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REPORT

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Local Arabs in Israel gather in a cafe with smoke flavored tobacco in Nargillas affectionately referred to as hubbly-bubbly.

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ARABS MAKE THE BEST GENTILES

By Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson

“**Y**ou are the one who brought these green books?” asked Mohammed, a Sheikh in one of the Arab villages east of Jerusalem. A little nervous, Rotem confirmed it was true. Rotem (not his real name), a good friend of ours and co-laborer in the work of the Gospel, had

been discipling a few Arabs in the village. He had returned again and entered “the shack” where local men gather to smoke their nargillas. One of his new disciples had given the green New Testament to his father, who was a Sheikh (elder) in the Muslim community.

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“My son gave this to me,” the Sheikh continued, “and I have been reading the life of Isa (Yeshua). We want to know more. Come.” The man led Rotem and his companion, Alon, into his house and spread out a feast for them and his large family.

Seeing what had just happened, the bearded man walked up and sat next to Rotem. “When I was 19 years old,” he began, “something came in me. Ever since then I walk around angry and filled with rage and have nightmares.

“When I was younger, I saw a vision of Isa, and my wife saw a vision, too, before I knew her. She saw Isa dancing in the sky.” Rotem and Alon told the whole story of Yeshua’s life and even acted out parts of the story. In the end, Rotem asked the Sheikh, “Would you like to pray?” The Sheikh agreed, and they prayed together. Suddenly the man jumped up and declared, “I feel like a huge weight has been lifted off me! You said Isa does miracles. I have pain in my knee, can you pray?”

They prayed, and the pain left instantly. Then Rotem and Alon prayed for two other ailments that were instantly healed. While all this was going on, Rotem noticed a bearded man in traditional Arab garb at the table. “ Hamas,” someone whispered. The man, they explained, was a radical Muslim who searched out nominal Muslims and radicalized them.

Seeing what had just happened, the bearded man walked up and sat next to Rotem. “When I was 19 years old,” he began, “something came in me. Ever since then I walk around angry and filled with rage and have nightmares. I believe you two can help me.” It wasn’t what Rotem expected to hear from the man, but he figured he’d better be able to “help.”

They prayed for him in Yeshua’s name, and the man suddenly turned to them. He

jumped up with the biggest smile and said, “I felt the thing that has been holding my heart let go and go out of my head!” He then grabbed Rotem and Alon and began to dance. Enjoying the celebratory mood, one of the men in the shack turned on a little boom box in the corner and they began to dance in a circle to Middle Eastern rhythms.

Is This Real?

The sight was so incredible that Rotem thought to himself, “I’m so glad Alon is here with me, or no one would believe me if I described what’s happening”

“Who here would like to receive Yeshua as their Lord?” Rotem asked. Five men instantly raised their hands including the Sheikh and the Hamas member. Rotem warned them, “You know you will be called *mabashar* (missionary) now.” They smiled, prayed and danced some more. Several other men chimed in, “We are interested, but we want to know more first.”

This testimony of the Hamas member struck me because, while the world runs around trying to deliver food and money to the Arab community, the real issue that should be addressed is that these people are being tormented by evil spirits and used as pawns in the greater war of the devil against God’s promises.

Delivering Arabs from Their Oppressor

Secular people who have been involved in thwarting terrorist attacks have testified, “Looking into their eyes was like looking at the devil himself.” The outcry of Christians who love Arabs should be, “God, deliver the Arab people from their occupier and tormentor, the devil.” This man wanted to be free, but his desire was as attainable as a paralyzed man’s attempt to get a pile of scorpions off his back. Only God could rescue him!

So what is this? Salvation among the Arabs? What does this have to do with Jews?



Daily Life in a Palestinian city

Credit: Shutterstock

Some people think Paul got sick of the Jews rejecting Yeshua and left them for the Gentiles. But in reality, Paul was led to change his tactics.

In Romans 9-11, he writes of his continued burden for the salvation of Israel, and notes, *"I am saying all this especially for you Gentiles. God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles. I stress this, for I want somehow to make the people of Israel jealous of what you Gentiles have, so I might save some of them."* (Romans 11:13-14)

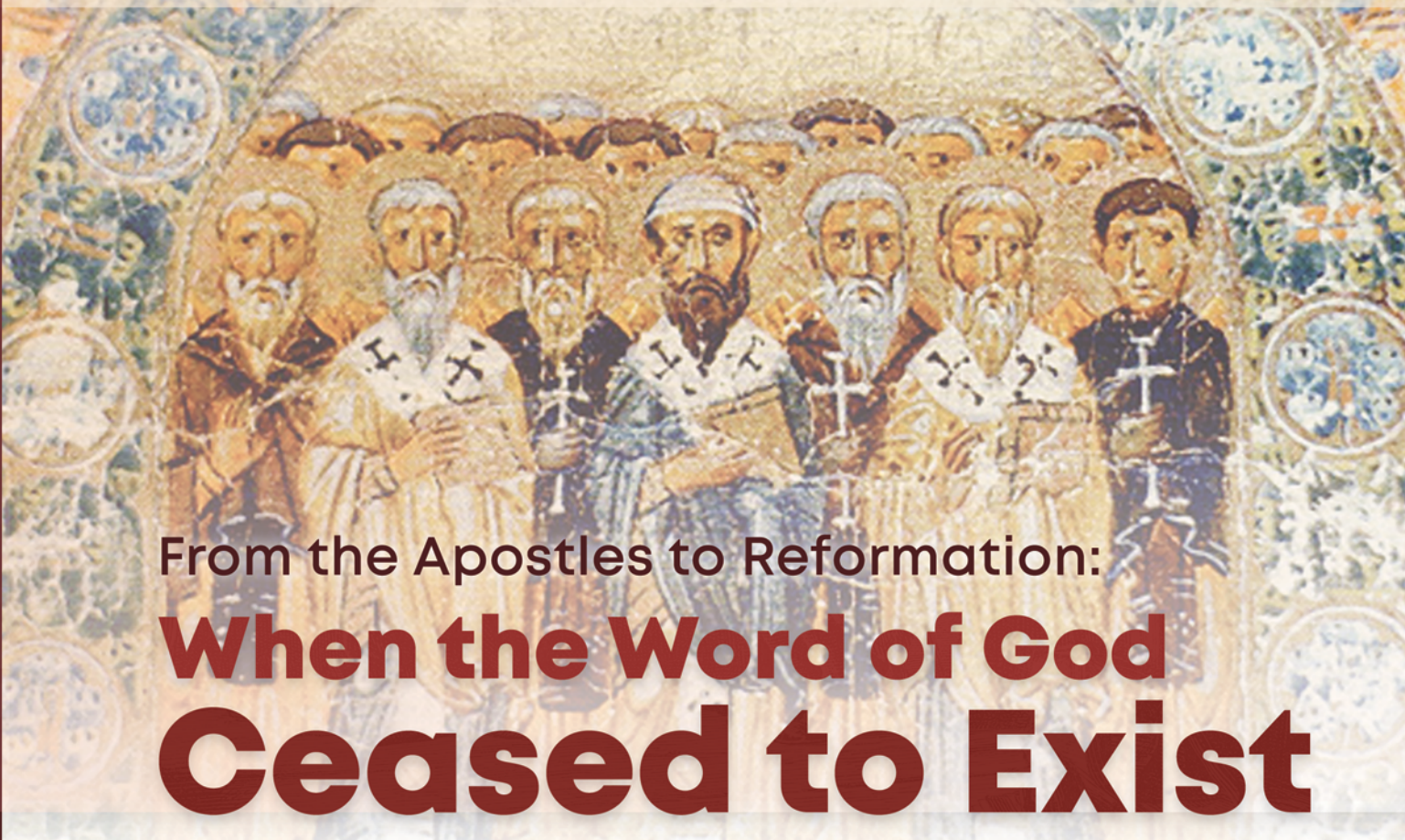
This certainly does not mean the salvation of "non-Jews" is any less precious to the heart of God than Jews. Just as Jewish believers are glad to have the Messiah come from their midst for the salvation of the world, so Gentile believers should rejoice that their union with God will stimulate the return of Israel to God.

Siding with Islam

It is a shame that some Christians come over here to Israel and "side" with Arabs against Jews as they offer Arabs the Gospel. Ironically, their adamant support is in fact not siding with the Arab people; it is siding with Islam – the greatest source of Arab oppression worldwide.

There is no greater testimony to the Jewish people of the power of God through Yeshua than seeing men full of hatred towards the Jewish people – come to accept the Jewish Messiah and then embrace the Jewish people as their older brother.

And so, as God said He would save the Gentiles to make the Jews jealous of the Gentiles' relationship with the God of Israel – there are in fact, no better Gentiles for the job than the Arab people! ■



From the Apostles to Reformation: When the Word of God Ceased to Exist

By Shira Sorko-Ram

PART III

For 40 days after his death and resurrection, Yeshua the Messiah encouraged, energized and taught those closest to Him and then left for heaven. Exactly 10 days later on the Jewish holiday of Shavuot (Pentecost), Yeshua sent the Holy Spirit in power to a gathering of 120 apostles and close associates of Yeshua who met on the second floor of someone's house.

That day 3,000 Jews believed in Yeshua and received salvation. The thousands multiplied as the disciples crisscrossed the land of Israel, bringing the Good News to their countrymen everywhere.

Then a vision of all kinds of non-kosher animals appeared to Peter adding a new component,

foretold by the prophets, but hidden from the Jewish people until that moment. Gentiles were no longer to be considered non-kosher. Each individual is created in the image of God and is valuable to God.

After all, the prophets had foreseen that Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles. And before Yeshua ascended into heaven, He commanded His disciples to bring the Gospel to "every person in all the world."

Soon Paul, whose Hebrew name was Shaul, became the leader of the Jewish evangelists commissioned by God to reach the non-Jews. He began his ministry in Antioch, where Gentile believers were first called Christians.

Apostles Spread Out to Evangelize with The Old Testament Scrolls

Congregations of Jews and of Gentiles began to be planted around the known world. It is thought that Andrew went to Greece and Asia Minor. Tradition says Philip went to Hierapolis (Turkey) and archeologists recently claim they have found his tomb! Thomas was martyred in Persia or India. Judah is said to have evangelized in Armenia, Syria and Persia, where he, too, was martyred. Paul worked day and night for his Master, until he was most likely beheaded (usual punishment for a Roman citizen) in Rome around the time Peter was crucified.



The apostles had scrolls of the Old Testament in Greek as their source of Scripture. And with their personal first or second-hand witness of the risen Messiah, they were seeing growing crowds of pagans receive everlasting life.

Realizing how important the written word was for the growth of believers in Yeshua, the apostles created 27 books, all in Greek, to add to the Old Testament. This collection would come to be known as the books of the New Covenant – or New Testament. Though few people could read, they received the Word of God through their leaders in their house meetings, and the Body of believers grew.

Community Of Jewish Believers Disappears

For the first 40 years, the number of Yeshua's Jewish followers in Judea, Samaria and Galilee, also grew, despite strong opposition of the Pharisees. But then, in 70 AD the Temple, Jerusalem, and for all practical purposes, the entire land of Israel was destroyed. Again the Jewish people were exiled, this time by the Roman Legions.

Before that horrific event, the Jewish followers of Yeshua fled to Petra,

according to a tradition cited by fourth century Christian historian, Eusebius. Whatever may have happened, the Jewish followers of Yeshua as a community disappeared.

Throughout the centuries, there would always be a remnant of Jews who followed Yeshua. Nevertheless, the commandment to make disciples would now almost completely be carried out by the growing Gentile Christian community. This absence of Jewish presence in spreading the Gospel would slowly result in the absence of their role in church doctrine.

Godly Early Fathers Lead The Growing Church

There are well-known fathers among the early Christians who faithfully shepherded the flocks of new Christians. Men of faith like Clement of Rome and Polycarp of Smyrna – the latter, is recorded to have been a disciple of the Apostle John.

By the middle of the second century, the original disciples to the second

Christian leaders were martyred – beheaded, crucified, burned or eaten alive by wild animals.

At times, whole communities were murdered. Even with all the persecution, the Church grew. By the year 300, Christians accounted for approximately 10% of the Roman population – some six million Christians, according to estimates.

From all reports, the great majority of Christians during the first 200 years were the real thing – including those who were later called popes



Roman Emperor Nero

Credit: Getty

At times, whole communities were murdered. Even with all the persecution, the Church grew.

and even third generation were gone. As the Gospel spread, the need arose for a version of the entire Bible in Latin (not just Greek) for the western regions of the empire.

Persecution of Early Christians

Beginning in 64 AD, severe persecution began with Emperor Nero, and continued off and on with terrible atrocities against church leaders and Christians until 311 AD. Many of the

and bishops. (It appears that leaders of Christian communities were called presbyters or bishops until somewhere around the middle of the second century, when the title “pope” in Rome was designated retroactively.)

Ancient Fragments Show Few Variations

During this time, countless numbers of scribes were copying the Word of God in Greek and Latin by hand, as the scrolls

were distributed and shared from church to church. Then, around 320, the codex book form replaced the roll or scroll, making it easier to read and transport. The Word of God was circulating freely among believers.

There exist today 5,800 early copies and fragments in Greek, the original language. There are also another 8,000 in Latin. Moreover, there were scholars who translated the Bible into a few other languages, of which thousands of fragments still remain. Most errors of these *early* manuscripts were misspellings and copy errors. Only one to two percent of the differences can be seen as real differences, and none of them have any impact on doctrine.



Roman
Emperor
Constantine

Emperor Becomes a Christian

In the fourth century, everything changed. Christians saw the year 313 as a miracle year for the growing Gentile Church. The Emperor Constantine had a vision that transformed his life. Christianity became the dominant religion under the Emperor of the

Roman Empire. Ten years later, he declared it the state religion. Persecution came to a halt.

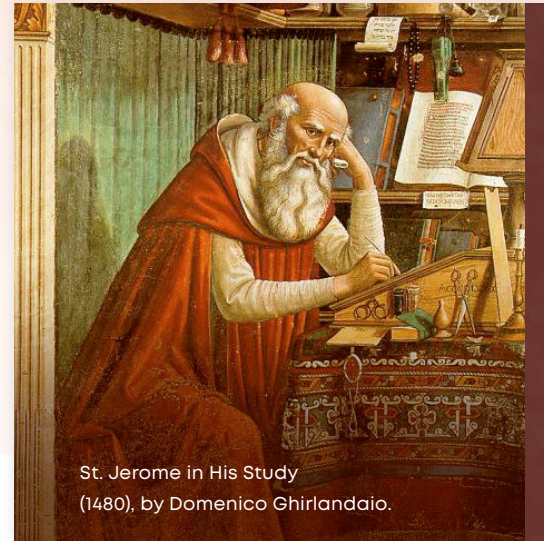
Indeed, Constantine commissioned the historian Eusebius to deliver fifty Bibles to one church in Constantinople. He was serious about the Bible. Producing New Testaments and Bibles began in earnest – even though, we must remember, copying an entire Bible was still a huge undertaking.

However, with this copying and translation activity over a few hundred years, confusing variations of Scripture texts *in Latin* began to circulate throughout the early church. The great fifth century scholar, Jerome, who had a passion to get the pure and accurate Word of God into the hands of the people wrote, “*Ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Christ.*”

Jerome was commissioned by the pope to translate an official definitive Latin version, using the earliest copies. In his monastery in Bethlehem, he authored what is called the Vulgate, finished in 405. This became the official Bible used in Catholic churches to this day.

The work of copying the Scriptures continued to be undertaken in earnest in the monasteries of the early Middle Ages. Several thousand monasteries were established across Europe, and for many of the monks, making copies of the Scriptures was their chief task. They became the true guardians of the text and produced literally thousands of magnificent Bibles. Teams of scribes and artists worked with parchment to produce incredibly beautiful works of art. A scribe taking dictation might use as many as 80 quills a day, and artists embellished the work with intricate designs and illustrations.

Each Bible was made of sheep’s hide. It took 250 sheep and thousands of hours to make one Bible. In fact, a Catholic article states each Bible would be worth about \$150,000 in today’s economy. Churches actually chained their Latin Bibles to tables so they would not be stolen.



St. Jerome in His Study
(1480), by Domenico Ghirlandaio.

Western Roman Empire Collapses

Roman Emperor Constantine’s support had given the Church new strength. But when he moved his capital from Rome to Byzantium (which he renamed Constantinople in his honor) this move created a power vacuum in Rome that was quickly filled by a formidable line of popes who created a kind of “papal monarchy.” And then, in 476 AD, the Roman Empire in the west completely collapsed from a Barbarian invasion.

The popes and the bishops appropriated not only religious but also secular control over much of the old Roman world – with absolute governmental power to levy taxes, call up armies, make laws, and punish citizens who violated its laws.

As the Roman Empire dissolved, multiple regional languages developed. Latin became a dead language. This, of course, meant that huge populations no longer had access to the Scriptures in a language they could understand.

For 1,000 years, Christians were not allowed to read a Bible in their mother tongue.

Nevertheless, the Catholic Church continued to shepherd their flocks by conducting the Mass in unintelligible Latin or Greek.

Church Liturgy Replaces The Bible

The Church began creating its own literature of its traditions and practices, and then placed it on the same level of authority as the Bible itself. (This is exactly what the leading rabbis did when recording their traditions and interpretations of the Bible called the Talmud and Gemara. They declared that these rabbinical books have the same authority as the Bible.)

Gradually, the doctrinal teachings of the Church replaced the Bible. Since most people couldn't read or write, the clergy was free to teach the Church's version of religion and practices, no matter how unbiblical they became. Encapsulated Bible and traditional stories were passed down in oral form that could be easily memorized. Stained glass window pictures of the saints took the place of the Bible.

It became obvious to the popes in Rome that their constituents

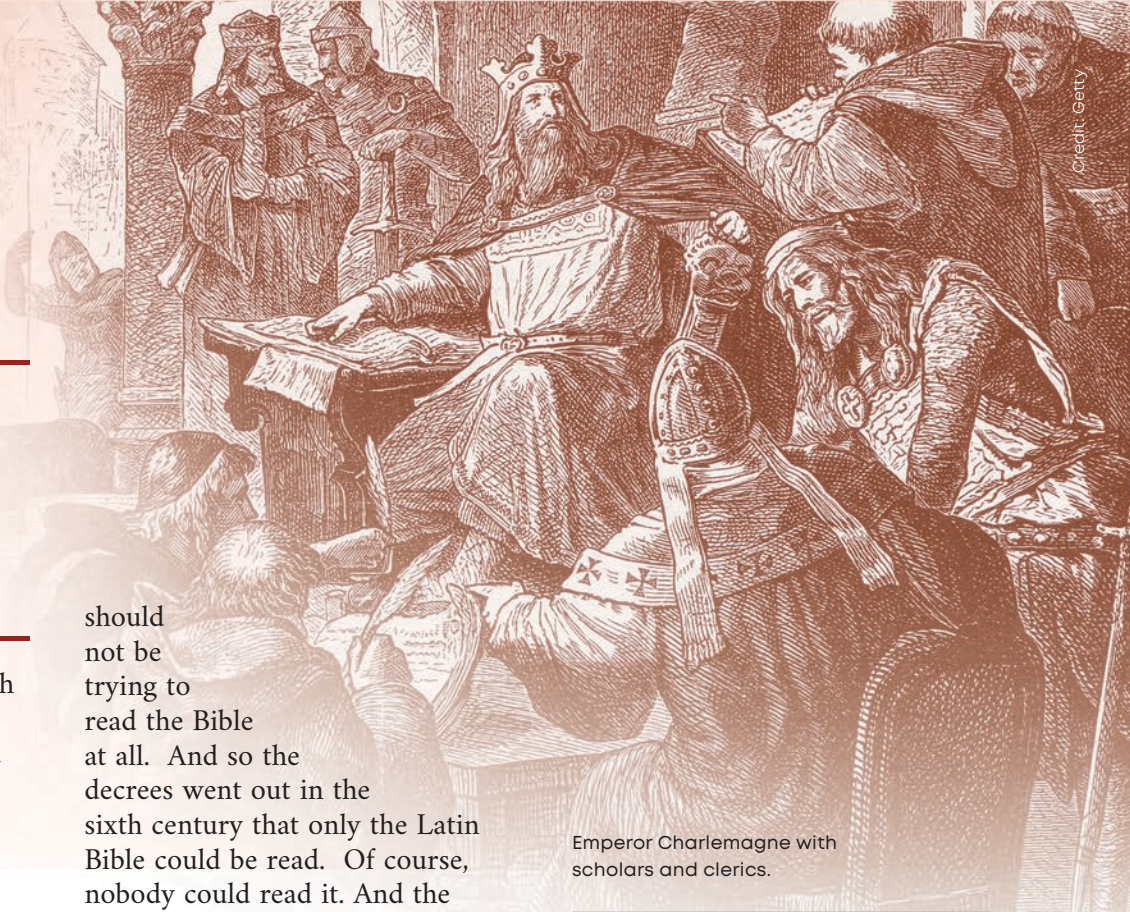
should not be trying to read the Bible at all. And so the decrees went out in the sixth century that only the Latin Bible could be read. Of course, nobody could read it. And the Church made sure they wouldn't read it in any other language. The pope and his bishops forbade the translation of the Bible into any of the vernacular languages. The light on the hilltop went dark.

The Dark Ages

For 1,000 years, Christians were not allowed to read a Bible in their mother tongue.

This meant there were millions of Christians who had no direct access to the Bible.

But it was even worse than that. Jerome's official Latin version (the Vulgate) had become corrupted with copiers inserting Catholic doctrine throughout the Scriptures they were copying. In the ninth century, Emperor Charlemagne made a serious and extensive attempt to get the best scholars to return the Vulgate to its original form. But his efforts would not find wide distribution.



Emperor Charlemagne with scholars and clerics.

As centuries went by, scholars were unable to discern the original Bible Scriptures from the interwoven Catholic teachings and interpretations.

Bible Plus

By the early fourteenth century, the condition of Jerome's Vulgate was deplorable with all its added notes. Yet only a few of the most elite scholars were aware of it. It didn't really matter as, has been said, the majority of lay citizens couldn't understand it anyway. Just to make sure, in the thirteenth century, the pope proclaimed it illegal for lay members to even own a Bible in any other language, much less read one.

Christianity Becomes Pagan

Alongside the extreme lack of the Word of God among Christians, was another debilitating and



Painting of Ignatius of Antioch from the Menologion of Basil II (c. 1000 AD)

destructive force that had been at work for centuries. When Constantine declared the Roman Empire a Christian state, millions of pagans joined the Church bringing their pagan gods and traditions with them.

Since millions of Catholic Christians had no way of knowing what the pure Word of God said, the popes and their bishops decided for them. Anti-Semitism was one of the earliest signs of anti-Bible doctrines that infiltrated and impregnated the Catholic Church.

The Scriptures had promised Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse.” As the church gained power, it became standard practice to publicly curse the Jews:

John Chrysostom in the late fourth century delivered eight sermons of extreme violence. To quote him: “the synagogue is not only a brothel and a theater; it is also a den of robbers and a lodging for wild beasts. No Jew adores God... Jews are possessed by the devil, their debauchery and drunkenness gives them the manners of the pig...”

Augustine in his “Sermon against the Jews” declared that “though the [Jews] deserved the most severe punishment for having put Jesus to death, God kept them alive to be witnesses to the truth of Christianity.”

Even Jerome who translated the Vulgate Bible described the Jews as “...serpents, wearing the image of Judas, their psalms and prayers are the braying of donkeys.”

That hatred of the Jewish people poisoned the faith of the early church. Sin and pride brought not only doctrinal error, but anti-Biblical behavior. In a sentence, the Catholic Church disintegrated into heresy and corruption.

Martyrs, once loved by their contemporaries, now became the object of veneration and worship. The sheep left off praying to God and turned to praying to dead saints.

Hypocrisy from the top

Although the papacy banned marriage among the clergy, the popes, bishops and the majority of priests openly displayed their mistresses, concubines,

wives, illegitimate children and homosexual orgies. They murdered, tortured and massacred their enemies. They created a hodgepodge of conflicting doctrines and ceremonies. Mary became the “Mother of God.” Statues and images of saints became an integral part of their worship. The Christians just changed the names of their erstwhile pagan gods to those of the saints.

Power and mammon corrupted the leadership. They learned to enrich their pockets by enticing the well-to-do and the poor to pay cash for their sins and the sins of their relatives, to be forgiven.

The popes sold ecclesiastical offices. Unqualified men purchased church offices, enriching the coffers of the feudal lord or king. Does that sound familiar? This is exactly the same practice that occurred during the late Maccabean period, when the wealthy Hellenistic Sadducees bought the offices of the High Priest and other important administrations.

No more evidence is needed to demonstrate that Gentiles could stray from the path just as the Jews did, as but for the grace of God, humanity always follows the same path towards power, greed and destruction.

The Dark Ages of ignorance and poverty and abuse enshrouded the people of the Middle Ages.

And the Word of God was hidden. ■

To be continued in the January 2020 Maoz Israel Report:
The Reformation, Resurrection Power and the Printing Press



IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA

Reaching out to Muslims and Ethnic Arab Christians

This year alone, we've worked significantly in 10 Muslim and ethnic Arab villages. Most people don't know that many Arabs who were born "Christian" have never actually heard the full gospel. And thus, they are just as lost as Arabs who are born Muslims.

We've ministered to special needs people, widows and poor families. We've also sponsored disabled children events and conducted Children's and Parenting Camps focusing on raising children, God's love and plans for them and how to communicate kindly with others. We're happy to share highlights of some of the events, as well as some personal testimonies. These are first hand testimonies from our Arab co-worker in the Lord who we shall call Jamal for security reasons. Maoz Israel supports Jamal's work as he is able to work in areas of the West Bank where Jews can't go.

Camps for Children

Camps that reach children are one of the most effective ways to bring a clear message of salvation to entire families. At our last camp, we had approximately 100 kids attending. The children heard the story of Jesus' resurrection, and we asked them to pray with us to follow Him. Many of these families have suffered greatly because of Islamic oppression. When parents see the love we give their children, they recognize we are of a different spirit than Islam.





Visiting Homes

Some of the neediest in the Arab villages can't come out to events, so we visit them in their homes. It is difficult for a woman in Arab culture to support herself and so we often reach out to widows. Aida (above) lost her husband and her sons. She said when her sons died, she died inside. So we prayed with her and gave her food. She told us we had come just as she had completely run out of food.

Another single mom, Amal, had a husband who was addicted to drugs. He paid for his drugs by selling them as well. He regularly raped his wife and beat her and their children. His drug abuse caused one of their children to be born mentally damaged. We helped her and also taught her about forgiveness so she could be free inside. There are too many stories like these, and very few options for the victims to get help. We continue to pray for miracles, resources and creative ideas to rescue these people from their difficult situations.

Training at Different Villages

We offer different training seminars for different villages. One of the training we did focused on parents with disabled children. We took time to let them share their stories about the suffering they have faced. Then we encouraged them to present their problems to God and trust God. This event opened doors for us to share the Gospel with leaders in the village who have never heard this rescue story of God's Son. We rejoice in knowing that when the leaders of a people are godly, the people will prosper!



Mobile Clinics

We brought a mobile clinic to two different villages with 12,000 inhabitants. These villages never had a visit from a Christian organization before. We brought specialized doctors along, a Neurologist, Dentist, Chiropractor, Pediatrician and a General Practitioner treating 200 patients. The leaders of the villages showed much gratitude towards the team because of their unique patience and compassion towards the people. These events help us build relationships with people in the community, share the love of God and pray with patients.



Dear Maoz Israel,

I'm so excited to share with you the testimony of Ibrahim (not his real name). He was a Muslim man from Hebron who had a serious kidney problem. As he also held a US passport, he received special permission to leave the Palestinian controlled city and fly to the US for surgery. When Ibrahim arrived in the US, he went to the hospital and did many tests to prepare for his surgery. He was told to go home until they received the results.

He left and went to eat at a restaurant, but began feeling ill because he had lost so much blood from the tests. He made it as far as the bathroom and passed out. When he woke he was in the hospital, but his wallet and passports had been stolen. He had no way to prove his identity and the police could not find the thief.

The hospital refused to treat Ibrahim's kidney condition until he could prove who he was by getting a new passport. Not only were his possessions gone, but now his life was in danger as he was being refused urgent treatment. Because he was Muslim the hospital told him to go to a local mosque and see if the sheik could help him.

Ibrahim visited the local mosque, but upon understanding his dilemma, the sheik had no interest in helping him.

Frustrated, Ibrahim went back to the hospital to tell them he could not get help. One of the nurses who was a Christian, called her friend, Mark, to see if this Muslim man could stay with him. Mark welcomed Ibrahim and cared for him.

A few days later Mark was attending his weekly Bible study and invited Ibrahim to join him. Ibrahim accepted, and during the meeting the believers there prayed for him. Ibrahim suddenly felt love like he'd never felt before. He received Yeshua as Lord and was baptized.

With his passport issue resolved, the hospital called him back for surgery. Before the surgery they ran a few more final tests.

The doctor came in with the test results confused and declared, "You are *NOT* the same man who was here before." Ibrahim was stunned and responded, "Yes, I am, and I have a serious kidney problem." The doctor argued back that new test results **showed NO kidney problem. It was a miracle. Ibrahim was completely healed.**

Ibrahim returned to Hebron a changed man. However, he was soon discovered by his family to be a Christian and his life was threatened. A Muslim becoming a Christian is an offense punishable by death. I was put in touch with Ibrahim and ministered to him until Ibrahim was able to escape. He now lives in hiding.

There are other stories like this one, equally as miraculous and exciting about the work the Lord is doing among the Arab people. However, I cannot often share them publicly as they could endanger new believers or the ones who are working with them. Anonymous as they may be, they benefit from the power of your prayers and the generosity of your supporters! So remember them when you go before the Lord, as revival among the Arabs would change everything.

With Deep Gratitude,
Your coworker in the Lord,
Jamal





While children in Palestinian controlled areas are being exploited by terrorist organizations, there are those of us fighting for the lives of these innocents. This past summer 150 kids between the ages of 6 and 12 participated in summer camps that taught them God has a better plan for them. Most of them are from Muslim families and some of the kids have special needs.

We ask you to join us in prayer that the seeds we planted in these children will take root and bring a harvest of souls into God's kingdom.



Prayer Line in Israel

Email your prayer request to prayer@maozisrael.org from anywhere in the world!