The Carmel forest fires which broke out near Haifa in early December were quickly labeled the worst natural disaster in Israel’s modern history and the toll in terms of lost lives, resources and habitat was staggering. By the time the flames were finally extinguished four days later, the wildfires had claimed 42 lives, damaged or destroyed 250 homes, and consumed some 12,500 acres of the nation’s most treasured woodlands.

The tragedy was compounded in the first hours of the blaze when 36 trainee prison guards were sent to evacuate an endangered prison but died when rapidly spreading flames engulfed their bus. By nightfall of the first day, Israeli officials admitted they were unable to contain the wildfire and appealed for international assistance.

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem joined in this appeal by asking our friends and supporters worldwide to donate towards the rescue and recovery efforts.

As the funds poured in from across the world we were able to assist Yad Ezer L’Haver, our Israeli charitable partner in establishing the new Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors, to open up the facility as an emergency shelter for hundreds of area residents forced to evacuate their homes.

With our help, Yad Ezer also opened a crisis center in Tirat Karmel to provide food, clothing, shelter, childcare and medical aid to those affected by the fires.

> CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE
Dear Friends,

As we enter a new year, it is appropriate to look back and give thanks to God for all that we have achieved together in 2010. Not only have we discharged the day-to-day work of standing with Israel and comforting her, but we have also taken on some challenging projects like helping to send Israeli relief agencies and medical teams to Haiti, supplying portable bomb-shelters to the threatened towns of southern Israel, and greatly expanding a home in Haifa for poor Holocaust Survivors.

As always, the Feast is a huge event with an impact that is always positive and comforting to Israelis. Year after year, they are assured that they are not alone and have true and faithful friends throughout the earth. In some respects I could go on and on, but the truth is the Lord has helped us to fulfil His call and mandate over our ministry.

We desire to please Him and do His will. Time and time again in our deliberations, we have stopped to pray and wait upon Him so that we could be sure of harmonizing our plans with His. It can be so easy to press on as usual assuming that God is blessing what we are doing. It is, in fact, the other way around! We are always mindful of this.

So as we enter 2011, I know that we will have even greater challenges and needs to meet in Israel. I personally think that difficult times are ahead in Israel and all over the world. I feel that the Spirit of God is warning me about this. We must prepare and we must keep our eyes upon Jesus. We have no need to fear or panic. That is the business of the world. Our confidence and peace is found in the God of Israel, Who indeed is shaking all things!

We have much work to do for Him and we are ready to serve. This we can only do with you and I want to thank you for always standing with us.

May you know and love the Lord God of Heaven more and more in 2011.

In Jesus,

Rev. Malcolm Hedding
ICEJ Executive Director
ICEJ Christmas & Hanukkah Outreach
Reaching out to needy Arab and Jewish families throughout the Holy Land

By Estera Wieja

During the Hanukkah and Christmas seasons this past December, the ICEJ reached out to needy Jewish and Arab families throughout the Holy Land as a testimony to the heavenly “light” celebrated at this unique time of year.

During Hanukkah, the Embassy’s social assistance arm - ICEJ AID - sponsored holiday festivities for several needy Jewish communities, reaching out to underprivileged and abused children and the elderly.

Then, as Christmas neared, we stepped in to sponsor a number of assistance projects among the Arab Christian community, including the largest Christmas party in Bethlehem, hosted each year by the First Baptist Church of Bethlehem. We also provided Christmas gifts to several hundred Arab children from Bethlehem and Jericho.

Using our contacts with local Arab Christian ministries, the ICEJ AID team were able to provide needy Lebanese refugee families in the Galilee with food coupons for the holidays, while poor Arab Christian families in Nazareth received food as well.

This Christmas, ICEJ AID also partnered with charitable ministries in the Old City of Jerusalem so that several hundred elderly Arab believers living in the Christian Quarter could experience first-hand care for the holidays, including gifts and blankets for each.

With the onset of winter, ICEJ AID will now focus on making sure the more vulnerable segments of society have the warmth and shelter they need to face the cold weather. Our efforts include the distribution of blankets and heaters to new immigrants, the elderly, poor families and others in dire need.

Support Ongoing ICEJ AID Projects in Israel: www.icej.org/donate.php
The Yardenit ‘Wall of New Life’

ICEJ honoured for multilingual Bible project at world-famous baptismal site

By Estera Wieja

The Yardenit baptismal site near the Sea of Galilee, one of Israel’s most popular tourist venues, recently honored the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem for sponsoring its Wall of New Life, which features beautiful Armenian tile renditions in nearly 40 languages of the Gospel of Mark’s account of the baptism of Jesus.

Kibbutz Kinneret, Israel’s second oldest kibbutz, established the Yardenit baptismal site some 30 years ago on a branch of the Lower Jordan River as it flows out of the south end of the Sea of Galilee. The serenity of the location readily invited visitors back to that moment when Jesus began his public ministry by entering the waters of baptism in the same Jordan river. The site quickly became a “must” stop for Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land, and today it draws nearly one million visitors per year.

Yardenit’s managers were especially moved over the years by their encounters with friendly, exuberant evangelical Christians, who have become the main focal point of their marketing efforts. While most Bible sites in Israel frequented by Christians are owned and maintained by the Catholic or Greek Orthodox churches and thus cater primarily to their followers, Yardenit is unique in the welcoming atmosphere it offers to Evangelicals. The Israel Ministry of Tourism has also given the site much emphasis in its promotional materials.

For these reasons, the Christian Embassy was pleased to have the opportunity to establish a “presence” at this popular site through the Wall of New Life project. The ICEJ’s Executive Director, Rev. Malcolm Hedding, and International Director Dr. Jürgen Bühler were recently invited to take part in a ceremony dedicating a plaque along the Wall which honors the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem for sponsoring the project.

The Wall is designed to be a significant feature at Yardenit, beginning at the entrance to the facility and continuing along the banks of the Jordan to the baptismal pools. It conveys a powerful and welcoming message, as most visitors from various nations

“Yardenit is a special place for evangelical Christians, where they can follow their Saviour through the waters of baptism”
around the globe are able to read the account of Jesus' baptism from Mark 1:9-11 in their native languages.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan.

And when he came up out of water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove, and a voice came from heaven;

“Thou art my beloved Son, with thee I am well pleased.”

The Wall is dedicated to Christians throughout the world who have been baptized at the site, and consists of some 40 panels of beautifully hand-painted tiles created by noted Armenian artist Hagop Antreassian from Jerusalem’s Old City. Each panel presents the same baptismal verses from Mark in a different language, ranging from tribal tongues of Africa to prevalent European languages and unique Asian scripts.

At the dedication, Hedding described Yardenit as “a special place for evangelical Christians, where the spiritual dreams of millions of Bible-believing Christians have come true. To follow their Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, through the waters of baptism and to be able to do so in the flowing waters of River Jordan is a supernatural experience.”

“We appreciate that you’ve done something this unique”, Hedding told the Yardenit leadership. “I think by this particular facility you have also made a great contribution in Jewish-Christian relations. The fact that Israelis would build a baptismal site for Christians – it’s quite astonishing.”

Rev. Hedding was also invited to plant an olive tree in the Yardenit gardens in his name as a memorial to his efforts in building closer Christian ties to Israel over recent decades.
Opening the Way
Ruppin Academic Center developing Ethiopian Jewish leaders of the future

By Shallé McDonald

In 1993, a 14-year old Jewish orphan named Solomon trekked alone from Ethiopia to Israel. His mother had died in Ethiopia while his father – who immigrated two years earlier during Operation Solomon – had died in Israel. How could such a frightened young man from a small village, stripped of family support, immigrate to a modern society with a different language and culture and then rise to become an outstanding college student with his own family?

Solomon started out the absorption process in Israel like many Ethiopian Jews his age — at a religious boarding school. After high school, Solomon completed his IDF service, but found himself facing yet another tough moment in his young life.

“I needed to do my own fight, to grow up alone, look for a job and pay rent—all alone. I didn’t even know how to look for a job”, said Solomon.

Solomon said he had always wanted to study and be successful, but without money for studies due to his low-paying work, he was not able to begin university when most young Israelis do. Around age 27, he first heard of the leadership program for Ethiopian Jews run by the Ruppin Academic Center near Netanya. He could earn a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration with a specialisation in Immigration and Social Integration with an eye to helping other Ethiopian newcomers, all while receiving a full scholarship and benefiting from an extensive network of support.

Essentially the program, which is the first of its kind in Israel, seeks to develop role models who can mediate between the Ethiopian community and Israeli society at large, helping to break down barriers of social and economic integration. The program includes participation in hands-on volunteer projects and post-degree assistance for entering the job market.
Solomon was excited to learn of the program, since he knew many young Ethiopian Jews like himself who simply felt helpless about achieving a successful career due to the unique hardships they face. One such challenge is passing the Israeli university entrance exams, which are culturally geared for those born into Israeli society.

“Besides socio-economic issues, young Ethiopians have difficulty passing the test because it is culturally-based — so we offer a prep course that enables them to go on to higher academic studies”, said Revital Poleg, a development director at Ruppin.

Solomon began connecting with the Ethiopian community from the moment he began studying at Ruppin, as a volunteer at a special center for at-risk youths in Tel Aviv.

“On my very first day at the center, we found one young guy that was running away”, he recalled. “This was my first day, but suddenly I found myself knowing that I have to take the lead. We knew nothing about this guy, so I made some calls in the community. I found out that he ran away from home and we found the family. It gave me a special feeling that I can really contribute a lot to my community.”

Another semester he volunteered at absorption centers, which showed him how important it is for absorption workers in Israel to understand new immigrants.

“I remember my first days in Israel when they put me in an absorption center, in an elevator going to the 9th floor. I never saw such floors in my life because I grew up in a village. It was all ground level and suddenly I’m on the 9th floor — I didn’t even know how to go down”, Solomon said with a chuckle.

“What I do is a mission. The main thing I received at Ruppin is that it brought me to a better understanding of my community and how to help them be more connected”, he said.

Solomon now wants his own family to succeed, and he hopes to work for the Israeli government on behalf of Ethiopian Jewry.

The ICEJ is sponsoring scholarships for Ethiopian students like Solomon to attend the Ruppin Academic Center, making it possible for them to excel and make a profound impact not only in their own community, but also in Israeli society as a whole. Please consider making a gift to this special project today. ☞

Shallé McDonald served as a staff writer for the ICEJ media team and a contributor to The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition

Painful Journey; Bright Future

ICEJ Project Update

Making aliyah has been fraught with difficulties for Ethiopian Jews, many of whom fled their famine ravaged homeland in the early 1980s by trekking across Africa’s Nubian Desert on foot. It was a journey that saw only 2 out of 3 make it to Israel alive. For those that survived new challenges awaited them in Israel as they struggled to adapt to the culture, lifestyle and advanced technology of a First World nation.

This past year ICEJ AID has been focusing on the needs of this unique community: increasing educational opportunities for young Ethiopians on one hand while assisting the older generations deal with the painful memories of their journey nearly 30 years ago.

Today some 70% of Ethiopian Jews live below the poverty line. To break the employment barrier, however, this community needs help bridging the education gap. That’s why the ICEJ has been partnering with the Ruppin Academic Center near Netanya in its efforts to enable more second-generation immigrants to gain higher education qualifications.

We’ve also been supporting a successful after-school program in Bet Shemesh that provides a safe place for at-risk Ethiopian teens to get help with behavioural and educational problems and complete their High School education. So far not one of those in the program has dropped out of school!

In addition ICEJ AID is continuing to support the Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma at Herzog Hospital as it seeks to assist an older generation come to terms with the trauma of their historic, yet painful desert journey.

With our help, the center is providing one-on-one counseling and group therapy to enable these precious survivors finally to tell their story and begin to address the high rate of suicide and depression prevalent in their community.

None of this would be possible without the ongoing prayers and financial sacrifice of Christians around the world. Thank you for your faithful support!

Support ICEJ Aid Projects in Israel
www.icej.org/donate.php
While most evangelical Christians are supportive of Israel’s modern-day restoration, there is a growing movement among Evangelicals which is sympathetic to Palestinian suffering and claims to statehood. To provide a biblical basis for their position, many Evangelicals have turned to the trendy new answer of Fulfilment theology. This is a biblical outlook which sees natural Israel as having already “fulfilled” her redemptive purpose with the coming of Christ and the birth of the Church, leaving the Jewish nation with no future role to play. Adherents place much emphasis on the ever-expanding “inclusiveness” of God’s salvation plan as it culminated in the Gospel being preached to all nations.

In a sign of just how prevalent this view has become, it was endorsed at the course-setting Third Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization in October 2010.

Now the universal nature of God’s intended family is such an elemental truth that no Christian can rightly contest it. Yet some are presenting this inclusiveness as if it were some new or deeper revelation. But when God first called Abraham into redemptive service, He was not exactly ‘hiding the ball’.

Rather, God stated quite clearly that His ultimate purpose was to “bless all the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:1-3).

On the other hand, the Apostle Paul tells us there is a certain enduring “mystery” about natural Israel that has survived the Cross and the birth of the Church. So while Fulfilment theology makes some valid points, it is not the full counsel of Scripture. That is to be found in Covenant theology.

Covenant Theology – The Story of Salvation

The great covenants of the Bible actually tell the story of God’s salvation plan, beginning with the calling of Abraham. God’s covenant with Abraham is the foundation upon which all successive covenants are built, from Moses to David to the New covenant. Each was built upon or “added to” prior covenants and did not abrogate or nullify any preceding one (Galatians 3:16-19).

In the Abrahamic covenant, God offers His grace and salvation to “all the families of the earth” through faith in Him. But the world did not know it was in need of redemption, so in
the Mosaic covenant the Ten Commandments were given to tell us we are sinners. Thus, Paul says, “the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ” (Galatians 3:24).

Under the Davidic covenant, we are assured of a King from David’s lineage who will be the Righteous Judge of the whole earth, applying the grace and law of God justly.

In the New Covenant, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus enables Gentiles to be “adopted” as “sons of Abraham” and “heirs of the promise of blessing (salvation) made to him (Romans 4:1-16; Galatians 3:6-14, 29).

The sinless life of Jesus also satisfied the just requirements of the Mosaic law (Romans 3:21-26; 1 Peter 3:18). His perfect obedience to the Father, even to the point of a cursed death on a tree, earned Him the right to ascend to the throne of David as Judge of the whole earth (Psalm 110; Ephesians 1:15-23; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 5:5-10). In Romans 9:3-5, for instance, he explains that the covenants “pertain to” or “belong to” his fellow Israelites in the flesh. Earlier in Romans 3:1-4, he insists that the very oracles of God were “committed” or “entrusted” to natural Israel.

Finally, we can note the words of Jesus himself, who told the Samaritan woman that “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22).

These are all possessive terms used to describe the unique covenant relationship which God established with ancient Israel. They were entrusted with the means by which the world could come to salvation. God called Israel into a trust relationship, with the beneficiary being the world. Even title to the Land of Israel was vested in Abraham’s progeny in the nature of a trust so that Israel could become a nation which over time might birth into the world all the things we need for salvation.

Yet in serving this unique birthing role, the people of Israel were called to be suffering servants, even to the point of being hardened by God towards their own promised Messiah. Paul tells us that this was all for the sake of the Gentiles, with the expectation that we should be grateful for it (Romans 11).

So God called natural Israel in order to birth spiritual Israel – that is, the one, ever-expanding household of the redeemed. We Gentile believers do not replace natural Israel, we enlarge spiritual Israel (Galatians 6:16; Ephesians 2:11-13).

Now consider that each of these great biblical covenants was established with natural Israel. God has always worked out his salvation plan for the world through natural Israel, using their belief and their unbelief in equal measure to produce the one family of the redeemed from the earth.

It may come as a surprise to some Gentiles, but this is even true for the “new covenant”, which was established by Jesus with twelve Jewish disciples gathered for the Last Supper. Even the New Testament Church was birthed through 120 Jews gathered on the Day of Pentecost in that same Upper Room.

Thus, Paul bases his “mystery” in Romans 11:25 upon this understanding of natural Israel’s irrevocable covenant relationship with God, which is still working out His redemptive plan in the earth even through their unbelief. What he essentially says there is that so long as natural Israel rejects their Messiah, there is still time for Gentiles to get saved.

**Fulfilment Theology and the Davidic Covenant**

We also have the preaching of Peter in Acts 3:17-21, where he states that all the prophecies concerning the things Messiah must suffer have indeed been “fulfilled”, but that there are still many other things spoken by the mouths of the prophets concerning the “restoration” of Israel which are still to come. This refers to the prophetic promises regarding Israel’s physical restoration to the Land in unbelief and then their spiritual restoration to God and His Messiah in the last days (see, e.g., Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, and Hosea 5-6).

These passages all have to do with the future timing and fulfilment of the Davidic covenant, when Christ – as the “Son of David” – will take up his throne in Jerusalem, to rule over the earth in righteousness and peace. And since the covenants were entrusted to natural Israel and always find their outworking through them, this means that the Jewish people still have a redemptive role to fulfil for the benefit of the world.

Plainly stated, the modern-day restoration of Israel is destined to birth the world into the Messianic Age in fulfilment of the Davidic covenant. In this process, natural Israel will be merged with spiritual Israel and will finally enter the rest and peace in the Land that was promised to her by God.

This may frustrate some Christians, as it takes certain matters out of their hands. We Evangelicals think that if we will only preach the Gospel in all nations, then “the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). This is true, but it is equally true that natural Israel still has a redemptive role to play. We need to understand and identify the out-workings of this redemptive process and to pray that it be hastened in our day. In the meantime, this demands that we show respect for natural Israel as still elect of God, even in their unbelief (Romans 11:1, 11, 29).

**“So God called natural Israel in order to birth spiritual Israel - that is the one, ever-expanding household of the redeemed”**

David Parsons is ICEJ Media Director and Contributing Christian Editor of The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition. He lives with his wife and son in Jerusalem.
The University of Ariel has grown from a small college established in 1982 to a full-fledged university playing an important role in strengthening the bond between Israel’s young generation and their ancient heritage and values. But in recent years, the school’s application for official university status became entangled in the global delegitimization campaign against Israel, due to its location in a large community over the pre-1967 armistice lines – i.e., the West Bank.

The city of Ariel and the university it hosts are both being unfairly targeted by academic, artistic, economic and other boycotts. This despite the fact that the university, for instance, is known for the wide diversity of its growing enrolment, which includes a broad mix of Jews and Arabs, Russian and Ethiopian immigrants, native Sephardim and newcomers from Western countries, all with equal access to its excellent academic programs. Stroll around campus and you will see Muslim girls browsing in Jewish shops, while Ethiopian Jews dine with Palestinian Arabs.

Still, even within Israel some foundations refuse to support its students because the campus is located beyond the “Green Line”. In response, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem decided to contribute to a scholarship fund at Ariel University which will make a difference in the lives of a number of students by providing them with financial support needed to continue their educational pursuits. The funds will help over one hundred and thirty students, many from families evacuated in the 2005 Disengagement from Gush Katif in Gaza.

“Thanks to the ICEJ some of our students can get scholarships they deserve, but were never offered, because the university they attend is in Samaria”, said Eldad Halachmi of the Ariel University Center (AUC). “They deserve the support no less than a student in Tel Aviv or Haifa.”

“We take pride in reducing the gaps in the society of Israel. We want all our students to get a better chance in life”, said Elinor Einat, Dean of Students, who also notes the school has the largest number of Ethiopian students of any university in Israel.

One of the students applying for the ICEJ scholarship is Elhanan. Outside of being a student, he is also a husband and father of two children. He is studying Industrial Engineering and Marketing, but often finds himself unable to commit the necessary time to focus on his studies due to work and family demands. “A scholarship would really help me devote more time to studying, but it would also give me a chance to spend more time with my family”, said Elhanan.

Rotem, another student hoping to receive a grant, is very precise about his future plans. “I study social work, so I can join the Israeli Air Force to assist people. As a professional in my field, I believe I could be of great help to the army.”

Estera Wieja serves as a staff writer for the ICEJ media team in Jerusalem and a contributor to The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition.
Since 1980 the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem has stood at the forefront of a growing mainstream movement of Christians worldwide who share a love and concern for Israel and an understanding of the biblical significance of the modern ingathering of Jews to the land of their forefathers.
Our emergency response to the devastating fires came at the end of a year of intensive engagement with the wider community in the large Israeli port city of Haifa. And it went far beyond providing temporary shelter, school supplies or clothes for the children of displaced families.

Since last January, the ICEJ has invested more than $750,000 to help impoverished Holocaust survivors in the city with the purchase and renovation of two adjacent apartment buildings that now house Yad Ezer’s assisted-living home.

Thus, just weeks before the arid conditions and unseasonable heat combined to fuel the raging fires in the Carmel forest, ICEJ staff were in Haifa once more to participate in a joyous ceremony dedicating a new Torah scroll and synagogue room at the facility.

A number of government officials and rabbinic authorities were on hand for the occasion, as residents of the ICEJ-funded facility celebrated the receiving of a Torah scroll and completion of the one-room synagogue just off the Home’s main dining hall.

“Now you have combined charity and faith, charity and Torah,” said Rabbi Avraham Weizman, head of Haifa’s Jewish Religious Council.

Yad Ezer Director Shimon Sabag arranged for the Torah scroll to be brought from Haifa City Hall through several blocked-off streets in a festive atmosphere similar to a traditional wedding procession. Participants were dancing, singing, playing tambourines and throwing candy.

Sabag explained that the $25,000 Torah scroll was donated by the family of a Greek Jewish survivor of the Holocaust who had purchased it for his own home before passing away recently. It will be housed in an “ark” – a beautiful wooden cabinet built into the room adjoining the activities center.

Sabag added that the synagogue now gives the elderly residents an added dimension to their lives, being able to take part in daily prayers and Shabbat worship services without having to leave the Home.

“The residents feel like they won the lottery each and every day”, said Sabag. The home, which is now Israel’s largest assisted-living facility for indigent Holocaust survivors, will eventually house up to 130 residents, who receive free room and board as well as round-the-clock medical care.

“We are still getting calls from all over the country from survivors who are desperate to move in”, noted Sabag.

The renovations are still on-going, so - as you remember the fire-ravaged region of Carmel in your prayers - consider what you can give to help finish the facility and cover its operating costs.😊

Support the Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors: www.icej.org/donate.php