

whole-heartedly. Father Thomas closed his February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001 Shabbat sermon in a powerful way by reading Luke 14:12-14 in which Jesus commands his followers when they host a dinner, not to invite their friends, family, or rich neighbors, but instead to invite the outcasts of society.

This verse is not talking here about giving food to the poor. We can say, “we worked in the soup kitchen; we fed the prisoners in the jail, distributed thanksgiving baskets.” I’m not talking about that and Jesus isn’t either. Whenever you give a lunch or dinner, do NOT invite your friends. Whenever you have a reception invite beggars, the lame, the blind...I defy any theologian in the world, any scripture scholar in the world to make this verse unclear.

If we did this one thing, this would solve the mission problem. The whole world would be converted. You don’t need a new subcommittee, you don’t need another conference, just do what it says in verses 12 and 13, and you’ve got it done. You give a lunch and invite the poor, sit down with them as an equal at the table. You help them out; serve them; see what they need. Talk to them and have a pleasant conversation, interact with them. You do that one time and you will be converted because you will meet Jesus Christ in a way that you have never met him before.

These Good News for the Poor Conferences and subsequent outreaches continued to solidify Narkis Street’s young leadership and their understanding of God’s redemptive plans and supernatural acts of compassion, especially to those with none to help them.

### ***New Refugees, a New Intifada, and a New Millenium***

While the vast amount of Israel’s forces left the “Lebanon War” by 1985, it was not until May 2000 that all Israeli troops officially pulled out of southern Lebanon. As the Israeli army returned across the border, thousands of Lebanese Christians (former militia men of the South Lebanese Army – SLA) who had fought with Israel against several terrorist groups in South Lebanon also fled into Israel to escape reprisal attacks by the Islamic extremist power, Hizbollah. With over 6,000 Lebanese refugees on her northern border, Israel was in dire economic straits to accommodate these new long-term visitors. Since these Lebanese were culturally Christian, the Israeli government began seeking help from the local indigenous churches but found little because of the SLA’s unpopularity in the Arab world. When Narkis Street was contacted, church member Christine Sakakibara, began organizing trips to visit and minister to the

Lebanese refugees who were extremely grateful for these small acts of kindness. As 2000 rolled into 2001, many of the lower ranking Lebanese soldiers decided to return to their homes in Lebanon preferring to serve prison sentences because their future in Israel was so bleak, but many others could not return to Lebanon because they would surely face death. Jerusalem Cornerstone continues to encourage and support the remaining Lebanese refugees even as the world has quietly forgotten them.

With Israel’s surprising withdrawal from southern Lebanon in the summer of 2000, Yassir Arafat’s rejection of the Camp David accords, and Ariel Sharon’s later visit to the Temple Mount in September, Palestinian unrest and political designs were primed to usher in a new wave of violence. The al-Aksa Intifada, a much more bloody affair than its 80’s predecessor, has ravaged the Land the last three years with hordes of suicide bombers and multitudes of terrorist attacks and severe Israeli retaliatory measures endangering civilians on both sides.

Also near the turn of this millennium, Cornerstone Ministries was reevaluating and sharpening its purposes and goals in the ever-changing Israeli landscape. Brian Kvasnica and Jon “Yoni” Gerrish were instigating plans for educational tours in Israel and programs for the disadvantaged. Eventually, these meetings led to larger gatherings within the local believing community. In 2002, Larry and Mary Ehrlich flew from the U.S. to join these discussions in Jerusalem and agreed to represent stateside this evolving ministry, formerly Cornerstone but now Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation (JCF). Today the vision of Jerusalem Cornerstone is about promoting acts of charity and educational opportunities with an eye towards restoration and reconciliation.

The term “missionary” is a relative curse word in the modern state of Israel. It is associated with the murderous medieval Crusades, Hitler’s holocaust, the Inquisitions, and other horrors of twisted institutionalized Christianity. Therefore, Christian workers in Israel do not characterize themselves by this formulated, archaic term. Instead, they seek to bear witness of Jesus in their lives rather than drawing attention to themselves and their titles. It is too easy to be stereotyped and quickly pigeonholed in a political state where, unfortunately, one’s religion discriminately defines a person and their people group. Jerusalem Cornerstone is eking out a path of righteousness in Israel’s bureaucratic wilderness, bending yet not breaking with political winds that are constantly changing temperature and direction, and resiliently holding out the Word of life that is prophesied to forever change the Middle East and the world.

אבן פינה

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## The Roots of Jerusalem Cornerstone

by Gary Alley

### ***(1983-2003): Harvesting the Wilderness***

*The Holy Land has always been characterized by fences which separate and discriminate between different groups. Regrettably, this practice has carried over into modern Christian involvement in the Land. Israel is also notorious for being a bureaucratic wilderness for evangelicals seeking to bless and help the country. Since its establishment in 1936 as Zion Apostolic Mission and till now, Jerusalem Cornerstone, has tried to walk that political tightrope by loving all peoples, Jews and Arabs, and adhering to changing governmental protocols, all the while faithfully sharing the Gospel through biblical teaching and acts of loving-kindness.*

### ***A Tabernacle in Jerusalem***

Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world, after the shock and infamy of 9/11 when over 3,000 people lost their lives at the hands of terrorists, world leaders have begun an ardent offensive to hunt down and eliminate terrorist elements. So too, nearly 20 years ago, Israel began advancing its battle against terrorism by invading Lebanon in 1982, seeking to push out and destroy the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) which had staged repeated deadly attacks against Israeli interests at home and abroad. Following Israel’s summer invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Narkis Street Baptist chapel in Jerusalem was destroyed during Sukkot—the biblical Feast of Tabernacles. This holiday is commemorated by Jewish families by building make-shift wooden structures on their porches, yards, or balconies with palm branch roofs. These observant families for the next seven days eat all their meals outside under this “tabernacle” to commemorate the homeless children of Israel and their vagabond forty-year wandering in the wilderness.

Similarly, for the following nine years, the chapel-less congregation at Narkis Street met under the awning of a giant tent in the church parking lot, whether rain or shine, frigid

or hot. Only after many long and tenuous years of political, bureaucratic, and prayerful struggle did the doors open on 4 Narkis Street to a new reconstructed facility in 1991 and an official rededication in 1996. The scorching of the chapel and further, the lengthy fight to rebuild on its own property in downtown Jerusalem, is a poignant example of the hardships which Christian workers face in modern day Israel. Like a hardened wilderness, nothing is guaranteed in this country except complications and obstacles, especially regarding the Gospel. Appropriately and intentionally, when the new Narkis Street sanctuary was completed in 1991, it had been designed stylistically in the shape of a tent.

In 1987, Bob Lindsey, the longtime pastor of the Narkis Street Baptist Congregation, retired and returned to his native Oklahoma. He and his wife, Margaret, left behind nearly a half century of experience and vision which had laid the foundation for evangelical work in the maturing state of Israel, now nearly 40 years old. They had balanced their ministry with all Israelis, both Jew and Arab, without bias in contrast to many Christian ministries which chose to defend one side and demonize the other. The Lindseys’ Christ-like love and wisdom would be dearly needed by the end of 1987 when a violent grassroots movement among the local Palestinian population erupted on the heels of the Lebanon War.

In December 1987, West Bank and Gaza residents began a massive popular campaign against Israeli occupation attacking soldiers and citizens with stones, knives, grenades, and firearms. This Palestinian uprising that lasted for 6 years came to be known as the Intifada or the “uprising,” and it further accentuated many Christian workers’ theological divisions, whether to support the Palestinians or the Jews. Once again, the difficulties of the land had a way of extracting and sifting out the true sentiments of a person or ministry, sometimes producing disappointing results. Deuteronomy 8:2 adequately

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sums up this time: “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments.”

### *Unless a Kernel of Wheat Falls to the Ground...*

For those whose ministries survive and prosper in Israel, flexibility, adaptability, and patience are necessary attributes for overcoming the hurdles and holes on the desert road. One example of this happened in 1989 when Charles and Elizabeth Kopp were forced to vacate the Zion Bookshop on 33 Prophets Street by city rezoning. This shop had been in the custody of Charles and his father, E. Paul since 1962 and before that, under William Hull. From 1936 to 1962, Hull’s ministry was called Zion Apostolic Mission and E. Paul Kopp changed the name of the work to Zion Christian Mission in 1962. The Zion Bookshop had undergone many torchings and defacings by religious hate groups over the years, yet the shop was restored after each new assault. Ironically, it was not these brazen criminal attacks that successfully silenced the bookshop’s decades old work but rather a calculated municipal decision.

Charles instinctively had already begun to redirect the fifty year-old ministry of Hull and his father E. Paul, renaming it Cornerstone in 1985 and starting to engage the Israeli political bureaucracy on behalf of Christian work in the Land. In 1974, Charles and Zion Christian Mission (later renamed Cornerstone) joined the United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI), a large alliance of Jewish and Arab evangelical ministries working in Israel. It was in this fellowship of core local Protestant leaders, that Charles would start helping evangelical interests, an acute minority, on the Israeli political stage. In 1985, Charles became the General Secretary of the UCCI and eventually chairman in 1996. Some examples of Charles’ significant contributions toward evangelical causes, during the last two decades:

- representing Christians before the Israeli Knesset (parliament) commissions regarding anti-proselytization laws, then and now as a board member of the Messianic Action Committee (MAC),
- mediating between Arab Christians and Muslims after bloodshed (Turan),
- helping lead an international campaign against the Islamic abduction of property and threats against the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth,
- continuing to fight for the rights of the Aweke sisters, three Ethiopian immigrants who have had their Israeli citizenship unlawfully stripped for being associated with Messianic Jews.

While Charles was honing his skills on the diplomatic level, Elizabeth found an open door into the West Bank orphanages of Bethlehem. In the mid 80’s, Elizabeth had begun participating in choirs that sang at Bethlehem’s Christmas celebrations, and these soon prompted her to bring Narkis Street youth to the local orphanages. She first

started visiting with the Holyland Christian Mission, a ministry to crippled children. She also frequented Bet Jamima, a home where the Dutch Christian couple, Peter and Helen Volbehrs cared for extremely handicapped orphans—the children that the local orphanages would not touch. In 1992, Elizabeth began a relationship with the SOS Children’s Village that continues today. As the SOS children have matured and become adults, Elizabeth has been a constant help to them in their times of turmoil.

The year 1990 introduced the megalomania of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein onto the international stage with the Persian Gulf War. Once again, Israel was on the receiving end of its regional enemies’ threats and missiles. With Saddam’s defeat in 1991, the exiled, pro-Saddam Palestinian leadership was forced to the negotiating table with their Israeli counterparts through international pressure. In 1993, the hopeful Oslo accords were signed in Norway, which would theoretically usher in a time of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. While erratic stints of terrorism continued after the Oslo accords, for the most part, 1993-2000 was seen as an optimistic era for the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. This same hope and expectation also played out in the birth of new visions among Christian work in the Land. It was at the beginning of this era of hope that Charles Kopp became senior pastor of the Narkis Street Congregation in 1994, following in the steps of Bob Lindsey. With Charles serving as both UCCI chairman and Narkis Street’s pastor, the times were right and the pieces almost in place for a renaissance of study and action.

### *Reclaiming the Word of God*

On May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1995 Bob Lindsey passed away in Oklahoma, but that summer at Narkis Street Congregation, a bible study began on Shabbat mornings, which echoed what Lindsey had begun decades earlier. Joseph Frankovic, a doctoral student at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York who had also learned from Lindsey during his last years in Oklahoma, began teaching the Bible focusing on its early Jewish sources with roots in Second Temple Period thinking. Every lesson brought fresh and new angles on well-known Bible stories that had been engrained yet dulled in the hearts of the participants. These powerful teachings came alive in their ancient context and interpretations. With the conclusion of every study, listeners were provoked to live out their faith in a tangible and radical way—defending the weak, caring for the poor, reaching out to those in need.

At least two important methodological roots grew out from Frankovic’s Shabbat bible study. The first is the assumed oxymoronic idea of examining and testing the Scripture with scientifically critical eyes of faith. That is, to not be afraid to dissect the Bible, learning it from the inside out...taking it a part, putting it back together. By recognizing that the Bible is a 2,000 year-old Jewish book percolated in its ancient ambiance, modern students must grapple with and not ignore these historical and theological issues. We should take God’s Word to heart and wrestle with it daily and not lock it behind fearful dogmatic doors of systematic theology as a superstitious totem. The second methodology is to uncompromisingly live out these

age-old tenets of the Bible by the power of the Sprit. Especially emphasized was God’s heart for the poor and broken. Repeatedly, God comes to the rescue and defense of the alien, widow, and orphan within the Scriptures. These messages from ‘95 had lasting effects upon a young, maturing group of Jerusalem-based Bible students. This collective would eventually influence and help mold the reemergence of Jerusalem Cornerstone six years later. Shabbat morning bible studies have continued at Narkis Street where some of the former students have now become the teachers.

### *Biblical Language Revival*

Another awakening occurred in 1996 with the return of Randall and Margret Buth to Israel. Having served nearly twenty years with Wycliffe Bible Translators and United Bible Societies in eastern Africa, Randy moved to Israel in order to develop innovative programs for teaching biblical languages. Due to Randy’s past experiences with the dismal results of biblical language acquisition among Bible translators, he believed there needed to be a revolution in how the global Church’s institutions were disseminating the biblical languages. He sought to transform the manner in which Bible translators, teachers, pastors, and students were learning the source languages of the Bible—Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Randy’s idea was to teach and administer these biblical languages through modern language acquisition methods, essentially, within a vibrant classroom setting of active participation—hearing, speaking, and performing the biblical text. By distilling the language in a lively verbal environment and through recorded audio-lingual homework, Randy believed students would grasp and absorb the biblical languages quicker and more efficiently. Such a method could possibly ignite a revival within the hungry Body of Christ that was searching for spiritual sustenance within its anorexic contemporary Christian literature, microwaving theological leftovers with no ancient flavor.

Randy started developing materials for biblical languages and his first experimental class was teaching Koine Greek as a spoken language at Narkis Street in 1996-7. His first Biblical Hebrew ulpan started in the summer of 1998 and has continued every summer since with nearly 200 students having experienced Biblical Hebrew as a living language. For the first time, in the fall of 2002, Randy, his daughter, Sharon, who had taught with him since 1998, and Gary Alley took this unique Biblical Hebrew ulpan outside of Israel training 20 Bible translators, teachers, and pastors in Jos, Nigeria. Randy has recently laid the administrative framework with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to bring Christian undergraduate students from around the world to study the language, land, and literature of the Bible through a newly created program, Biblical Studies in Israel (BSI).

### *A Light to the Nations*

In the late 90’s, Charles Kopp and Joseph Frankovic first met Jonathan Miles, an American who was living with his family in the refugee camp of Rafah in the Gaza Strip. Jonathan, his wife, Michelle, and their six children moved into Rafah in 1997 and were helping to bring local Arab Muslim babies to Israeli

hospitals for life-saving operations. The Miles’ ministry, Light to the Nations, begun without staff or institutional backing to mediate between Palestinian and Israeli bureaucracies, aided these sick and dying children to obtain proper medical care. In 1999, the Miles and Narkis Street began a lasting relationship which brought visitors to their Rafah home and some support to their ministry.

The Miles moved to Jerusalem in 2001 to establish a central base for Light to the Nations. In 2002, Light to the Nations was renamed Shevet Achim (Hebrew for “brothers dwelling together” and an allusion to the reconciliatory work that was developing between Israelis and Palestinians through this medical mediation). This same year brought upheaval as Jonathan’s family was forced to leave Israel because of a governmental bureaucratic decision which was laced with anti-Christian sentiment. To continue the Miles’ work, Philip and Martha Berg and family moved into the Shevet Achim house on Jerusalem’s Prophets Street (next door to where the Zion Bookshop had formerly ministered). By 2003, two additional families joined the Bergs at Prophets Street, Elia and Gerdi Zweverink and Brian and Shoshi Kvasnica to bolster Shevet Achim’s sacrificial labor. With his family’s move, Jonathan began to see the Middle East as open for the expansion of Shevet Achim’s work, beginning first to bring children from Jordan into Israel for surgery. With the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, myriads of dying Iraqi children without necessary medical facilities and trained specialists has become a chief concern of Shevet Achim’s future work. One day amity may come to the Middle East, and these acts of loving kindness may be cobblestones on this path of peace. This liaison begun in the late 90’s with Shevet Achim/Light to the Nations planted a seed among Narkis Street’s young leadership for visionary work bridging the ever damning and growing divide that continues to separate Israelis and Palestinians.

### *Good News to the Poor*

From 1999-2001, two Good News for the Poor Conferences were conducted in Jerusalem with three main speakers, Father Rick Thomas, a Jesuit priest of El Paso, Texas, Rev. Jeyanesan, a clergyman from Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, and Jonathan Miles of Rafah. Father Thomas was well known for his association with the Charismatic Renewal within the Catholic Church and his work among the downtrodden who lived at the Juarez, Mexico trash dump. Joseph Frankovic had invited Father Thomas after making a trip to the Mexican border to see his work and recognizing its prophetic potential to encourage the new vision at Narkis Street. Rev. Jeyanesan, a parish priest in the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India had directed programs focused on aiding the Tamil refugees, orphans, and widows that had resulted from the civil war shredding Sri Lanka. Several members of Narkis St. volunteered with Jeyanesan in the mid 1990’s. Jeyanesan’s work in the midst of fighting peoples brought comparable and insightful experiences to the conflict raging in Israel.

During these Good News to the Poor Conferences, the audience was challenged to hold nothing back from God but to serve him