

-Apex" continued

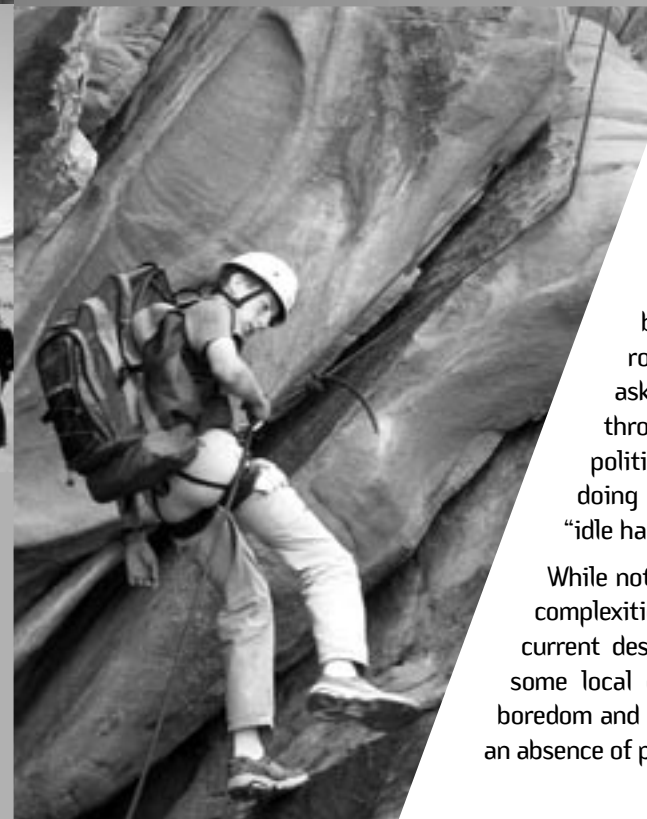
This state-of-the-art facility would rival climbing complexes elsewhere in the region, bolstering Bethlehem's communal self-esteem. A local staff would be trained to teach children and youth climbing, camping, and survival skills similar to those taught in Boy Scouts. After these weekly courses, local Christians would lead Bible classes for any youth with parental permission wanting to attend.

Apex Adventures International has enormous potential for positively impacting Israel. As Erich envisions Apex's effect, "an outdoor adventure center will help children to develop a deeper understanding of their role in determining the consequences of their actions." Apex's survival skills will teach the importance of choice, which can lead to physical and spiritual maturity. Apex has long-term plans for working with all youth in the Land, both Israelis and Palestinians. During the two years that he has lived in Jerusalem with his wife Candice, and now, their five-month-old daughter, Elleana, Erich has already led a some group climbs, most recently the youth of Jerusalem's Narkis Street Congregation to Wadi Rum, Jordan.

Many of us remember "mountaintop experiences" as key events which helped shape us as we matured from youth into adulthood. An apex is the peak of a mountain. Apex Adventures International desires to bring those who are down in the valley up to the mountaintop. During this most recent Intifada, Bethlehem has slowly been encircled by a security wall that has virtually relegated many of its residents to a ghetto existence. Jerusalem Cornerstone is working together with Apex in order to raise hopes and catch those who fall in the cracks. Apex's program will focus on including children and youth without financial and social standing, i.e. orphans and refugees. Amazing life-changing experiences could await Bethlehem's youth through the upward climb of Apex.

In order to realize this initial project—purchasing land in the Bethlehem area and then building and equipping the Outdoor Adventure Center—Apex needs \$170,000 to cover costs. Apex also needs long-term and summer-term volunteers who can assist the camps in a variety of ways: teaching, administration, and building.

If you would like to support Apex, please contact Jerusalem Cornerstone. If you are interested in serving as a volunteer, please contact [Erich@mountaintopadventures.com](mailto:Erich@mountaintopadventures.com)



*Jerusalem Cornerstone is now partnering with Apex Adventures International, a program that teaches children and youth survival skills to overcome a rocky world. Apex's first project is to build an Outdoor Adventure Center in the economically depressed Bethlehem area, the ideally romanticized but practically forgotten birthplace of Jesus.*

# APEX

Teaching Youth to Climb Heavenward

By Gary Alley

Last year, Erich Strehl was in Bethlehem when he happened upon a spontaneous rock-throwing episode of Palestinian boys aiming at Israeli soldiers. While crouching behind a wall during the dangerous rockflinging and tear gas melee, he asked the Palestinian kids why they were throwing the stones. Some gave him typical political rhetoric, but many replied they were doing it "for fun," incarnating the old adage, "idle hands are the devil's playground."

While not ignorant of the political and economic complexities which have shaped Bethlehem's current desolation, Erich reasoned there must be some local constructive outlets for these youths' boredom and frustration. Looking around, he noticed an absence of parks, playing fields, or playgrounds. Few

to no activities were available for the average child, especially for those without means.

Erich, an avid climber since his teens, realized he might be able to create climbing opportunities to help motivate Bethlehem's young people. Having founded Mountaintop Adventures, a Michigan-based company which leads experiential outdoor trips involving backpacking, rock climbing, hiking, rappelling, and camping, Erich began meeting with parents and community leaders in Bethlehem to discuss outdoor activities for youth.

He laid out an ambitious plan for a half-acre Outdoor Adventure Center, equipped with a high ropes course and rock climbing wall, along with classrooms and eating pavilion.

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 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](mailto:chuck@jerusalemcornerstone.org)

Israel Director: Jon (Yoni) Gerrish, P.O.Box 546, Jerusalem, 91004, Israel. Tel/Fax 972-2-673-1096 [yonig@jerusalemcornerstone.org](mailto:yonig@jerusalemcornerstone.org)

U.S. Director: Larry J. Ehrlich, P.O. Box 54351 Tulsa, OK. 74155. Tel. 918-622-9573 [larry@jerusalemcornerstone.org](mailto:larry@jerusalemcornerstone.org)

Speaker at Large: Nathan Solomon 3717 Triplet Rd., Lawrenceville, VA. 23868-4303 [nathan@jerusalemcornerstone.org](mailto:nathan@jerusalemcornerstone.org)

[www.jerusalemcornerstone.org](http://www.jerusalemcornerstone.org)

# Consider It All Joy

## Persecuted Believers Among the Israeli Druze By Francois Smit

“My brothers live in darkness. Demonic forces are closing their eyes to the light.”

Faik, a carpenter by trade, is an Israeli Druze who knows and loves Jesus as his Messiah and Savior. Faik’s faith is a rare occurrence among the Druze, an offshoot of Islam that numbers over 100,000 in Israel. His faith is even more unusual because he publicly witnesses to his fellow-Druze.

It all began in the late 90s when some Canadian Christians visited his village located near the Sea of Galilee and presented the Gospel. Faik recalls how they spoke of a different Jesus than the one posited by local negative impressions of Christianity. Although they left a Bible with him, he never gave it much thought.

In December 2000, shortly after the start of the second Intifada, he was sent on a secret military mission by the Israeli army. During the operation two good friends, a Jew from Jerusalem and a Druze from a neighboring village, were killed. Faik was critically injured himself, regaining consciousness in the hospital only a week later. He did not recognize anyone for another eight days. After two months in the hospital he was discharged but continued to suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. These experiences turned his world upside down.

Then, in February 2001, a friend invited him to a Messianic congregation. That evening God did a deep work in Faik’s life. He realized that the fellowship and intimate relationship with God at this congregation was what he had been searching for, and accepted Jesus into his heart. He asked the people present to keep his conversion

a secret, as he knew persecution would be his lot if word leaked out.

When he told his wife about his decision, she could finally tell him about the dreams she had been having for a number of years in which Jesus had been appearing to her. The following week he took her and their four children along to the congregation, where they all made public professions for Christ.



Initially, Faik’s family kept quiet about their faith, but gradually God began to stir Faik to share his faith with his fellow-Druze. How will they know if someone does not tell them, and who better to tell them than one of their own? His faithful witnessing, despite severe opposition, brought six other families to follow Christ. Sadly, two of these families have bowed under the intense pressure and persecution of their clan and community.

During the past four years, Faik’s greater family has also disowned him, and wants almost nothing to do with him. Before becoming a believer, Faik had previous financial debts, and now he is not able to repay them because no one in the

community will offer him work. His wife’s family has recently discovered Faik’s conversion and has repeatedly threatened to take their daughter’s life because of the dishonor she has brought them. Their children are teased and isolated at school; just last month his 10-year-old son was beaten up by some boys because of his faith. His family cannot recall the last time they had meat to eat. Yet when I asked his

children how they feel, the answer came back with love sparkling in their eyes: “We count it all joy!”

Please pray for Faik and his family as they continue to witness to their neighbors about the freedom and joy they have found in Jesus. Please pray that God would miraculously relieve him of his financial debt, as his opponents are using it against him to undermine his witness. Please pray for his children (there are now five), especially the older ones who are entering their teens.

If you would like to make a specific contribution to Faik’s family, please indicate on the JCF insert.

# Adultery and Dust

## The Bizarre *Sotah* Ritual

Numbers 5:11-31—Synagogue Torah reading for June 11, 2005

By Yoni Gerrish

Before the end of the Second Temple period (70 A.D.), it is apparent that people caught in adultery were summarily sentenced to death (Lev. 20:10). However, when only a suspicion of adultery existed, the strange ceremony of the *Sotah* was performed which would ascertain whether a wife had committed an act of infidelity in secret (Num. 5:11-31).

*Sotah* in Hebrew means “a woman who has gone astray” (Num. 5:12b). The *Sotah* ritual was an extraordinary measure taken when there was no convicting evidence, in cases where jealousy, suspicion or resentment between husband and wife existed. During the rite of the *Sotah*, dust from the floor of the Tabernacle (or later the Temple’s inner chambers) was mixed with holy water. The priest would then write curses on a scroll and rinse them off into the holy water and dust (Num. 5:23). The suspected adulteress was then required to drink this bitter brew. If found guilty after having drunk this cup, she would take on a curse that would make her sexual organs and reproductive system literally rot from the inside out.

One rabbinic interpretation of how the *Sotah* was carried out is found in *Mishnah Sotah* 2:3. While the mixture of dust and water was brought to the woman’s lips, the priest would write out the words of Numbers 5:19 on a parchment using ink that could be blotted out if the woman was innocent (thus the parchment could be re-used). If she was guilty, the parchment would be sealed away with her name on it and she would then bear the curse of the aforementioned text.

However, in this same tractate of the Mishnah, it is recorded that Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakai, a famous Pharisaic leader who lived and taught in Jerusalem prior to 70 A.D., stopped employing the *Sotah* ritual. According to him, the ritual no longer worked as a deterrent or as a means for discovering the truth because adultery had become commonplace in Israel (*Sotah* 9:9). This would suggest that the *Sotah* ritual was possibly abolished or downgraded while the Second Temple still existed. Could this erosion possibly coincide with another rabbi’s ruling on an alleged adulteress brought to the Temple precincts?

Nearly a half-century earlier, while teaching in the Temple courts, Jesus was approached to judge a case of adultery:

*At dawn [Jesus] appeared again in the Temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of*

*adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.*

*But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground [γρην] with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground [γρην]. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” (John 8:2-11)*

Despite having caught the woman of John 8 red-handed in the act of adultery—punishable by death—the scribes and teachers are dissuaded from carrying out such a verdict. Jesus, similar to the later view of Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakai, labored the point that none of her accusers was without sin. This point is amplified by another textual tradition found in some Byzantine manuscripts which describe Jesus writing out the sins of the accusers in the dust of the Temple grounds.

Jesus’ odd act of writing in the dust of the Temple ground (γρην) could allude to the *Sotah* ritual where the priest would make a sort of “truth serum” by mixing ground dust (γρης), holy water, and the ink of written curses. In both cases, a woman is accused of adultery and the dust of the ground holds the written verdict.

While Jesus did not condemn the guilty woman to death, he also did not condone her sin. He threw down the moral gauntlet—“Leave your life of sin.” There on the Temple grounds, Jesus could have performed his own interpretation of the *Sotah* ritual, writing out the passage and all its abominable curses on the ground—“a scroll of dust”—that could be blown away, erasing the woman’s sin but not her life.