

A Word from Jerusalem

May/June, 1999

*“I see the rod of an
almond tree...”*

*“I am watching over my
word to perform it.”*

Jeremiah 1:11-12



Letter from the Director

Dear Friends,

Christian ministries have to find the right balance between presenting the vision of their ministry and the needs of the ministry itself—as a tool for implementing its purposes. In the distinction between the message and the messenger, where does one put the emphasis?

As the ministry of the Christian Embassy is specifically geared to “comfort Israel” and to challenge the Christian world regarding its responsibility towards the Jewish people, there is often a tension. At the Embassy, our experience has been that people respond more readily

to the needs of the projects, such as Soviet Jewry and Social Assistance, than to the day-to-day expenses of maintaining this ministry itself. While we are, of course, very grateful for this generosity, we feel that it is timely to present the over-all ministry of the Embassy. In some countries, believers feel uneasy when they are asked directly for gifts, whereas in others, they assume that if you don't ask it is because you have no needs. As a matter of policy, we have been cautious but perhaps this is the season to more explicitly communicate the fact that the Embassy's on-going work also needs support.

For this reason, we have just completed a video on the work of the Embassy itself. All previous videos have either been on Soviet Jewry programmes, the Feast of Tabernacles or the Christian Zionist Congress. This new video will give an overview, as far as it is possible in 30 minutes, of the extent of the ICEJ's work. It is being designed as a tool that anyone can use to promote the ministry of the Embassy and to invite people to participate. It gives details to those who have a love and burden for Israel and want to become members, or who want to receive our publications, such as this “Word from Jerusalem”, the prayer letters, the Middle East Digest or to subscribe to our free e-mail news service.

There is an increasing demand for these news services and we are in the process of establishing contacts with correspondents in key parts of the world, such as inside Russia and Lebanon. It should give our reporting service a clear edge and will enable us to provide reliable, firsthand bulletins.

Israel is, as usual in April, covered with beautiful flowers, so we have brought an emphasis on Israeli nature. Much is being done in this land towards nature conservation—apart from the well-known tree planting projects—so underlining the fact that the land of Israel is becoming restored as prophetically promised.

The photograph of the almond tree on the front cover was taken in February in the Embassy garden. The Hebrew word for Almond is “*Shaqed*”, which is a play on the same word meaning “watch over”. “I see a rod of an almond tree (*shaqed*) ... for I will watch over (*shaqed*) my word to perform it.” (Jeremiah 1:11-12).

With the rapidly developing situation in Russia, we have an update on our efforts to work with the transportation of new immigrants from there.

At the time of writing, the offensive against Serbia and Belgrade is already in its 20th day. Israel has opened its doors to over 100 non-Jewish refugees from Kosovo. The situation there reminds us that a few years ago when the Serbs were launching their offensive in Bosnia, the ICEJ sent in a team from Budapest with the Jewish Agency and in conjunction with the Israeli Embassy. The purpose was to make contact with the Jewish community in Bosnia and to rescue a number of them and help with their transportation to Israel through Hungary. This time almost 500 Jewish refugees have already arrived in Budapest where they are temporarily housed in Jewish homes.

The ICEJ's Raoul Wallenberg Centre in Budapest is also being used for this purpose. With civil war and unrest possible in Russia, the Balkans and the Muslim states of the former Soviet Union, the warning to the Jewish people is the same: “Now is the time to return home”. We are thankful that as Christians, we can participate in this homecoming.

Israel is also gearing itself to receive millions of tourists in the year 2000. With this in mind, the Board of the Embassy has recently made a decision concerning the convening of the next Christian Zionist Congress. Please see the announcement on page 7 for further details. We would still like to invite Christian Zionist leaders and pastors to come to Israel during Purim (March 21-24) next year for an important planning meeting for this Congress.

May you be blessed out of Zion,

Johann Lückhoff



The “Doctrine of First Fruits”

Excerpts taken from a teaching by Malcolm Hedding at the Embassy on March 24th, 1999.

***“I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness;
I saw your forefathers as the earliest fruit on the fig
tree in its first season.”*** **Hosea 9:10**

Jesus was staying in Bethany and every day He went over the Mount of Olives down to the western side of Jerusalem where He taught and visited the Temple precincts. The Bible teaches that on a certain day, He obviously did not have anything to eat in the morning, and went quite early on His way to Bethphage, “the house of figs”. (Mark 11:12-14, 20)

When He gets to Bethphage, He sees fig trees and although it is not the season for figs, He goes looking for them. It seems a strange thing. It is not the season for figs and yet He curses the poor old fig tree because it hasn’t got any figs. That’s like me looking for grapes on my vine at a time when it doesn’t yield grapes and then I hack the thing up and call it a failure. But is that the truth? Do we understand what happened there?

Fig trees such as those that grew on the Mount of Olives and mentioned in the book of Hosea, the Song of Solomon (2:13), and Micah (7:1), are quite peculiar and they still exist today. They have a unique ability to produce “first fruit”.

That is, around about April—the time of Pessach—each fig tree puts forth about five “first fruit”. The time of the harvest would be later. The season for figs was still at the end of the year, when the rains would come—a good six months away. But if you knew anything about this fig tree, you would know that the most useful figs were ready for eating round about April. If you got a first fruit you were really nourished because the strength of the tree was in those five figs. When the harvest comes six months later and the tree is laden with figs, the strength of the tree is dissipated through thousands of figs, so they are not as nourishing.

Jesus saw this fig tree and He thought to himself, “Has this fig tree got first fruit?” So He looked through the branches and found nothing. Meaning that the tree was already diseased. He didn’t curse the tree and it died. The tree was already diseased and dying. He just hastened the process. He cursed it, because if it did not have first fruit, it would not produce a harvest.

That’s the principle. And that’s the same thing that is mentioned in the book of Hosea, in Micah and Song of Solomon. And that is why the Bible also teaches that we are a kind of “first fruit”.

The Bible also teaches, as we saw in the book of Hosea, that Israel’s first fruit has come in and that is what Paul alludes to in the book of Romans (chapter 11). According to Paul,



there is going to be an all-Israel redemption because there has been first fruit already. I want to remind you of the “Doctrine of First Fruit”—that if the first fruit comes in, there will be a “lump”—a harvest will come.

Isn’t that incredible! If Israel’s first fruit has come in then our labours for Israel are not in vain. Then we know that the fig tree of Israel actually is prophetic. Those figs were the best, they were the most nourishing and they were prophetic. And Israel’s first fruit have come in—according to Paul. So we know that the calling to which God has summoned us is going to be successful.

In Acts 15 [we read that] they had a Jerusalem convocation and were discussing the back-to-front way God was doing things—in their perception. You see, in their perception, when Jesus came, the harvest of Israel should have come in and there is an accusation that this new-found religion is bogus because the way it should have happened, hasn’t happened. Israel actually doesn’t come in. The harvest doesn’t happen, and suddenly Gentiles are coming. The whole thing is a bit disturbing. So they try to thrash the whole thing out theologically because there were those in Judea who still expected a massive harvest in Israel but instead they got rejection. And they weren’t quite sure how to go forward and then they hear that brother Paul is stomping around Asia and he’s just hooking in the Gentiles, left, right and centre.

I want you to get the context, that’s why I said that. “... and after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.” Just a people from amongst them for His name. That’s a ‘first fruit’. “And with this the words of the prophets agree.” (Acts 15:13-15)

Now you have to keep this passage in its proper context to understand it. “After this...” What’s the “this”? After the Gentiles have been plucked as first fruits. In other words the question is: when is God going to harvest Israel? He answers: “God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.” After this He will return to

Continued on page 5



“A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey”

“We came to the land to which you sent us: it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.” Numbers 13:27

When the twelve spies returned from scouting the land of Israel, they carried a pole laden with a single cluster of grapes cut from the valley of Eshkol, pomegranates and figs.

As some Bible scholars explain, the phrase “a land flowing with milk and honey” described an environment suitable to both shepherding and farming, the main livelihoods of that day. Milk would come from goats and sheep grazing on the rocky hillsides. Honey would be available from date palms, signifying that fertile valleys were also to be found there. Another view holds that the reference to “honey” meant an abundance of wild flowers and fruit blossoms, providing nectar for bees.

Entrance into the Promised Land exposed the Israelites to phenomena of nature which they had not known either in Egypt or in the Sinai desert. Water, the source of all life, was totally dependent on rainfall brought by wind-driven clouds. It could have seemed reasonable to assume that

in the land of Israel, the rains were controlled by some deity of whom the Israelites had not heard neither in Egypt, nor in the desert. Seeming confirmation was given by the Canaanite inhabitants of the land of Israel: in order to ensure rain in the right seasons, one must worship other gods. However, Deuteronomy 11:2 emphasizes that this land is:



“a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.”.

During the period from mid-April to mid-June, the flowers of the olive, grape, pomegranate and date open, and the embryonic figs begin to develop. During this same period, the kernels of wheat and barley fill with starch. This season in the land of Israel is also distinguished by multiple changes in climate. Scorching southern winds alternate with cold winds from the north and west. The former bring extreme dryness and heat, while the latter bring tempestuous storms, with thunder, lightning and rain.

The northern wind blowing over Israel between Passover and Shavuot frequently brings rain. This wind is most beneficial to wheat if it blows during the wheat’s early stages of ripening. But the same wind can wreak havoc on the olive crop if the buds have already opened into flowers.

Olive blossoms, like the flowers of Israel’s native grapes and male date flowers, need successive days of dry heat (southern wind). Under ideal conditions these flowers open, allowing pollination. But if the heat wave is too brief and pollination has not been completed before the cold northern wind comes, the olive flowers may be blown away by the wind or the pollen washed off by rain. The same danger threatens the grape, pomegranate and date flowers. Therefore, this northern wind can, at one and the same time, be a blessing to wheat, and a curse to the olives if it comes after they have blossomed but before they have been pollinated.



On the other hand, a prolonged southern wind is good for the olive as well as for the grape, date and pomegranate crops. But this same southern wind can devastate



the wheat and barley crops if it comes before the kernels have filled with starch, for then the grain will be scorched and the crop decimated.

Heavy rain during the wheat harvest is an additional hazard lurking during this season between Passover and Shavuot. The ripe, heavy-eared wheat can suffer from a downpour not only by physical damage from the force of the wind-driven rain, but also by rotting from moisture at high temperatures. This is why the Israelites cried out to Samuel to “pray ... to save us from death”—from starvation that would follow the destruction of the grain crop.

Israel today is not so dependent upon the “hand of the Almighty” when it comes to

supplying water for the crops, but it is still dependent on Him for the timing of the winds and the rains. However these seven varieties are no longer the only sustaining crops that are grown. Many of the fruit and vegetables found around the world are now produced in Israel because of increased technological techniques for simulating the right conditions for growing them. In fact, living in Israel, one is able to live on an amazing variety of fresh fruit and vegetables all year round.

Preserving Israel's fragile ecology, too, is critical for the future. Although there have been many incidents and areas of concern, Israelis increasingly are one of the most environmentally-conscious societies in the world.

The survival of this natural heritage is important for Christians as well, as we seek to understand the Bible. In so many instances, the Scriptures use plants, trees and animals native to Israel to introduce spiritual truths and principles. Indeed, entire biblical doctrines are built upon unique aspects of specific trees, such as the almond, the fig or the olive.

The almond tree serves as an excellent example. When the prophet Jeremiah was shown the branch of an almond tree, the Lord said it symbolises “watching over My word to perform it.” From observing the same almond tree today, we know it is the first tree to blossom in the land of Israel, and yet the last to bear its fruit. It's growing season is from late winter to late autumn. From this, the Lord wants us to take heart and know that, no matter how long it takes, He is going to perform all that He has promised in His Word.



The Doctrine of First Fruits

Continued from page 3

Israel and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down.” “I will rebuild its ruins and I will set it up.” The tabernacle of David is not a worship principle. In the Bible it is the Theocracy. It is His throne. If you refer to the book of Amos where it comes from and Isaiah 16:5, you will see clearly that the tabernacle of David is the Theocracy.

So after a people have been taken out of the nations for His name — first fruits — then He will return and establish the Theocracy. In other words the harvest of Israel.

“Planting them in the Land”

*“... So I will watch over them to build and to plant,”
declares the Lord.” Jeremiah 31:28*

*“And I will rejoice over them to do them good,
and I will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart
and with all My soul.” Jeremiah 32:41*

Since 1989, more than 750,000 Jews have immigrated to Israel in a last day’s Exodus from the lands of the north as foretold by the Hebrew prophets. The ICEJ has helped close to 50,000 of these Jewish people come home from the former Soviet Union. We also have been greatly involved in planting them in the land after their arrival in Israel.

God has indeed been faithful to watch over His word to perform it, since He promised not only to bring them back and to plant them here, but that He would also beckon to Gentiles like us to help fulfill these promises (see Isaiah 49:22). Here are stories of some of those we have helped recently.

Lena lives with her 4 children in a settlement outside Jerusalem. She came to us last year with a dental need we were able to help meet. A few months later she returned in desperation, due to the fact that her non-Jewish husband decided to divorce her and return to Russia. Lena was 6 months pregnant and did not know what to do. We prayed with her and answered her questions about the God of Israel.

This December she came to visit us again with her newborn baby and two of her other children. Remarkably, she was beaming. Although her husband had returned for a while after our initial prayers, he had again decided to leave her and the children and return to Russia. Instead of being desperate as before, however, Lena was full of faith for the future. She had met others of faith in her settlement and had been very encouraged with the sense of God’s presence. This was so despite the fact that her electricity had been cut off a few days before due to lack of payment. Upon discovering this, we immediately gave her money to cover the bill. Now Lena wants to move to Jerusalem, and we hope to continue helping her. She is a talented linguist and is employed by Hebrew University.

Max Privler from the Ukraine lost his entire family during the Holocaust. When he was 10 years old, his father was dragged out of his house by policemen, with Max desperately hanging on to his neck. The next day Max was made to stand next to his father and a group of other Jewish men who were shot by a firing squad. Max was hit and fell into the pit with others, but hours later regained consciousness and climbed out. He then ran home to find his mother and baby sister brutally murdered. His two younger brothers had also been killed. On two other occasions during the course of the war, Max was shot by firing squads and given up for dead. He also survived a concentration camp and a shot in the head as the war ended when he was 15.

A few years ago, Max was able to immigrate to Israel as a fulfillment of the prophecy that God would bring “one” from a family (Jeremiah 3:14). He came to us from a city near Tel Aviv, in the hope we would help relatives of Ukrainian Christians who had helped him during the war with a serious medical need. This we did. In December we also provided some money to help Max publish the miraculous story of his life. Despite the wounds that he still carries in his body, he is full of the desire that people will live in peace and wants his life to count for this purpose. Although it has been hard for him to believe that there is a God of love, when we spoke to him about God’s plan for him and Israel, tears came to his eyes. We also had the privilege of praying for him according to the biblical promises.



VIDEO on the Vision and Ministry of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem



A 30-minute video is available in PAL and NTSC on the over-all work of the Christian Embassy. It is impossible to cover the whole scope of the Embassy's activities in such a short space of time, but this video touches on the biblical background for the Embassy's calling, upon Israel's modern-day restoration, and the part of Christians in this.

The video shows something of the international network of the Embassy and presents the work in Jerusalem. It gives an on-site report on the latest transportation of Soviet Jews from St. Petersburg and Budapest on their way to Israel.

This video is an excellent tool in the hands of anyone who would like to make a presentation to their church or group about the vision for Israel and how we as Christians can be involved. Please order directly from our Jerusalem office. The price is \$10 including postage.

We encourage everyone showing the video to get names and addresses of individual Christians who would like to receive the Embassy's material.

We would also appreciate it if, following a video demonstration in your church or group, you felt free to take up an offering for the Embassy's work.

A N N O U N C E M E N T

Israel will welcome several million Christians next year for the Millennium. Hotel and airline reservations will be severely limited, especially with Pope John Paul's expected arrival on 24th March 2000 to celebrate the Annunciation. These circumstances pose a tremendous burden on the logistics of convening the Fourth International Christian Zionist Congress on 21-24 March 2000. Accordingly, the ICEJ's Board decided that a more opportune and practical time for the Congress is February 2001 (dates to be announced).

This Congress promises to generate significant, timely proclamations concerning the restoration of Israel and prophetic perspectives on the coming of the Messiah. The revised scheduling ensures the positions adopted will have a much better chance of being clearly heard.

The dates 21-24 March 2000 instead will be used as a Planning Meeting for the re-scheduled Congress. This planning session will address a number of topics, as tremendous pressure probably will be put on Israel regarding Jerusalem and other final status issues.

Special Alert:

We are asking Christians everywhere to sign a petition on Jerusalem, which will be featured in a document of support presented to Israel in March 2000, during this Planning Meeting for the 4th Christian Zionist Congress.



Russian Connection Update

JERUSALEM — Faced with increased requests to immigrate to the Jewish state, Israel announced it would open a consulate in St. Petersburg, its Foreign Ministry said.

A press statement said the decision was the result of warming ties between Israel and Russia.

The opening of the mission was agreed upon in meetings in Russia during a visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

(© 1999 Associated Press.)

The immigration of Russian Jews to Israel has increased 100% in early 1999 over this same time period last year, according to Israeli sources. There are now approximately 3,000 Jews per month immigrating. Yet even at that rate, it would take 12½ years for all 450,000 Jews in the former Soviet Union to immigrate. Anti-Semitism is on the rise, with a synagogue in Novosibirsk vandalised in early March. Swastikas were painted on the walls, the Torah was thrown on the floor and desecrated and the prayer books torn up. The police attributed it to “juvenile hooliganism”.

The increased level of *aliyah* meant that in just the first three months of this year the Embassy’s busing connection to Helsinki airport from St. Petersburg has carried more immigrants than in the entire year of 1998. On a recent Sunday morning, two buses instead of the usual one, left full of *olim* for Finland where they were to stay for a few nights in Finnish Christian homes prior to their departure for Israel from Helsinki airport.

Recently the Embassy’s Russian Connection Fund was able to provide a number of computers for different Jewish Agency outposts in the vast spread of Russia. Without these computers they have an almost impossible communication task.

The Embassy has also been privileged to provide several



Maya Pautova, the ICEJ secretary in St. Petersburg, in front of some of the computers we are using in St. Petersburg to teach prospective immigrants Hebrew and foundational skills such as computer programming.

TV monitors and VCR’s to Jewish Agency offices in cities like Kalingrad, for showing Israel videos to the Jewish communities in these cities.

Because of the economic collapse in Russia, many of the Jewish people in the out-lying rural areas are so poor they cannot even afford the train journey to St. Petersburg, where they have to apply for permission to leave Russia and get everything worked out with the Jewish Agency. The ICEJ staff in St. Petersburg is fully geared for the increased number of enquiries by Jewish immigrants who have to be assisted with the bureaucratic processes and is setting up a network to help them with their stay in St. Petersburg for the few days it will take them to get through the red tape.

The timing of this increased activity is critical because of the suffering amongst the many poor Jewish families and the increased anti-Semitism. The headline of a recent article in the Hebrew press read: “It Is One Minute Before a Pogrom.”

In spite of these expressions of hatred, we are grateful that on an official level, the relationship between Russia and Israel has warmed — there has been increased agreement and closer ties between Russia and Israel. This is providential in terms of providing a window of time for the Jewish people to be brought out.

The work of the Russian Connection is the responsibility of the worldwide constituency of the ICEJ, although the Finnish branch has been crucial in overseeing all the practicalities of the work.

Soon the work in Tashkent will also be expanding in light of the increased needs there. We will keep you updated on this.



The ICEJ sponsored transportation of new immigrants from outside the Jewish Agency offices in St. Petersburg, to Helsinki airport. This service had to be expanded recently from one bus per run to two, due to the increase in the number of immigrants travelling to Israel.

International Christian Embassy Jerusalem

20 Rachel Imeinu

• P.O. Box 1192, Jerusalem 91010, Israel •

Tel: 02.5669823/5619389;

Fax: 972.2.5669970

Email: icej@icej.org.il

Internet: <http://www.icej.org.il>