrate Christian love and support to our Israeli friends and partners and through them to touch countless shattered lives in the quake-ravaged island of Haiti.