

## BIBLE-READING MARATHON HELD IN JERUSALEM

by Rodney Stafford and JCF staff

Fifty days after Passover marks the day of Pentecost, the Greek word for the Jewish festival of Shavuot. In Jesus' day this was a pilgrimage festival, when Jews came to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices before the Lord. After the destruction of the Temple the Shavuot festival became a celebration of the giving of the Torah. It is a day to celebrate the record of God's dealings with man beginning with Adam and culminating in his covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. It is now a common practice for Jews to study the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, through the night, beginning at sunset. This example of the Jewish community inspired several of the leaders of Narkis Street Baptist Church, the home church of Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation, to run a Bible-reading marathon at the same time. They saw the injunction of Paul to Timothy,

"Until I come devote yourself to the public reading of scripture..." as directing them in what forum this reading should take place. <sup>1</sup> Timothy 4:13a

So beginning on Shavuot, running through the night, thanks to the efforts of the Narkis Street Youth Group, and for the following five days the Bible was publicly read in the front church yard by Christians from congregations all around the city. By the end over one hundred and ninety people, filling fifteen minute slots, read in twenty different languages. Many people were deeply moved by the opportunity, for the first time in their lives, to read the Word publicly. They stood unashamed on the front lawn of the congregations' meeting house in downtown Jerusalem, and proclaimed God's Word to those gathered to hear it and to those walking by in the neighborhood.

There are two times in the Hebrew Bible where we see God's people come together in Jerusalem for a public reading of His teaching. In 2 Kings 23 when Josiah is given the book of the law that the priests found in the Temple, he calls a gathering in Jerusalem and publicly reads to everyone. And in Nehemiah chapter 8 the people gathered in Jerusalem to hear Ezra the priest read the teachings of Moses. At the end of May, the believers in Jerusalem were blessed to continue this tradition of reading the Bible publicly, and just as in Ezra's day, the people were inspired to worship God and to rejoice in the Lord.



- Daniel continued

Daniel Manjang is a pastor of the evangelical Church of Christ in Nigeria. He was born in Rim, Plateau State, Nigeria and has a wife, four children and two adopted children. He has a BSC in Economics and an MDIV from the ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos, Nigeria. He has worked in bible translation of the Old Testament for ten years. He served as Exegete of the Berom Language and Translation Board, in Plateau State, Nigeria. When the project was complete he became a teacher of the Old Testament at The Gindiri College of Theology in Plateau State, Nigeria. He has twice attended the bible translator program in Jerusalem run by The Home for Bible Translators. He is completing his advanced course this month and will return to his home country.

### Our Classroom

**Biblical Language Center (BLC)** teaches intensive biblical Greek & Hebrew courses during the summer. A unique teaching method that makes learning fun, effective and for everyone.

**Biblical Studies in Israel (BSI)** an accredited one-year Undergraduate program of Land, Language and Literature of the Bible at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Study Tours** bringing the Bible to life through in-depth thematic tours. Tours are customized to suit the specific needs of groups for any size and age

### Our Outreach

**Israel Relief** Providing financial assistance for urgent situations to those in the Land needing help. A portion of this fund is also set aside for educational scholarships for the needy.

**Funds needed:** food vouchers, housewares & clothing vouchers, emergency medical & dental assistance, general needs

**Children's Fund** Helping children caught in great need due to the ongoing conflicts.

**Funds needed:** orphanages, school supplies, holiday gifts, general assistance for children

### Our World

[www.jerusalemcornerstone.org](http://www.jerusalemcornerstone.org) for further details on our projects, programs and the communities we live and work in, visit our world on our website

# JCF

Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation: P.O. Box 54351, Tulsa, OK 74155 (918) 622-9573  
Chairman: Charles M. Kopp, P.O. Box 546, Jerusalem, 91004, Israel, Tel: 972-2-671-4351, chuck@jerusalemcornerstone.org  
Israel Director: Jon (Noni) Gerrish, P.O. Box 546, Jerusalem, 91004, Israel, Tel/Fax 972-2-673-1096, noni@jerusalemcornerstone.org  
US Director: Larry J. Ehrlich, P.O. Box 54351, Tulsa, OK 74155, Tel: 918-622-9573, larry@jerusalemcornerstone.org



July-August 2007

# אבן פינה Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation

## Towards Sanctification

By Daniel Manjang, Jos-Nigeria

It is rather unfortunate today that many nations, peoples, and individuals desire to be forgiven but find it difficult to do the same. Like the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35, we want to support our position of unforgiveness by saying, "You do not know what he or she did to me. How can I forgive him or her?" You will probably manage to convince yourself that you are right in harboring your pain but Matthew 6:14-15 states clearly and in unmistakable terms that God can only forgive us if we forgive others the misdeeds they have done to us. This is a very difficult passage, isn't it? We desire to recite the Lord's prayer but it has that difficult phrase: "...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." God is not a respecter of persons. As a follower of Christ, forgiveness is incumbent upon all of us, no matter how ancient a grudge we carry. As Jesus shows us in the prayer he taught us, it is also in our best interest to forgive, especially when we reflect on the number of times we grieve the Lord by our thoughts and ways.

While it is true that forgiveness is difficult depending on the context of the offence and depending on the parties involved, one fact remains, it is not an impossibility. It is only a journey, a process in maturity, no matter how long it takes, you will surely arrive at your destination.

Bert and Exie Schlossberg one wrote, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and to discover that the prisoner was you!" That is exactly what I am saying here. As a matter of fact, forgiveness sets us free.

I have heard some people say, 'I will forgive but will not forget.' I find it difficult to convince them to the contrary. Yes I agree, but you must not even start talking of forgetting without first of all forgiving. Forgiveness is a process. When you jump to talk of forgetting you hurt yourself more and the desired effect, forgiveness, is short-changed. Start with the process of forgiving letting God work on your heart, and then see if you are willing to take the next step. Forgive then you can talk of forgetting. For us to have any testimony as believers in God we must follow his footsteps for when he forgives us he also forgets (Jeremiah 31:34). What has to be made clear is that forgiveness does not absolve one from bearing the consequences of his action. The fact that a someone is forgiven does not take away those consequences. He should and will still be tried according

to the law. For example when one embezzles funds and is forgiven, that does not mean he should not pay back. I am talking of restitution here and Jesus, who taught radical forgiveness still encouraged Zacchaeus to pay back fourfold what he had taken from the people unlawfully.

Phillip Yancey has a book called, 'Where is God when it hurts?' This a question many people ask when faced with painful challenges, like the call of our Lord to forgive. However, the word of God is clear in 1 Corinthians 10:13, there is no temptation (or challenge) that will come our way which is not common to man. This statement is followed with a promise from God that He will provide us a way of escape. That "escape" might look like helping us to lay down our hate and anguish and let Him teach us to forgive. I have seen God work in my life and the lives of my siblings in just this way.

On December 12th, 2002 Muslim fundamentalists overran our village of Rim in Plateau State, Nigeria. They came in the hundreds killing and maiming people and animals. They also

burnt and looted houses and raped women. It was terrible. My 69 year old father Rev Bitrus Manjang, a retired Vice President of our church, the Church of Christ in Nigeria, was one of the many killed. My sister in law, Victoria, pregnant at the time was also killed along with her six year old son, Doro! My first response was to challenge God, had He gone to sleep while my family became victims? Then I read 1 Thessalonians 5:18 - Give thanks to God in ALL circumstances, for that is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus, I felt like expunging this verse from my Bible. But that would not have stopped it from being the word of God. I began looking for an escape and indeed, over time, God gave me the grace to forgive my enemies. I had to if I was going to continue to preach the word of God to the heathen.

When our lives reflect these terribly difficult teachings from the scriptures like: love your enemies (Matthew 5:44), bless those who persecute you (Romans 12:14a), do not take revenge but give room to God to avenge for you in his wrath (Romans 12:19), we exhibit our maturity in Christ. More graphically we see in Romans 12:20 which states clearly: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink." Did I hear you say Amen?

- continued on back

# Radical Islam & Radical Forgiveness

By Bethany Slater

Believers in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank continue to struggle as the rising tide of anti-western sentiment among Muslims results in anti-Christian acts of violence and general intimidation. The link between Christians in the Middle East and Christians in the West has a long history extending all the way back to the Byzantine period. During the 19th century when the Ottoman Empire was in a period of slow decline, Christians (both Arab and non-Arab) in Jerusalem, and the rest of the former Ottoman Empire developed alliances with western powers who would lobby the Ottoman leadership for their greater social and economic freedoms. Today this traditional relationship makes Christians vulnerable to attacks motivated by the anti-western agenda of radical Islam. In Gaza there have been many attacks on believers. Most recently, a Christian book store in Gaza was bombed. This took place around the same time as the torture and murder of three of our Christian brothers in Turkey.

Those of us from foreign countries living in Jerusalem still feel relatively safe, we can always leave if things get really bad; but for our brothers and sisters who have no refuge, the threat is very real. Neither should we assume that our foreign passports will save us. In the end only God knows our end and what we need to consider is how we will respond to hatred. What will our testimony be?

In the last month, Christians around the world heard about the martyrdom of our three brothers in Turkey at the hands of young Muslim men, trained to ritualistically torture and murder “the enemies of Islam.” Some of us have also heard of the Turkish Christian community’s loving response to their attackers. Our fellow believers in the West Bank and Gaza live in a similar climate. In Turkey, “every non-Muslim is viewed as a potential traitor and conspirator,” and yet this community boldly stepped up to proclaim the Gospel in front of live televised broadcasts. Their response to the violence is the most powerful proclamation of the gospel ever heard in modern Turkey. Just as Jesus’ prayer was echoed by the first Christian martyr, Stephen, “Father forgive them,” the bereaved publicly proclaimed forgiveness sending shockwaves through the Turkish community. The headlines of the leading papers carried the words of Suzanne and Semse, the wives of the martyrs, saying “I forgive the ones who did this,” “May the Lord forgive them for this.” Alongside their proclamations, flowing from lives whole heartedly devoted to our Lord, the newspapers carried gruesome descriptions of the way their beloved husbands died. The black and white text of those Turkish papers presented the most vivid image of Jesus’ death on the cross that has ever been shown in Turkey. The message of radical forgiveness broke through and challenged the message of radical Islam.

Ziya Meral, “The banality of the murders of three Christians in Turkey,” Turkish Daily News, 21 April 2007.

Mike Niebur. Sermon given at Narkis Street Church, Jerusalem. 19th May, 2007.

## Unforgiveness

by Ray Pritz

We hear a lot about the healing effects of forgiveness. But what happens when we refuse to forgive? When Peter asked Jesus about forgiveness in Matthew 18, Jesus told him a parable of two debtors. After the king forgave the first a huge debt, that man went and demanded that a fellow-servant repay a debt. When the second man could not repay, the first servant had him thrown into prison.

Refusing to forgive someone who asks forgiveness is like putting them in a kind of prison. Perhaps you have had that unpleasant experience. You asked someone to forgive you for something, and they said, “No.” It is very unpleasant. You know God has forgiven you, but you may still feel trapped. Now, perhaps someone who has withheld forgiveness might say, “Good, he deserves it after what he did to me. I’m glad I didn’t forgive him. Let him suffer a bit.”

But notice what happens in the rest of the parable. Because he did not forgive his fellow-servant, the king ordered him “to be handed over to the torturers” (verse 34). The word is from the same root as the word translated “tormented” in Rev 14.10 (“he will be tormented with fire and brimstone”) and Rev 20.10 (“they will be tormented day and night forever

and ever”). The bad news for the person who withholds forgiveness is that it does you more harm than it does the one you refuse to forgive. The unforgiven one went to jail; the unforgiving one went to be tortured.

Unforgiveness is a kind of cancer. It is not static. It eats away at us and causes much worse things to happen. When Amnon raped his half sister Tamar, her full brother Absalom did not forgive him. After two years Absalom’s unforgiveness ate away at him until he murdered his brother (2 Kings 13.20-32). It may be far less dramatic in our own experience, but when we refuse to forgive, we contract a deadly disease, and we will inevitably suffer from it.

Our need to forgive is unrelated to the factuality or non-factuality of the thing we need to forgive. Let me explain. Suppose someone said something nasty about me to someone else, but I never heard about it. I have no need to forgive, because I do not even know about it. There is no cancer. But suppose I think someone said something nasty about me when they never actually said it. Now I must forgive. The determining factor is what is inside me. Unforgiveness will eat away at me just as badly whether I was actually wronged or not.



“True and undefiled religion is this, to care for orphans and widows in their distress...”

## SOS

By Bethany Slater

When I went to college I was “on my own” for the first time in my life but actually I wasn’t. I knew that I had a safety net prepared to catch me when I didn’t have enough money to pay a bill, buy groceries, or when I had a new opportunity that would help me achieve my dreams. The orphan children who grow up in the SOS village in Bethlehem do not have that support. They don’t have a family standing behind them to provide financial assistance once they graduate from the SOS program. Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation has tried to be a safety net for some of the graduates over the years and it will continue to help in this way in the future. Most recently we have begun to support a new project as strategic partners with a number of SOS graduates who face the challenges of life and now have families of their own. In a society that still views orphans with suspicion, the 150 graduates of the SOS village have chosen to commit their time and their finances to a prevention program targeting some of the most at risk families in Bethlehem.

Last year, several graduates of the SOS village formed a graduates association and convinced the others to come on board. Their first project is aimed at helping vulnerable children in their community. These children still have homes and some semblance of a family structure, but their home lives lack healthy, motivated parents who can help their children succeed. Some are being raised by single mothers, some by crippled fathers, five children have been dropped into the care of their grandparents when their mother, a widow, remarried and her new husband refused to accept her children. All of these children are well below the poverty line, living in tiny one room or two room homes shared between eight to ten people. Their caregivers are often depressed and overwhelmed by life and hence lack the emotional and physical strength to provide parental guidance. The SOS Graduates Association began a program in January of 2007 that seeks to bring hope to these homes full of despair.

The graduates have “adopted” 7 families (a total of 37 children) to participate in their five year plan to raise the standard of living in these households and to bring hope for the future. The families are offered a stipend of \$40 per month, per child, and in exchange they must strive to meet the standards set by the Association. Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation has partnered with the Association, cov-

ering one-quarter of the monthly stipend for each child, and providing the group with the seed money needed to set up an office. Last week, during my visit with the families I could already see the improvement in their lives. The mothers are maintaining cleaner homes, and the children are in school, some for the first time in their lives.

What really astonished me during my visit was that graduates such as Samia, have become like parents to these families. Samia visits each family twice a week. Her training as a social worker, her passion to see these families succeed, and her no nonsense manner, combines to make a very effective encourager. Just like a mother, she loves them while insisting on standards of behavior. She does not let any one get away with not trying their best.

Samia, like the other five SOS graduates heading up this program, is strictly a volunteer. Besides being a “mother” to seven families, she cares for her husband’s twins (her husband is a widower), works as a teacher, and helps her husband run his baking business out of their apartment. She seems to couple amazing clarity of vision with boundless energy to follow through with all her obligations. Her intimate knowledge of her own culture makes her a very effective motivator. She understands that throwing money at a social problem doesn’t solve it. She and her husband Hani, along with Abdallah and Hussam, do not lord it over the families, tossing them a few coins, nor do they speak arrogantly about how these families are incapable of doing better; but rather as a caring family they build up each family through their commitment and love. This project is about getting into other people’s space, a very uncomfortable prospect for most of us. It is about a genuine and personal engagement with one’s neighbors. Ultimately, Samia and her fellow volunteers are a picture of what it means to love your neighbor as yourself.

Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation has chosen to support the SOS Graduates Association over this next year. We are among their first financial partners, though in accordance with their general outlook on life, the members are not content to rely on only one donor but insist on looking for partners within their Bethlehem community and continuing to support their projects from their own funds. They have had some successes getting support from Bethlehem businesses willing to donate services or goods, a sign that these ‘orphans’ are winning respect in their community. The SOS Graduates Association is one of the most well conceived, effectively managed, and upright projects that I have ever seen.