HAVE YOU NOT READ?

BY DR JÜRGEN BÜHLER
FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK

Dear friends,

This editorial is the last I will write from my office here at 20 Rachel Imenui, which has been ‘home’ to the ICEJ for the past 22 years. For our Jerusalem staff there is a sense of sadness, as we will miss the beauty of the building and gardens. But we also are thankful for over two decades of God’s blessing and provision. In this landmark building, we have seen many prayers answered and many people impacted from Israel and around the world. Quite a few staff first met here, married and started families. Dignitaries, prime ministers, and scores of Christian tourists and ordinary Israelis came through our doors. It was truly a season of blessing!

Now we move on to a new facility in Talpiot, a main business hub of Jerusalem. As you receive this magazine, we will be settling into our new offices. I just reminded our staff of how King David was troubled over having a nice palace while God dwelt in a portable tent, so he sought to build the Lord a house. Yet God had never asked for such a home and was content with the tabernacle in Sinai and Shiloh. Wherever Israel went, His presence followed. When Solomon later built the Temple in Jerusalem, he prayed: “But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” (2 Chronicles 6:18) Still, the Lord declares: “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made... “But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isaiah 66:1–2).

Our prayer is that the presence of the Lord will be with us in the new location as He was with us here. For “if Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here” (Exodus 33:15).

The next magazine will include more about our new location. Meanwhile, we must continue our daily ministry of comfort to the people of Israel. Recently, we welcomed the newest wave of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants at Ben-Gurion Airport. We also visited the Druze community in the North to help with educational projects, welcomed the newest wave of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants at Ben-Gurion Airport. And we are now preparing Passover baskets to make it a joyful season again this year for many needy Israelis.

Please keep our staff in prayer for extra strength in this busy season. Also, if you feel led to support us with a special financial gift for the moving expenses, please do so by mentioning “Embassy move” with your donation.

Yours in Christ!

Dr Jürgen Bühler
ICEJ President

COVER PHOTO: Portion of the Torah

View this cover photo through ICEJ’s new AR app (p. 14) to watch a special video greeting on your smartphone.

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Over Christmas, I was troubled as I read *Irresistible*, a new book by Andy Stanley who is a cutting-edge preacher with significant influence in the Evangelical world today. In his book, Stanley advises preachers to drop such phrases as ‘the Bible says’ and ‘the Bible teaches’, claiming there is nothing to be gained by it and much to be lost. In addition, Stanley suggests reading the Old Testament with great caution, as it contains no doctrinal relevance to the Church today and represents a God that “appears uncivilized” to the modern reader.

This approach represents a growing phenomenon in the Church today. Though some may be less extreme than Andy Stanley’s views, there is a deliberate, growing move away from the Word of God and from the Old Testament.

When speaking in congregations around the world, I often ask: “How many have read at least once through the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation?” The answer is sobering. In most cases only a few hands go up; sometimes not even a single hand. I find the highest percent of Bible illiteracy among churches in Western countries. While the results are a little better when I ask who has read the entire New Testament, the Bible in general and the Old Testament in particular seems to be ignored, a black box for many believers. In one church, I was told by the pastor that I was quoting too many Scriptures. One, maximum two per sermon will do; otherwise, I would overly challenge the audience. A close friend told me that for years now he cannot remember hearing a single sermon in his church on any Old Testament passage.

This phenomenon is nothing new and can be traced back to the early Church. Marcion, an influential teacher in the church of Rome around 140 AD, rejected the Old Testament writings and even some New Testament books as being too Jewish and misrepresenting the loving God revealed by Jesus. While he was removed as a heretic, his...
‘Marcionism’ would leave a wide imprint on the Church for centuries to come.

This all leads us to ask: What does the Bible say about its own relevance and authority? And how did the early Church approach Scripture? Indeed, the question often posed by Jesus to the scribes and teachers – “Have you not read?” – is more relevant than ever today (see Matthew 12:3; 19:4, etc.).

**Tanach – the Old Testament**
First of all, the early Church did not have a New Testament yet, as it was only written and canonized decades later.

### FOR THE EARLY CHURCH, THE TANACH WAS CONSIDERED THE MAIN SOURCE OF DOCTRINE AND TEACHING. REGARDING THE HEBREW BIBLE, PAUL COUNSELS HIS SPIRITUAL SON TIMOTHY: “ALL SCRIPTURE IS GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD, AND IS PROFITABLE FOR DOCTRINE, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS…” (2 TIMOTHY 3:16)
Thus, when New Testament writers refer to ‘Scripture’, they are clearly referencing the Old Testament.

Also, the early Church never used the term ‘Old Testament’. They referred to the Hebrew Scriptures as the Tanach. This is a three-letter acronym [T-N-K] containing the first letters of each section of the Old Testament. The ‘T’ is for Torah, or the Law contained in the five books of Moses, also referred to as the Pentateuch. The middle ‘N’ refers to the Prophets (Nevi'im in Hebrew) which includes all the prophets of the Old Testament, from Isaiah to Malachi (except for Daniel, which is counted among the Writings). The final ‘K’ is for Kotvim, or the Writings. The Writings contain all the other books from Joshua through Samuel, Job, Psalms and ‘Song of Songs’.

Thus, New Testament authors often refer to the Old Testament as “the Law and the Prophets” (e.g., Matthew 5:17; 11:13; 22:14; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; etc.); or “the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). Only once in the Bible is the Old Testament referred to as ‘old testament’ – in 2 Corinthians 3:14. Here, the Greek text literally speaks of the “old covenant”, but Jerome’s Latin translation in the fifth century used the expression ‘old testament’ in this passage and the term stuck.

‘The Bible says’
The Bible never refers to itself as the ‘Bible’, but rather as the ‘Scriptures’. In more than 20 instances, Jesus affirmed his teachings by declaring, “It is written”, or “the Scripture says”, or “Have you not read?”

Think about it: Jesus was God incarnate. As Creator of heaven and earth, he could have established an entirely new framework and set of rules to define his role and mission. Yet he continuously accredited the Scriptures as the fixed point through which he identified himself.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refocused our approach to the Torah from mere external obedience of the letter to a transformative expression of the heart and mind. Yet he never discounted the Law or advocated for replacing it, choosing instead to expound upon and sharpen its meaning. “‘Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets’”, Jesus told his disciples. ‘I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.’” (Matthew 5:17–19)

“It is written” was his chosen weapon to overcome Satan. And what was true for Jesus is true for the New Testament writers, who repeatedly refer to the then-existing Hebrew Scriptures – the Old Testament. The New Testament directly quotes or cites the Hebrew Scriptures more than 300 times and alludes to them over 1,600 times.

So Billy Graham’s practice of often referring to what “the Bible says” was not a quirky habit of an old-fashioned preacher, but was the same time-honoured custom followed by Jesus and the Apostles. And we do well to keep this practice alive today.

The Noble Church
The book of Acts honours one particular church as being ‘noble’ – the church of Berea, in Greece. Luke testifies of them:

“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:11)

Paul must have loved this church. First, they readily received the preaching of the word of God. Yet they also went home and made sure the message matched with Scripture.

Please understand, they did not check Paul’s sermons against Peter’s epistles or the Gospels. All they had at the time was the Tanach – the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. In other words, if they could not find what Paul was preaching in the Old Testament, they likely would not have accepted his Gospel. This also means the original Apostles only preached the Gospel from the Old Testament (Acts 17:2-3; 18:28). Many Christians today would be lost if they had to share the Good News of Jesus solely from the Old Testament. And again – Paul did not consider the Bereans to be a particularly critical or backwards-minded audience; on the contrary, he called them more fair-minded and noble than the others.

Jesus in the Old Testament
Jesus did not come to start something completely new, but to affirm and fulfil what was written. For three-and-a-half years, John the Apostle watched Jesus teaching, engaging with men and women, and caring for children, the sick and the rejected. And then John described his experience with Jesus as “the word became flesh”. While hearing his words and watching his deeds, suddenly the passages of the Old Testament became a ‘red-letter edition’ for his disciples. In Jesus, they saw their Scriptures coming alive and understood the true meaning of God’s word. Jesus elevated the outward
ritual of the Law in the Tanach to the level of transformed hearts. While his bold new approach to Scripture at times frustrated even the disciples (Matthew 19:10), he also promised the Holy Spirit would soon purify their hearts, just as the prophets foretold (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Jesus also declared it was the “Scriptures who testify about me” (John 5:39). This is a concept Jews hold to this day. A rabbi once told me: “Jürgen, you can find Messiah on every page of the Bible (the Tanach). For example, the very first verses of the Bible say: ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, ... and the Spirit was hovering over the waters.’ This was the spirit of Messiah! He already was there.” And this is exactly what we find in John chapter 1. “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God...” The places where Jesus can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures are countless. Whether in the story of Joseph who was rejected and sold by his brothers and became the redeemer of Israel, or through the lives of Moses, David and many other figures and stories which foreshadow the future Redeemer.

Thus, when Jesus met two disciples on the way to Emmaus after his resurrection, Luke tells us: “…beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). We also find Paul in Rome speaking thusly to the Jewish leaders: “So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.” (Acts 28:23)

The main source of doctrine

For the early Church, the Tanach was considered the main source of doctrine and teaching. Regarding the Hebrew Bible, Paul counsels his spiritual son Timothy: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...” (2 Timothy 3:16). In fact, all the major doctrinal positions of the Church emerged from the Old Testament. The divinity of Jesus (Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2), his atonement through suffering and death (Isaiah 53) and his resurrection (Psalm 16:10), the high priesthood of Jesus according to the order of Melchizedek (Genesis 14; Psalm 110), salvation by faith (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4), the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28; Ezekiel 36 & 37), Gentile inclusion in the redeemed (Genesis 12:2; Isaiah 11:10), and so forth – all can be found in the Tanach. From start to finish, Hebrew Scriptures informed and inspired the theology of the early Church.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God... and it starts, not with the book of Matthew, but in Genesis. In so many ways, the New Testament can only be understood through the pages of the Old Testament. For example, it would be difficult to fully grasp the atoning power of the blood of Jesus without understanding the sacrificial system of the Tabernacle and Temple. The heroes of faith, from Noah and Abraham to Nehemiah and Ezra, serve as our examples to this day of how to trust in God. In the same way, the books of the New Testament and working of the Holy Spirit can shed light on the writings of the Old (2 Corinthians 3:14ff).

Conclusion

All this, of course, should not cause us in any way to abandon or devalue the New Testament. On the contrary, knowing and studying the Hebrew Scriptures helps us better understand Jesus and the New Testament. It should encourage us to take the entire word of God for what it is – the word of God! Indeed, the whole canon of Holy Scriptures deserves our fullest respect as God our Creator speaking to humanity.

So ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your hearts and minds as you read your Bible. Ask Jesus to show you the wonders of his word. I encourage you to embrace and study all the books of the Bible. Decide even today to read through the entire Bible. I assure you, it will change your life. God promises us: “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11)

I pray this will be your experience as you study and absorb the whole counsel of God.
A time marches on, we tend to divide history into distinct periods, each with a beginning and an ending. Today, we live in the Digital Age. But in biblical terms, our present age began in Noah’s lifetime, when God destroyed the ancient world due to its irretrievable rebellion and offered mankind a new, post-Flood beginning. God’s covenant with Noah established the order of the seasons we still enjoy today. But the Bible also warns this current age will one day end amid a massive global upheaval, similar to the Deluge, ushering in the promised Messianic Age. Jesus himself said: “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” (Matthew 24:37)

How could Jesus make such a prediction? After all, God promised never to destroy the earth again by water. While this is true, there are other means of judgment at His disposal, and we often overlook the fact that God’s covenant with Noah came with a rule for mankind to follow. So, what was this rule?

In many ways, the Flood account parallels the Creation story. For instance, just as Adam could eat from every tree, except for one specific tree (Genesis 2:16-17), Noah was told mankind could now eat of all things, even the animals, but there was an exception. Man was not to eat live flesh with its blood (see Genesis 9:3-6). But this was more than a dietary law; the Lord also specified He will require an account for every life. This passage is the first appearance of this key principle in Scripture, and it also warns against murder. But the rule goes even deeper and is rooted in the concept Imago Dei: Mankind is a special creation of God made in His image. So, we must draw a line between ourselves and the animals and should not act like them. Rather, man must maintain a high view of himself as the closest thing in Creation to God, which means every human life has dignity and deserves respect.

Now when God makes a rule, He does not waste His breath. Every violation has consequences! Here, the implication is that God would no longer be bound by His side of the Noahide covenant and could severely judge the earth again – just not by water.

This helps explain why Jesus warned that His second coming would be like the “Days of Noah”, which he also paired with the “Days of Lot” (Luke 17:26-30). The apostles Peter and Jude also linked the days of Noah and Lot, and both insisted that the fiery judgment which befell Sodom is an “example” of the coming global judgment at the end of the age (2 Peter 2:4-6;
Jude 6-7). In fact, Jesus and the Apostles all foresaw the present age ending in a great cataclysm like the Flood, only by fire this time, followed by the new beginning of Christ's peaceful, righteous reign on earth – what we call the “Millennium”.

They could say this with confidence because there are Flood analogies and allusions throughout the Hebrew prophets connected to the end-of-days judgment. The clearest example is Isaiah 24, which foretells of a time when the earth will be laid waste and its surface distorted (v.1); the inhabitants of the earth will be burned and few men left (v. 6); the windows of heaven above and foundations below will open again... as in the Flood (v. 18); alas, the earth will split apart and be violently shaken (v. 19). All this will be happening because mankind has “broken the everlasting covenant” (v. 5) – a reference to God’s covenant with Noah (see Genesis 9:16). In other words, Isaiah foresaw an ominous day when humanity would be in serious violation of the underlying rule of the Noahide covenant.

In my new book Floodgates, I make the case that humanity has been in breach of this command ever since the mainstream acceptance of Darwinian evolution, which directly refutes the divine origin of mankind. Indeed, Darwinism erases the line between humans and animals and says we came from them, thereby greatly devaluing human life.

From its inception, Darwinism was highly seductive. For starters, it provided an easy means to explain away the old order, when the Church and Crown both claimed to rule by divine right. It also proved very flexible, as radical revolutionaries and political theorists all cited it to support their widely divergent worldviews, from atheistic Communism (with its violent mass purges last century) to laissez-faire Capitalism (where only the fittest survive).

Darwinism also gave rise to Scientific Racism, as many white Europeans used the theory to justify their condescending views towards the “lower” races. The worst expression of this phenomena was Aryanism. Indeed, Hitler’s main treatise, Mein Kampf, reads like a biological paper, justifying on Darwinian grounds the elimination of the inferior Jewish race to prevent degeneration of the supreme Aryan race.

The bad fruit produced by Darwinism is endless, and its ungodly influence has thoroughly permeated the modern world. It has fuelled the death mills of abortion; it has led to the growing acceptance of homosexuality and the rise of militant atheism. How can this be? Because mankind has used Darwinism as a scientific pretext to walk away from any moral accountability to God. We have reasoned away His existence and now become the judges of morality in His place. Even among those who still believe in a Creator God, many feel the world is so broken they could have done a better job in making it. But, to assume moral superiority to God is a dangerous place to be!

No doubt, the stronghold of Darwinism lies at the root of the irreversible moral rebellion against God in the earth today. It also has exalted itself against the truth of Christ as both fully God and fully man. For if we truly understood the concept of Imago Dei, we would realise that when the Lord formed Adam from clay in Genesis 2:7, He was actually making the bodily form that God Himself would one day come to dwell in forever.

What an amazing thought – that God wanted to reside in one of these human bodies! It gives mankind such great worth. And if we are in Christ, we have the matchless hope and promise that we will enter the age to come with immortal bodies like His, freed from our current human limitations. For “we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2)
The ICEJ hosted its annual Envision Conference in January, with over 150 pastors and ministry leaders from 25 different nations gathering in Jerusalem for a special time of fellowship, touring the Land, and learning more about God’s heart for Israel.

The main sessions at Envision featured teachings by the ICEJ leadership and select local ministers, who provided a solid biblical perspective on Israel – both the ancient and modern land and people. Given that the New Testament admits there is something of a “mystery” to Israel, the teaching series aimed to equip pastors and ministry leaders to speak and teach confidently on the subject. For some attendees, like Brian from Denmark, this was their first trip to Israel, so they had so much to take in even just driving around Jerusalem. Yet even for those who have been here many times before, like Bible teacher Sally Howard from Atlanta, Georgia, there is always so much more to learn about Israel to take back to her church and community.

On the opening night, ICEJ President Dr. Jürgen Bühler gave a powerful message from the story of Baalam and Balak in Exodus, that many today are looking for vantage points from which they can scrutinize and denounce Israel for her faults, but we need to maintain God’s perspective on this uniquely chosen nation.

The next morning, ICEJ VP & senior spokesman David Parsons emphasized the importance of preaching the full counsel of Scripture about Israel from the pulpit. “Your view on Israel says much about your view of God!” Parsons exclaimed.

Connecting with Israel and the local Body
In addition to offering ministry tools and networking opportunities, Envision also challenged attendees to deepen the personal impact of their time in Israel. Noted Bible teacher Peter Tsukahira spoke on the great importance of these ministers receiving fresh revelation from God. “What you need to be praying while you are here in the land is ‘God, open the eyes of my heart. Show me what you are doing here in this land.’”

Magne, who leads a congregation in Germany, shared that this was a motivating factor for him. “I have a firm understanding of the importance of Israel”, he said. “I hope to renew and strengthen my connection and relationship with God’s heart for Israel.”

Panel discussions with local Jewish and Arab pastors, as well as Messianic professionals and business owners, provided a rare inside perspective on life in Israel for the believing community here. In one session, Arab and Jewish ministers shared the stage, discussing the unique opportunities and challenges faced by their congregations in Israel. The unity and cooperation between these shepherds and congregations inspired the audience, as they stand firm for the truth of being one new man in Christ!

Other panels discussed trends in business and Israel’s corporate culture, and ways to get involved. “I think the Lord is calling each of you to a deeper relationship with the community in Israel”, explained Israeli consultant Yoel Shoshani. “Above all, I encourage you to be an ambassador for us to your nation.”

An especially touching session featured three local pastors who shared their personal Aliyah experiences. Pastor Birlie Belay is an Ethiopian Jewish immigrant who has started several Ethiopian Messianic congregations here in Israel. He explained the many
struggles that Ethiopian Jews have in moving to Israel, including the extreme culture shock and the discrimination he faces for being African and a Messianic Jew. In the middle of these struggles, Birlie also sees God moving powerfully.

“God is doing new things here in Israel”, Birlie said. “We need your prayers for the leaders and pastors to do God’s will here. Your love makes us more jealous for Yeshua... God sent you to encourage us, stand with us, and pray for us!”

The conference also included several day outings to places of special interest in Israel. The first excursion took the pastors and leaders to Yad Vashem, the revered Holocaust remembrance center in Jerusalem. Throughout the tour, each story they heard about the Holocaust brought a new level of understanding and impact to the group. A separate field trip took the pastors to the volatile border with Gaza to see up-close how the ICEJ has been helping Jewish villages there cope with years of rocket fire and other terror attacks.

**Vee from Malaysia**

“This is my first time to Israel, and it has been an eye-opening experience”, said Pastor Vee, originally from Malaysia but now based in Canada. “I wasn’t even planning on coming to Israel, but everything fell into place for me to be able to attend the Envision conference. Just in this week here, God has shown me more of His love for Israel and that the missing piece in our churches is the revelation of Israel.”

Vee oversees seven different churches spread throughout the world in Malaysia, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. “I am inspired to get serious about learning more about Israel, so that I can share it with the churches I am overseeing”, he said.

“In this conference, I have felt a stronger brotherhood in Christ. I have seen the unity of the Arab Christians and the Messianic Jews working together and I am very encouraged.”

“Pray for the church in Malaysia to be more outspoken about the truth of God and to stand up for Israel.”
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THROUGH THE FIRE
PASTOR MEKA DANY, ICEJ–INDIA

Your hope will soar as you read the amazing account of God’s divine intervention in the life of Pastor Meka Dany, National Director of ICEJ–India. Since coming to Christ from a Hindu background, Pastor Dany was no stranger to persecution and trials. When his entire home exploded leaving him severely burned and barely alive, even doctors expected that he would surely die. But when it seemed all was lost, that’s when God stepped in! You will find new courage and faith through this testimony.

Use ICEJ’s new AR app on your smartphone (p. 14) for a video preview of Dany’s story.

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Show off your love of Israel with this incredible watch! Created to commemorate this incredible Israeli milestone, this stunning watch features a modern blue design on its face of the number 70 along with the word ‘Israel’ written in Hebrew beneath it in a biblical font. With Hebrew letters instead of numbers, this marvelous watch is complete with a mechanical date display and a comfortable and stylish brown leather band. Perfect for both men and women, this astounding limited-edition watch will make a meaningful gift for someone you love that they will never forget!

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Gladys needed few words to describe the most harrowing day of her life. Last November, she and her husband Sergio were at home in Ashkelon, just north of Gaza, when they heard sirens and Hamas rockets being intercepted by Iron Dome batteries. All night long, the alarm kept sounding and sent them scurrying towards the bomb shelter specially built into their home.

From inside the shelter, they heard a rocket hit nearby. After a while, Gladys went to the balcony and saw smoke rising in the distance. For Gladys, her balcony is not only a great lookout point, but one of her favorite places to talk with God. Standing there watching the smoke rise, Gladys heard the Lord say: “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.” (Psalm 91:7)

Sergio suggested they move their mattresses into the shelter for the night, which they did. They had just closed the door, when muffled explosions of Iron Dome intercepts began again and then everything went silent. But the eerie calm abruptly ended in a loud, violent BOOM!

Hearing debris falling outside, Gladys shouted, “It was here, it hit in our home!” But her husband thought otherwise. Gladys slowly opened the door to investigate. A gray cloud of smoke and sulfur enveloped her, so she slammed the door in shock. Later, Sergio ventured out into the dark, smoke-filled home. Stepping over debris and broken glass, he reached the balcony and yelled for help. Their home had suffered a direct hit!

As Sergio led Gladys safely out of the home, she looked at the devastation and felt her dreams were crushed. Yet when the police arrived, they made an extraordinary discovery: The rocket never exploded! Instead, the massive rocket – over five meters long – had split in two and exited the home unexploded. The security forces were perplexed how this happened. But Gladys knew why! The Lord had kept His promise to protect them.

During the ambulance ride to the hospital, Gladys kept repeating Psalm 91:7. She asked God, “Why did this happen?” And she heard the Lord reply, “I told you that it would not touch you.”

“This situation changed me”, Gladys explained during a solidarity visit from an ICEJ team. “I strongly believe that God is with me and He answers my prayers. This made me stronger as a believer to trust in God, and it strengthened my marriage.”

As Gladys related her experience, her heart overflowed with both sorrow and thankfulness. The destruction of her home was shocking, yet she was utterly grateful for God’s protection. When Gladys later met an old man with scratches all over his face from rocket shrapnel, she appreciated God’s protection even more. A rocket directly hit their home, yet Gladys and Sergio walked away without a scratch!

Despite losing everything, Gladys insists, “I still prefer to live in Israel, even if a rocket hits my home, because this is the land that God wants me to live in.”

Gladys and Sergio are now in temporary housing, but must still pay rent on their gutted home. When the ICEJ heard their story in the Israeli media, we stepped in to provide some much-needed assistance. Gladys was greatly comforted with the love and care from her brothers and sisters in Christ. “I am so thankful you are here”, she said. “It brings healing.”

Your generous support allows the ICEJ to reach out quickly to families like Gladys and Sergio when they most need our help. Please pray for this dear couple, and many other Israeli families who must overcome the trauma of violence and terror every day.
Women who are abused, lost and hurting have found a well of hope amid south Tel Aviv’s desert of prostitution, poverty, slavery and addiction. This hope is found at the “Red Carpet” ministry center which receives women in distress, some even near death.

When they first enter the center, many women are shocked to see fellow prostitutes being cared for with a tender grace. A small Israeli lady greets them at the door and wraps each one in a hug. The warmth easily touches hearts as they are introduced to volunteers eager to offer a nice lunch. They talk with the women as if they were old friends. After a hearty meal, the women are offered a hot shower, plus a free haircut and manicure, before they are ushered to a special area to pick out new clothes, shoes and bags, along with toiletries and other necessary items. These are all luxuries, as many of these women are homeless. Treated for once with dignity and respect, they leave the center a little different than when they arrived.

This description of life in south Tel Aviv is not fiction. Sadly, it is the reality for countless women who have been trafficked and now are caught in the snare of prostitution in central Israel. Thankfully for them, the Red Carpet center is not fictitious either, but a ministry birthed out of the godly compassion of a believing Israeli couple who saw women in need and decided to reach out to them. The work they do is physically and emotionally demanding, and comes at the cost of their family time, their rest, and their own pocketbook.

Today, the center provides numerous services for these battered women, including supplies for infants and new mothers. Many of the women are simply seeking warmth and support, while others are desperate to escape the vicious trap of prostitution.

Red Carpet’s work is highly sensitive and dangerous. A security guard is stationed at the door to prevent pimps from trying to forcibly drag the girls back to the streets. Inside, some of the women have been known to turn violent against themselves or the workers out of fear or a drug-induced hysteria. Workers at the center must be extremely sensitive to the moods of the women and often simply sit and listen to their stories in order to provide emotional support.

Regrettably, some of the women are dying from sexually transmitted diseases. To them, the Red Carpet team offers the redeeming love of the Lord and their most earnest prayers.

For those who seek to escape this abusive profession, Red Carpet offers the safety and tools to take back their lives. Women who are pregnant can receive prenatal support and counseling – hopefully securing one crucial victory at a time in the fight against abortion.

The Red Carpet center is salvaging and changing lives forever. Without the center, these women would have nowhere to turn to flee their enslavement. The continued support of ICEJ donors is vital to helping rescue these extremely vulnerable women. Please also pray for these women, that they would find the courage and strength to break away from their cruel masters and seek help from the center. And pray for the Red Carpet workers, that they might have the grace and power needed to truly help these women become free and whole again.
We truly have an out-of-the-ordinary home," assured ICEJ Haifa Home director Yudit Setz.

The purpose of ICEJ’s Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors is not just to provide the best care for the residents, but also to bring purpose in their last years of life. In fact, it was revealed in a recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association that while Holocaust survivors experience more chronic illness than the general population, they outlive them by an average of seven years. The study cites several possible reasons for this, such as their unique resilience, including favourable genetic, physical and emotional capabilities which may have helped them survive the Shoah in the first place.

However, this extra lease on life requires a special kind of care, not just for the body but also for the mind and the soul. Therefore, ICEJ’s Haifa Home provides the Holocaust survivors with opportunities to share their personal stories of suffering and survival with visitors from around the world. Each story, along with photos, is also displayed in the Haifa Home’s museum, which receives a steady stream of visitors both from Israel and abroad.

The Haifa Home buildings are always in need of maintenance, so the ICEJ team in Haifa recently launched a renovation and expansion called ‘Project Upgrade.’ This work is overseen by a dynamic couple, Yudit and Will Setz, who are on-site managing the daily progress of the renovations. When heavy rain and wind hit Haifa early in the new year, causing water damage in some apartments and even toppling an old tree against the main dining hall, Yudit and Will were able to respond rapidly and supervise the cleanup and repairs.

“Our journey now is discovering how to fit our volunteers into the work we do”, explained Yudit. “We started to invite Christian handymen from abroad to join our local team in refurbishing many of the older apartments and to adapt the living quarters of the residents to their changing needs. It has been a great blessing for the residents.”

At the same time, this project is impacting the Christian volunteers in special ways. They take pride in bettering the home through their valuable time and trade skills. These foreign volunteers also not only see the land, but connect with the people and return to their home countries as ambassadors for Israel.

One recent handyman from Germany was 72-year-old Rainer Kert. During his stay, Rainer helped repair a handrail and other features around the property, bringing greater safety and comfort to the survivors at the Haifa Home. After serving the survivors for several weeks, Rainer stated: “What touched me the most, was that I was in such close contact with people who lived through hell, and that I – a German – could have a positive impact in making the lives of Holocaust survivors more comfortable.”

This year the ICEJ team in Haifa hopes to:
• Upgrade and expand the volunteer infrastructure
• Create more videos capturing the great work ICEJ is doing at the Haifa Home
• Develop a local team in Haifa to help with the daily tasks
• Finish construction in a new building for residents in need of intensive care
• Continue upgrading and renovating existing buildings
• Add gardens and beautify the exteriors of the survivor’s home.

This one-of-a-kind humanitarian project needs your prayers. Please pray for God’s wisdom in Will and Yudit’s daily decisions, for a healthy balance of work and rest, for grace to minister to the residents, and for the right volunteers at the right time to complete each job. As the ICEJ Haifa team moves forward in this year of new beginnings, we look ahead with great expectation to see how the Lord will continue to move in extraordinary ways! 😊

Impact the lives of Holocaust Survivors today: int.icej.org/aid/haifa-home-holocaust-survivors
When Tatyana needed assistance, the ICEJ’s Homecare team was there. In 1998, Tatyana and her husband made Aliyah from Kiev, accompanied by her elderly parents. After her mother passed away, her father needed home-nursing care. “The Embassy will help you”, acquaintances told her. When Tatyana called the ICEJ for help, that was the beginning of a long relationship with ICEJ Homecare. After Tatyana’s father passed away, she and her husband developed serious health problems so Homecare came back into their lives and continued to provide help and friendship.

During a recent visit, Tatyana shared: “Life has been difficult in Israel. My health problems and having seven grandchildren gave me no time to make a circle of friends or learn Hebrew, but in Israel I feel at home. This is my home!”

When our Homecare worker, Corrie, asked Tatyana what gave her the most joy in Israel, her face beamed as she instantly replied, “My son’s family!” Tatyana’s son made Aliyah four years before his parents and started a family. She also expressed appreciation for the “new friends I’ve made through ICEJ. I know I am not alone in difficult moments.”

Her joy also includes memories of Israeli Guest Night at the ICEJ’s Feast of Tabernacles and visits from Christian friends at her husband’s hospital bedside for his 80th – and last – birthday. Her apartment was painted and extra groceries arrived for a Jewish holiday, thanks to the generous giving of ICEJ donors.

“They didn’t help me out of obligation, but they helped me with the heart”, she says. (loatingimage)
This new year holds the promise of many new beginnings, and for the ICEJ one of those new beginnings involves a move to new offices. After much prayer, and four months of evaluating almost every available rental space in Jerusalem, we have finally found a new place to serve as our ICEJ Headquarters for at least the next two years. The new ‘home’ takes up an entire floor in a large office building in southern Jerusalem. (Pictured above)

Thank you for your prayers regarding this move. Please continue praying for grace, strength, protection and favour as our staff adjusts to the new working environment after 22 years at the Rachel Imeinu property. Once some necessary remodeling is completed in June, we will be ready to receive visitors. Watch for updates on our progress, when we will share the new address and instructions on arranging a tour of the new building!

During this transitional season, we also invite you to continue praying for a more permanent home for the ICEJ, as we are convinced that the Lord would have us own and not just rent an office building here in Jerusalem. We are excited about the great plans God has to expand our work and ministry in Israel and around the world, and we look forward with faith and anticipation to seeing this unfold in this new year filled with new beginnings!

A MAP OF JERUSALEM SHOWING THE LOCATION OF OUR OLD AND NEW HEADQUARTERS BUILDING

In keeping with the theme of “Beginnings”, this issue of the Word from Jerusalem unveils an exciting new feature: Augmented Reality.

SIMPLY:
1. follow the instructions below to install the app,
2. watch for the special ICEJ AR icon next to photos, illustrations or other graphic images throughout the magazine,
3. hold the phone so the image appears on your phone’s screen, and
4. enjoy the AR content as it plays on your phone.

Watch for exclusive content available only to readers of the Word from Jerusalem in the coming issues!

STEP 1: DOWNLOAD THE APP
For Android Phone / Tablet
1. Open the Google Play Store
2. Search for “ICEJ AR” and locate the icon
3. Click “Install” and click accept on the “needs access to” dialog

For iPhone / iPad
1. Open the Apple App Store
2. Search for “ICEJ AR” and locate the icon
3. Click “ICEJ APP” Install Icon

STEP TWO: VIEW THE SPECIAL AR CONTENT
1. On your Smartphone, select the ICEJ AR icon to start the app and your camera will be activated
2. Hold your phone so the photo next to an ICEJ AR icon [icon] shows on the screen.
3. An AR (augmented reality) animation will start automatically.
One popular way to attack Israel these days is through BDS (Boycott, Divest and Sanction), whether in business, culture or via legislation.

A proposed law currently making its way through the Irish parliament would criminalize the trading of goods from Israeli settlements. As a native German and citizen of the European Union, I find this bill totally misguided, extremely unfair, counter-productive to peace, and — above all — morally outrageous. It is a clear example of why BDS will never bring peace and only harms the people it claims to help.

According to this bill, anyone found guilty of importing or selling any goods or services originating from “occupied territory” would face a fine of up to €250,000 or five years in jail. Yet the bill is deliberately worded to only apply to “Israeli settlements” in the West Bank, eastern Jerusalem and Golan Heights. Those pushing this Irish bill have proudly proclaimed it will lead Europe and the world out of the current impasse in negotiations and towards Middle East peace. Nothing could be further from the truth!

The international community has always approached the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a dispute which must be resolved by the parties involved. From Resolution 242 forward, every UN Security Council decision has been geared to offering the parties a suggested pathway to peace and encouraging them to sort out their differences in direct talks. This approach helped produce the Oslo Accords, witnessed by the EU, which left the fate of the settlements to a final-status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

However, the Republic of Ireland is now trying to force the issue unilaterally. Yet, how is putting someone in an Irish dungeon for buying a gold-medal winning bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon from Tura going to bring us closer to peace? A housewife making a salad with olive oil from Shiloh or a dessert with dates from the Jordan Valley could unknowingly bankrupt her family. Will some Jew-hating neighbour see such contraband in her kitchen and report the family to the Irish authorities? How can you ever fairly enforce such an absurd criminal law?

The bill is also counterproductive to peace, in that it rewards Palestinian intransigence. When all the blame is being placed on Israel, what incentives do the Palestinians have to make concessions? Are the Jews who have returned to the heart of their ancient homeland any more a threat to world peace than those Palestinian neighbours who have been violently attacking them for decades?

In practice, this criminal law would harm Palestinians the most. As the SodaStream episode made clear, many businesses and factories in the Israeli settlements employ Palestinian workers and pay them salaries four times higher on average than what ordinary Palestinians earn. These breadwinners often support large families, so tens of thousands of Palestinians could be impacted if, due to BDS pressure, Israeli businesses fire these workers and move elsewhere.

But the truly odious aspect of the Irish bill is its blatant anti-Semitism, as it viciously singles out Jewish ‘occupiers’, while ignoring all other occupying forces in the world. What about olive oil from the Turkish-occupied part of Cyprus, fish from Russian-occupied Crimea, or dates from Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara? All these products are free to enter the Euro zone, while it is the Jews who must be taught a lesson again. How can this truly be a righteous act, as the Irish sponsors claim, when it is so clearly discriminatory?

I cannot help but think these Irish do-gooders are taking us straight back to the racist laws of the 1930s in Germany. Kauft nicht bei Juden! “Don’t buy Jewish!” was the rule then and is precisely what this law tells Irish citizens today. It is legislated anti-Semitism dressed up in nicely polished legalese and mere lip service to promoting peace and “European values”.

If we have truly learned the lessons of the Holocaust, Europe will reject this attempt to single out Jews for punishment.

So please stop the nonsense, Ireland!
very special flight from Addis Ababa landed at Ben Gurion airport in early February 2019. On this flight were 83 Ethiopian Jews finally cleared to make Aliyah. Some had been waiting their entire lives to return to their ancestral homeland and reunite with family members. This was no ordinary arrival.

While ICEJ staff members waited with the local families for the Olim (new immigrants) to arrive, we heard numerous stories of family members waiting to meet a mother, brother, or grandmother they had not seen in 12, 18, or even 38 years! Their longing was palpable.

ICEJ VP Barry Denison greeted the immigrants as they stepped off the plane. As soon as the first Olim entered the arrival hall, an entire mob of family members flooded to greet them. Frail old grandmothers in wheelchairs embraced grandchildren they were meeting for the first time. Almost instantly songs and drumming broke out in the room. At last, families were reunited in their true homeland.

The ICEJ has pledged to pay for the flights of all 1,000 Ethiopian Jews approved for 2019, and this was the first of many joyful reunions. Together we can bring them back home: Become a partner today and shape Israel’s tomorrow: www.icej.org/aliyah
“Worldwide, the situation for Jews is unstable now, but Aliyah is strong,” writes ICEJ’s Aliyah Director, Howard Flower, commenting on the sharp rise in Aliyah last year. This boost illustrates a unique pattern in the different countries from which Jews are immigrating: Jewish communities face numerous challenges, whether financial crisis, refugee living situation, threat of war, Antisemitic acts and hate speech, or other threatening circumstances.

Living in Instability
A significant region for Aliyah activity is the former Soviet Union, including Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. In Russia, the fall of the Ruble triggered a major financial crisis, forcing a large majority of people below the poverty line. Others live in consumer risk zones, which often suffer food shortages and lack of other essentials, exposing residents to health risks and malnutrition.

Aliyah Grows Rapidly
Spurred by heavy oppression, Jews are seeking refuge in their homeland of Israel. The hand of God is demonstrated in the process of Aliyah. His people are taking refuge in Israel, as they adapt to the culture, learn the language, receive training, get a job, and build a new life here. God is rescuing His people not just from exile, but also from the harsh living conditions in their current countries. God is preserving His people and Christians help make this financially possible. With the support of Christians worldwide, the ICEJ assists more than ten percent of all Jews making Aliyah to Israel each year. In 2018, we helped 2,539, and are on track to assist over 3,500 this year.

Barry Denison, VP of Operations, oversees ICEJ’s Aliyah assistance. Digging through the Scriptures recently, he uncovered more truths about Aliyah from the prophet Isaiah which he shared at ICEJ’s Envision Pastors and Leaders Conference this year.

“O Zion, bearer of good news, lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news...” (Isaiah 40:9 NASB) In many translations, this passage is translated as a command to bring good news to Zion. However, the original Hebrew indicates Zion itself is the bearer of good news. Therefore, as it relates to Aliyah, Zion bears good news to those Jews living in desolate circumstances as they return to the homeland the Lord intended for them.

Denison continued with Isaiah 52:9-10 which reads, “Break forth, shout joyfully together, you waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God.” (NASB) Aliyah is a comfort to the Jewish people, especially now, as they suffer under persecution, poverty, and many other life-threatening circumstances. Aliyah is strong because God is laying bare His strength and drawing His people home.

As believers, God establishes a responsibility for us regarding Aliyah. Again in Isaiah, the Lord declares, “The time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come to see My glory... and they will declare My glory among the nations. Then they [the nations] shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the Lord, on horse, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem,’ says the Lord.” (Isaiah 66:18-20 NASB) As we – the Church – help the Jewish people return to their homeland of Israel, God honors it as a grain offering, holy and pleasing before the Lord.

Thus, let us continue to lift up our offering before the Lord, giving glory to Him as Jerusalem continues to be a bearer of good news to her scattered ones. 🙏
In December 2018, I visited Tanzania. The short trip took me to Arusha, a modern city located within sight of the majestic Mt. Kilimanjaro, and then to Dar es-Salaam, a bustling metropolis on the shores of the Indian Ocean. The purpose for this trip was simple: I wanted to visit what has been our most productive branch in Africa over recent years and understand the reasons for its success.

In just a few short years, our energetic National Director, Stanton Newton, managed to mobilize thousands of Tanzanian Christians to support Israel. Coached by David Parsons, who has been tirelessly traveling to the country over the past three years, Newton drafted the constitution of the Tanzanian branch and appointed the first board members. During my trip, an important milestone was achieved: The board signed their constitution which will be submitted to the authorities for registration. This development opens the way for further growth of the Tanzanian branch. The local team translated and designed a special version of the Word for Jerusalem in Swahili – the common language of East Africa, spoken by approximately 100 million people. We also planned to hold an ICEJ regional conference for East Africa this year in the city of Mwanza, on the shores of Lake Victoria.

ICEJ Tanzania exemplifies that with the right people and motivation, ICEJ can thrive in every culture and connect all peoples, tribes and languages with Israel.
Many families in Israel live in poverty and are unable to properly celebrate the Passover Feast. Every year, ICEJ Aid and supporters like you provide Passover care packages to families in need throughout Israel. Here are a few highlights from last year’s Passover 2018:

In Beit She’an, 50 needy families received gifts. A father of 14 children said: “My family appreciates your support. We thank you that we can celebrate and remember Pesach.”

In Kiryat Gat, 20 Ethiopian families that had just made Aliyah to Israel received care packages. One of the women said: “The heart only works if blood is flowing through it, and only then you are alive. If you do something with your whole heart, only that is life-giving. This is your visit and the work you are doing in the land – life giving, making sure that the heart is working. Thank you for coming, thank you for warming our homes with your presence.”

At Netanya’s Social Welfare facility, we handed out 50 care packages. One recipient, a religious Jewish man named Isaac, has four children and a beloved wife who has been bedridden for more than 14 years. When Isaac received his gift, he said: “Thank you with all my heart for being here today and listening to me. Thank you for these gifts that indeed show you care. My wish is that next year, I will belong to the people who give and no longer need any support. Chag Pesach Sameach. (Happy Passover)”

Many hearts were made glad through your generous donations, and we know God will do marvelous works again this Passover, which begins on the 19th of April. We hope to provide even more Passover care packages to help needy Jewish families celebrate Passover!

Send your gift today with a “Chag Pesach Sameach!” Happy Passover!
Donate online at: int.icej.org/content/passover-joy-everyone

The new Mayor of Jerusalem, Moshe Lion, and his wife Stavit, welcomed David Parsons of the ICEJ at the city’s recent gala reception for religious communities to greet the New Year. Barry Denison, ICEJ VP of Operations was also in attendance. Mayor Lion took over from Nir Barkat, who was a good friend of the Christian Embassy and is now seeking a Knesset seat in Israel’s national elections in April. The new mayor has many career accomplishments, including his work with the Jerusalem Development Authority to complete the First Station renovations and other exciting new sites around the capital city.

Jani Salokangas has been a valued member of the ICEJ staff since 2012, most recently as our Director of Marketing and the Arise young adults program. As of January, Jani has stepped into a new role as National Director of ICEJ-Finland. He was quickly on the job, meeting with Israeli ambassador to Finland, Mr. Dov Segev-Steinberg.
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ARISE TESTIMONY

Felicia from Canada shares about her experience on the ICEJ Arise Tour in Israel:

“The Arise tour greatly impacted my life. When I went on the tour, my faith was dormant for a number of years. In Israel, the connections I made, the people I met, and the places we visited slowly reignited my faith. It has been a four-year transformative journey since then. I can wholeheartedly say God has changed the posture of my heart completely since visiting Israel.”

“Before the tour, I only heard negative headlines about Israel in the news. But when you’re there, you truly feel safe and protected. I see Israel as an extraordinary place. It opened my eyes to the biblical truths of the Holy Land, the recent history of Israel, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

“If you feel that subtle heart tug calling you to Israel, don’t ignore it. That’s the voice from heaven telling you it’s your time to go home. I was hesitant at first, but God led the way. I think every believer should experience Israel at some point. I can tell you it was truly life changing.”

Many more young lives, just like Felicia, have been greatly impacted in their relationship with God through the ICEJ Arise tour. We encourage you to sign up today or encourage other young people to sign up for this unforgettable trip to Israel this summer 11-21 July 2019!

Sign up today: www.Arisegeneration.org/summer-tour

“This amazing adventure deepened and renewed my passion for God and ignited a new desire to live fully for Him” - Peter