



Avraham & Shilo

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Voices in the Desert

By Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson

When Shilo told me his dad, Avraham, was originally from the UK, I was stunned. “Then how is your English so terrible... I mean, for someone with an English-speaking parent?” I asked him with a wink. He laughed, “My mother is a Sabra (Israeli-born) and I have lived my whole life on the same street. We moved several times growing up—but always to a different place on the same street in Ma’ale Adumim (a suburb on the desert side of Jerusalem).”

Shilo’s mother grew up in a traditional Jewish family. In her later teens she and a couple of her friends heard about Yeshua. They accepted the invitation into the Kingdom and never looked back. Her parents, however, were not happy about her decision and rejected any attempt she made to talk to them about her faith.



Her prayers, however, did not go unheard. Less than a year before he died, Shilo’s grandfather

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would wake up from a coma having had a vivid experience with Yeshua. This changed the remainder of his life, though his wife, who lived through the horrors of WWII and could not accept that there was a God at all, remained hardened. It would be about 20 years later, and two months before her own passing, that Shilo's grandmother would soften and accept the truth about the God who watches over Israel and His Son, Yeshua.

Avraham was young when he first felt a stirring for the land of Israel. But he would have to wait until he was an adult to take the big step of moving to the Land of Promise. Soon after arriving in Israel, he would meet his future wife and be married by the time he joined the IDF.

After completing his military service (though he continued as a reserve until the age of 50) he got his master's degree in botany at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Avraham loved nature, but he especially loved the desert, and so he and his wife moved to a then-small settlement called

Ma'ale Adumim in the Judean desert. Looking for community with other believers, they joined a congregation that met in Jerusalem on the weekends. During the week, a good number of the congregants—all from Ma'ale Adumim—would have a mid-week

house meeting in different homes in their city, including their own.

The drive to the meetings in Jerusalem every week was draining (as Shabbat is the only day off Israelis get) and slowly members of the home group began feeling a need to establish a congregation in Ma'ale Adumim. Avraham went to the congregation's leaders and asked if they would bless their efforts to start a congregation in their own city. The leadership asked him to wait a year and pray with them about it—he agreed and a year later their group was sent out with a blessing. They named themselves Ma'ale Adumim Congregation, after the city they were committing to impact. That was 16 years ago.

In the early days, Avraham's house in Ma'ale Adumim was the meeting place. Every weekend much of the house furniture would be taken outside and stacked in the yard. The bedrooms would become the children's classes and plastic chairs would fill every available space.

Pastor's Kid

Shilo spent most of his life in this congregation. And despite the notorious reputation pastors' kids can have, he never hit a serious rebellion streak. It was always obvious to him who was King. Admittedly though, as a teenager, being a believer became less a priority for him. Yeshua was important, but so were his friends and the life he wanted to live.

Around the age of fifteen Shilo met Sarah in one of the summer youth camps. She invited him to attend the weekly youth meetings at a House of Prayer in Jerusalem. He liked her a lot and was happy to find an excuse to be around her.

In one of those meetings, a youth leader spoke about Yeshua's parable of the wide and narrow paths. "I realized as the guy was speaking, that the wide and narrow paths weren't about everyone in the world. It was only talking about people who bothered to even try and be on a path at all—people who thought they were believers. I looked at my life and thought to myself, if the path is narrow, it can't be an easy path. Sacrifices must be made to walk on it—and I'm not really sacrificing anything to follow Yeshua. From that moment on, I changed how I lived."

Worship Leader

Shilo's journey in music began at the age of six. Upon expressing an interest in the instrument, his mother bought a piano and was unwavering in her demands that he practice every day. He hated it then but thanks her now as it opened such a vast world of creativity for him.

Shilo wrote his first worship song at the age of 13 and was leading worship in his father's congregation and in a house of prayer in Jerusalem by the age of 15. "At first I led worship because it was fun," Shilo told me. "But by the time I went in for my mandatory army duty I knew music and worship would play a significant role in my calling."

Still, the army consumed everything, so for the next 3 years of Shilo's life, everything was put on hold. Well, mostly everything. He did manage to squeeze in leading worship when he was allowed to go home for the weekends. And with his parents' blessing, he also managed to squeeze in getting married to his beloved Sarah.

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Shilo, Sarah and the leadership team pray before the Shabbat service

Upon finishing the army, Shilo already had a high-tech job offer. The contract was already written and he had spent the last year of his service training for the position. However, just a few weeks before the work contract was supposed to be signed, Shilo began hearing in prayer the name of the house of prayer where he had lead worship as a teen. “I’d never told anyone that I’d like to be on staff at a house of prayer because I had never wanted to. I wanted to work as a computer programmer,” Shilo explained. “But, when the head of the house of prayer called me to ask if I wanted to serve on staff, I knew it was the Lord confirming what He had been telling me.

“My friend who had invested a year in training me was beside himself when I told him of my change of plans. I apologized

profusely and explained I had to follow what the Lord was telling me. Inside, I was wrestling, though, because I really enjoyed the hi-tech world and as an Israeli, playing the guitar and singing songs didn’t really feel like a legit job to me—for sure the difference in pay checks would be notable.

“Two years later that same friend called me out of the blue and offered me the same job with better terms and the option of working from home when I had free time. It was like the Lord saw I had given up something I loved for Him and He, in turn, gave me the ability to do both.”

Outgrowing Home

As the number of Ma’ale Adumim congregants grew too large for Avraham’s home, they moved to a field with sparsely planted trees—which only an Israeli would

look at and think to call a “forest.” Within several months, however, the summer heat became too intense for outside services. They would need to get creative since renting a meeting hall was too pricey.

In the end, the only place they found within their budget was a cave on the edge of an archaeological park near the Dead Sea that dated back to the time of Yeshua. They got along great with the park authorities, but it wouldn’t take long for the younger families to express how difficult it was for them to try to engage in a service while watching their kids at an archaeological site. Finding a new place to meet was an immediate need.

One night as Shilo’s mother prayed about the situation, she heard the word “bowling.” The next day, as she drove around with



During Shilo's army service, Maoz recorded a music video for one of his songs

a friend in search of potential meeting places, they drove by a place with a big “Bowling” sign outside. With the word fresh in her heart, they went in to take a look. There was, in fact, a bowling alley open for business, and the floor below was available for rent! Of course, the owner “happened” to be in, so they were able to check out the place (which was a recently closed-down nightclub). The owner was a gem of a person and gave them a very reasonable price for the size of the place.

It all seemed so perfect until they talked to their accountant, who promptly explained to them that they didn't have the budget to rent a place like that. They were not a congregation funded from the outside. They existed from the tithes and offerings of their 80+ congregants. Still, the leadership felt united in their confidence that this was the place God had for them and signed the lease. From the very first month they moved in, the congregation's giving doubled to cover the rent. That was nine years ago.

Beyond the City

“The first time I ever left Israel for a ministry trip was with Maoz when they took a group of Israelis to the MJAA Conference in Pennsylvania.” Shilo explained. “I got special permission from the army to go for a couple of weeks and went as a part of Maoz' music delegation, we affectionately referred to as the *Band from the Land*. The name stuck.

“I had never been to the U.S., so the culture shock was a bit jarring, but the amount of food I encountered was overwhelming. Overall, the experience was amazing and opened my eyes to the blessing we Israelis can be to the world. The response to the “Band from the Land” was so positive that upon returning to Israel, Maoz recorded a *Band from the Land* album. Two of my songs were recorded during that time.

“The first time I went overseas on my own to minister in worship was also Maoz. One of their partners from Singapore



Shilo recording his second album in the FoA studio as the nation sat in lockdown

wanted to put on a conference and asked them to recommend a worship leader from Israel. They recommended me and I went. It was my first time in the big world ministering on my own with Sarah and I was surprised how doable this was. With that glass ceiling shattered, I began to travel regularly and lead worship.

“A few years into this, one of our congregants came to me and said, ‘You have a lot of great songs! You need to record them.’ I told her lots of people have songs, but that did not necessarily mean they should record them. She encouraged me further and even offered to cover the costs, and so I agreed to look into it.

“Avi Perrodin, who had worked on the *Band from the Land* project, agreed to produce my album and

recommended we record at Maoz' *Fellowship of Artists* studio in Jerusalem. I didn't know much about the *FoA* or their vision at the time, but I'd had a good history with Maoz, and their facilities were high quality, so it made sense.

"By late 2019 I had written enough new Hebrew worship songs for a second album and returned to the *FoA* studio to plan the details for a new recording. They had a few projects lined up for early 2020 so I planned to begin sometime in March.

"Then COVID hit, and everything went on lockdown. Everything, that is, except emergency crews, grocery stores—and (because of a technicality in the law) the *FoA* studio! So, while the nation sat at home during the first wave, Avi and I sat in the studio arranging and recording ten Hebrew worship songs and bringing in one musician at a time to record their parts.

"As we were finishing up the second project and things were opening back up again (a little!) I really started to appreciate the "Fellowship" part of the *Fellowship of Artists*. I learned more about their vision for Israeli worship and supporting local musicians and worship leaders. They weren't just a studio—they were building a community for talented believers from different ministries and congregations who could not just collaborate together, but also build each other up in the Lord."

A House to Meet, A House to Pray

Ma'ale Adumim is a city in the very desert where Isaiah described a voice crying out in

the wilderness—prepare the way of the Lord. This desert has a long and beautiful history of people who cried out to God and were answered by the Maker Himself. King David, Elijah, John the Baptist and even Yeshua are just some of the voices that rang across the rocky hills of this land. Even during the centuries of Israel's exile, monasteries sprung up in this very area as they, too, recognized the spiritual richness of Israel's desert land.

Sixteen years ago, Avraham played a role in providing a place for believers to congregate in Ma'ale Adumim. Now, after 13 years of participating in a house of prayer in Jerusalem, his son Shilo is playing his part in planting a house of prayer as a part of the MA Congregation—where many voices will cry out in the desert.

Over the years, this congregation has not only grown in numbers, but has also grown in influence within the community. Many unbelievers view them as good people (an accomplishment considering the stereotypes most Israelis have about Jewish believers) allowing them to shine the light of Yeshua and help those who are struggling around them.

About a year ago when COVID was changing the way everyone did worship services and Israelis sat in lockdown for months, the congregation's leadership wrestled with the issue of paying rent for a building they could not use. Moving out would save money in the short term but when things opened again, their congregation would be homeless. The conclusion was unanimous. It was time to buy. The need for a place to meet

would not go away and this place had proved to be good for their people. Ultimately, purchasing the meeting hall would solidify their congregation's place in the city.

The owner of the building (who also recognizes the positive influence the congregation has had on the area) agreed to sell the property to them below market value so long as they could make a down payment by December 2021.

They signed an intent to buy and a few months later when things began to open up, real estate prices for everything in the area skyrocketed. The reason?

Design City, an ambitious architectural and technological development inspired by desert cities like Dubai—was being built up within view of their neighborhood.

Only God could have known nine years ago to direct Avraham and the MA Congregation to plant their feet in an obscure location that is now a stone's throw away from an area that will become a cultural, fashion and commerce hub for all of Israel. One can only wonder what He has in store for this new development. What is for sure—His people are already being stationed there to do their part in making Israel a land of the Presence again. ■

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The Birth of Tiferet Yeshua

The Maoz Center in Ramat Hasharon where Tiferet Yeshua was birthed

HOW IT ALL BEGAN - PART 10

By Shira Sorko-Ram

On the eve of Israel’s New Year 5756, known in the Bible as the Feast of Trumpets, the Jewish State declared a full year¹ of celebrations for the anniversary of the crowning of King David when he marched into Jerusalem and made it Israel’s capital.²

Israel’s archeologists and rabbis concluded that Jerusalem became Israel’s capital in the year 1004 B.C. Therefore, the year 1996 A.D. of the Gregorian calendar would mark Jerusalem’s 3000th anniversary as the capital of the Kingdom of Israel.

Even more astounding for Messianic Jews, this would also be the 2,000th anniversary of Yeshua’s birth according

to the Gregorian calendar.³ Many scholars agree that Yeshua the Messiah was born in 4 B.C. because Herod the Great (who killed the babies in Bethlehem) died in the year 4 B.C. So the year of 1996, also marked Yeshua’s 2,000th birthday!

Ari and I had been wrestling with the idea that God was wanting us to plant a congregation—again. We discussed what we felt with our ministry partners, Arni and Yonit Klein, and they were all in.

So, as our nation celebrated this historic moment, our small group of believers gathered to celebrate our first service together a few miles north of Tel Aviv. We

Commemorative coin celebrating 3000 years since Jerusalem first became Israel’s capital



[1] Officially, the celebration lasted a full 16 months—the Hebrew year 5756 was September to September and 1996 lasted January through December.

[2] David, son of Jesse, had been anointed seven years earlier in Hebron, but now he was crowned King of Jerusalem and all twelve tribes of Israel.

[3] Although this calculation could be off a year or two, for us it was an acceptable year to celebrate Yeshua’s second millennial birthday.

called it “HaSharon Congregation” as we lived on the Sharon plain near the Mediterranean Sea. We would eventually outgrow our home, move our meeting place to Tel Aviv and rename the congregation Tiferet Yeshua (The Glory of Yeshua).

Israel Celebrates by Itself

We were fortunate to attend Israel’s opening celebration—a spectacular and unprecedented sound-and-light show marking the start of the 3000th year anniversary. Throughout the coming months, over 100 conventions, including a number of Christian events, were scheduled to take place.

But Israel was celebrating alone. In an eerie rehearsal for the day when some nations will not go up to celebrate the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles) in Jerusalem,⁴ the nations in 1996 were boycotting these celebrations of its King who more than any man who ever lived, symbolized the coming Messiah. King David, who was born in Bethlehem and crowned King of Israel in Jerusalem, received the promise that his Son would one day rule the world from Jerusalem.

Israeli media noted not a single head of state attended the gala opening. In fact, none of the European ambassadors showed up. Neither did the American ambassador. The reason given was that focusing solely on the city’s Jewish history was inappropriate.

Strangely—and sadly—the opening celebrations of King David’s life and kingship were unpleasant reminders to the world that there is a God who still claims sovereignty over this world’s affairs. That He just might have His own plan for this city left the nations in discomfort.

Prophetically we felt this was going to be a very pivotal year when national choices of life and death would be made.

Yitzhak Rabin’s Decision to Divide Israel

Parallel to the national celebrations, just before sundown of that Rosh Hashanah (New Year), Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo II agreement with Yasser Arafat, setting the clock in motion to begin creating a Palestinian

Authority in Judea and Samaria which, in turn, would become an Islamic state. Its borders would reach to the edge of the Tel Aviv metroplex making Israel just 14 km wide in some areas. With a sinking feeling we read that Rabin declared, “The title deed to Israel’s land is not the Bible.”

Furthermore, upon ratification of the agreement, Rabin had immediately released 1,000 terrorists—600-700 of them convicted murderers. Rabin planned to release five times that many over the next couple of years. Of course, a fresh wave of terror attacks would follow.

I wrote in the September 1995 *Maoz Israel Report*: “Israel is shaken to her roots. People are waiting for the next bus bomb. Everyone is looking for a real answer to the tumult and havoc in the land. Yet nobody has an answer. Nobody can have the answer, except born again, filled with the Spirit, bold believers in the Messiah.”



ARMISTICE LINES

(1949-1967)

There was great consternation in the nation that Israel may be returning to her 1949 borders—mostly a small sliver of land along the coast, with a corridor leading up to Jerusalem.

October 19, 1994, 22 Israelis were murdered and 104 wounded in a suicide bombing. This was only one of many terrorist attacks that took place following Israel's signing of the Oslo Accords with Yasser Arafat.



Life Goes On, New Congregation Takes Root

It is remarkable how Israeli citizens continued to live their lives somewhat routinely in the midst of uncertainty and continuous terror attacks across our country. True, with bus bombings a possibility, we didn't particularly like stopping at a red light with a bus in the next lane. But God had called us to plant a congregation for such a time as this. And brand new young believers, and those who were interested but not yet committed—all needed a lot of attention. And there were not that many other believers around to serve as role models.

On Saturdays there were no buses, so Ari would travel for several hours to pick up members of our group from 20, 30, even 40 miles away. He would leave early in the morning, preach a sermon, spend a couple of hours with visitors and regulars, and often arrive home around midnight after a few rounds of dropping everyone off at their homes.

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think of the cold formal feeling of cathedrals. We wanted them to experience following Yeshua as a part of everyday normal life. Working out of our Maoz center, a large house, gave the new seekers the sense of home. It put people at ease. We also had a backyard where after services, we would have a potluck lunch, while endless conversations took place between our new believers as they explained the Good News to new seekers! Many have told us those years in the Maoz center were foundational to their own rebirth and growth in a relationship with Yeshua, our Messiah.

Also, we had the Mediterranean Sea 15 minutes away, where we brought our new believers to be immersed, symbolically being buried and resurrected with Yeshua. We found ourselves heading for that beach time and time again with new believers.

Fear Overtakes the Nation

As terrorist attacks of every kind only increased, the terms of the Oslo II accords weighed heavily on the Israeli consciousness. P.M. Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat agreed that the Palestinians would have 9,000 policemen. Without blinking an eye, Arafat then quickly put together a force of 30,000 armed men; most of its officers were former terrorist chieftains. It was rumored his aim was to transform his "police force" into a well-equipped Palestinian army of more than 50,000 men.

The editors of *The Jerusalem Post* summed it up this way:

For the first time, there will be a large PLO army on the outskirts of Israel's major population centers, and it will be in control of strategic areas which dominate Israel's heartland. To expect such an arrangement to bring anything but unrest, terrorism, and ultimately war, is to live in a world of make believe.⁵

Something for Nothing

What was Israel receiving in return? That Arafat would recognize Israel's right to exist and stop terrorism in the PLO controlled territory. Those were the same broken promises he had made under Oslo I while continuing to lead the terrorist attacks which killed hundreds of Israeli civilians.

The question being asked by so many was, why are Rabin and Shimon Peres (co-engineer of Oslo II) giving Israel's inheritance away for nothing? Charles Krauthammer, the well-known American conservative (and secular) Jewish journalist of *The Washington Post*, was able to cut through the fuzz:

“Even if you believe fervently that Israel must give up the West Bank, what kind of an absurd negotiation strategy is it to hand it over now, piece by piece, for nothing?”

Any negotiation novice would say to the Israelis: Hold everything. Begin your final status negotiations now. You want Jerusalem? Hold out for it—in return for, say, giving up the West Bank.

But if you have already given up the West Bank by the time the Jerusalem negotiations arrive, the only thing you will have to offer on Jerusalem will be half of Jerusalem—the half the Palestinians claim, the half so sacred and central to Jews. And what will you have to offer when the Palestinians demand the return of, say, two million Palestinian refugees? A counteroffer of one million?”⁶

Even U.S. Senator Jesse Helms and Congressman Benjamin Gilman tried to “save Israel from itself!”

In both houses, they proposed to limit and restrict American aid to the Palestinian Authority unless Arafat kept his word. Unbelievably, Israel did nothing to encourage this proposal.

It was only a matter of time when Arafat would be demanding the ancient city of Jerusalem including the Western Wall, the last remnant of Solomon's Temple. Just as the Bible says in Zechariah 12:3: *“It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples...and all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it.”*

The Body Rises Up: Intercessory Prayer for the Nation

In an unprecedented show of unity among Israel's small Messianic community, sixteen congregations had recently come together near the banks of the Yarkon River (near Tel Aviv). The eucalyptus trees above us were gigantic and majestic, giving us shade from the still-humid heat of the Mediterranean air.

A large crowd of Messianic Jews had already gathered, and busloads continued to pull up and discharge their passengers—Sephardic, Ashkenazi and Ethiopian Jewish believers. The 600-700 adults who came meant business. Eliahu Ben Haim of Intercessors for Israel, a prayer ministry in Jerusalem, sounded the call for the congregations to come together for a time of fasting and humbling ourselves, crying out to God for the sins of our nation.

With our congregation just one week old, we came on the Sabbath during the ten Days of Awe, between the Feast of Trumpets and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.⁷

One of the Messianic leaders in Jerusalem, Reuven Berger, gave a call which echoed the cries of our prophets of old:



The beach was just 10 minutes from the Maoz center so we would often take new believers to be immersed in the Mediterranean Sea.



Left to right: PLO leader Yasser Arafat, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin and FM Shimon Peres

hungry for literature that the teams ran out of every single piece of printed materials they had—Bibles, books and tracts.

One of our team who has participated in many such campaigns around the world said, “Except for one meeting in the Ukraine, I have never seen teenagers so open and hungry for the Gospel.”

A Dream: The Train Wreck

On a national scale, however, Rabin’s plans to divide Israel continued. In mid-October, as I

prepared the November *Maoz Israel Report*, I recorded I had never before felt such sadness for the inevitable outcome of the Oslo I and II Accords. After much pondering of the direction our nation was going, I went to bed and had a dream.

We were looking at a terrible train wreck. The many passenger cars lay at different angles, fallen off the track. We went to look inside the train, and we were stunned to find the cars full of Israeli soldiers, all shackled to their seats. When the accident occurred, they could not get out. They were dead, and their flesh picked clean. Yet somehow one could still recognize their pained, resigned features.

I began to count the number of rows of seats. There were sixty-six seats in each car. On each row were six seats—three on each side of the aisle. I began to weep uncontrollably, until I awoke.

Two weeks later it was November 4, 1995. At 9:30 p.m. we received the news. Prime Minister Rabin has been shot. At 11:02 p.m. the announcement was made: Rabin was dead. ●

He makes nations great, and destroys them; He enlarges nations, and disperses them. He deprives the leaders of the earth of their reason;
(Job 12:23-24)

Then we worshiped and beseeched the Lord God to have mercy on our nation’s government leaders, on our people and on ourselves, the Body of Messiah. Even though there were various political perspectives represented in the crowd, all agreed that our nation in its godlessness, had lost its way. We had come to confess our sins and the sins of our people, as the prophet Daniel had done.

Our time ended with corporate prayer for evangelism teams going out to a heavy metal rock concert that evening, to witness to the people in line for tickets. The report that came back is that many teenagers asked for prayer from the team and one young man accepted the Lord on the spot. The young people were so

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To be continued in the January 2022 Issue...

[4] Zechariah 14:17

[5] J.P. Sept. 27, 1995

[6] October 6, 1995

[7] September 30, 1995



November 2021

Shalom from Jerusalem!

Well, now you have read it...the beginnings of one of the first Hebrew-only speaking congregations in Israel...**and NOW – another Messianic Jewish community laboring to drive a permanent stake in the Land!**

We desire to be involved in this “next step” for Ma’ale Adumim Congregation. Owning property in Israel as Messianic believers falls right in line with our core vision and values to **make believers STRONG in Israel.**

We invite you to **GIVE** to make owning this building a reality for this congregation. **It is a wonderful opportunity to bless them, bless their community, and be a light in the darkness.**

Shilo and his father are good soil. Their congregation is solid. Their impact is already measurable. And the property is already worth more than it was when they signed for it!

But the downpayment deadline is less than 60 days away! To keep their current price of \$750,000 for the entire property, they will have to pay \$300,000 before the clock strikes midnight December 31, 2021. **That’s a mere 300 people giving \$1,000!**

We can do this! This month, along with your regular gift to Maoz, include a gift for this building! It is an investment in the Kingdom. **And 100% of your gift** will go to help this congregation **secure their new building—that’s Kingdom building!**

THANK YOU for your generosity, your faithfulness, and your vision, as you partner alongside us to **make believers STRONG in Israel!**

Blessings and Shalom,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kobi and Shani Ferguson".

Kobi and Shani Ferguson



JOIN OTHERS AROUND THE WORLD



...AND LEAVE A LEGACY *of* LOVE

We invite you to leave a legacy of outreach to the Jewish people for ages to come, in this simple but profoundly important way—and experience the blessing of God as you bless Israel!

By establishing a strategic will or estate plan:

- You can provide for your family, even after you die
- You can have the joy of knowing you are making a difference for eternity, and
- You can leave a legacy of love for God's chosen people.

WE CAN HELP!

Call any of our international offices to get more information on how we can help you with ways to give beyond your lifetime.

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