



Caspari Center NEWS

September 2012



One in Christ, Despite Everything

The third BridgeBuilders reconciliation conference was held in western Norway August 3–13, 2012. Twenty-nine young adults from Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Norway took part in the conference.

All believers living in the Holy Land face the realities of the conflict every day. Jewish believers, Arab believers, expatriate believers—we all need to relate to the various political and theological views regarding the Land and God's will for the peoples living here. And with no political solution in sight, it is difficult for believers from the different sides to find a common theological understanding of the conflict.

In this situation, the challenge of maintaining fellowship and unity among brothers and sisters in Christ is very difficult. And yet, as followers of Christ we are called to love our enemies and live at peace with all. Whether we like it or not, we are one with our fellow believers, and we need to find ways to express this unity, even in the difficult situation in the Middle East.

Many young Jewish and Arab believers have little or no contact with believers from the other side. Most only view "Israelis" or "Palestinians" through the stereotypes the conflict creates, and so the BridgeBuilders program exists to bring them together—not in order to solve the conflict, but in order to share fellowship, build friendships, listen to each other, learn each other's cultures and life stories, study the Word of God together, and pray and worship together. As they do these things, they are challenged to see how their common faith in Messiah Jesus binds them together, how this affects the way they relate to each other in the context of the conflict, and how they together can be witnesses for Christ and the unity only he can give in the midst of conflict.

The process of reconciliation is a long and difficult one, but one that has the power to change hearts and lives, as many of the participants have experienced.

"The only Israelis my own age that I have met have been soldiers," says Tania from Beit Jala. "And then I came to the conference and I realized that all the Israeli participants here have also served in the army. But here I got to know the people. I come from a pacifistic family and I had a hard time accepting that someone who believes in Jesus could be willing to serve in the army and bear arms. We talked a lot about this and I understand better now. I know that I love these brothers and sisters of mine, despite their being Israeli and having served in the army. They are wonderful people. We have really formed some deep friendships here."

Angelica from Jerusalem is a Messianic Jew and participated in the previous BridgeBuilders conference. This time she was one of the leaders. She, too, was very touched by what took place. "The participants have been so good at listening to each other and accepting each other's life stories, while at the same time challenging each other's views. For me, meeting one of the Palestinian participants who had hated Israeli soldiers so much was a powerful experience. At one point, he used to



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throw rocks at the soldiers. I discovered that this was at the same time I was one of the soldiers at the checkpoints. He had thrown rocks at my unit, perhaps even at me.

“I was really challenged and shocked by some of his stories about being harassed and humiliated by Israeli soldiers. He saw that I was listening to him and taking him seriously. And I felt that he listened to me and took me seriously. I thought I already had the ‘right’ attitudes to the conflict, but now realized I needed to reexamine them once more. It is a difficult thing, but it feels good. He was also really transformed by the time at the conference. He was part of my small group and we had a wonderful fellowship amongst us. We shared our views on the situation and how we view each other—and we could laugh and experience deep love for each other. BridgeBuilders is such an important work.”

The Caspari Center is one of six partnering organizations organizing the BridgeBuilders conference, including the Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway, the Palestinian Bible Society, Musalaha, and Grimstad Bible School. The conference takes place in two parts. The second part will be held in Jordan during Easter 2013. Read more about BridgeBuilders at www.bridgebuilders.no.

Soldiers and Stone Throwers

One of the Norwegian participants at BridgeBuilders, Andreas Masvie, will serve as a volunteer at Caspari Center this coming year. The following article contains some of his reflections on the conference and the work of reconciliation.



How can the deep-rooted conflict of the Middle East be resolved? Is it at all possible? Is a vision of lasting peace reachable, or merely a delusional dream?

The prospects seem rather dim for the outsider—an impression that was confirmed firmly by the young Jews and Arabs with whom I attended BridgeBuilders. And yet, despite the sense of hopelessness, these young Middle Easterners decided to leave the safety of home for the foreignness of the Norwegian wilderness, building relationships with members of the other side.

Many have reflected, and continue to reflect, upon how the conflict can and should be resolved. And a wide spectrum of opinions is indeed desirable. The Jewish author Amos Oz has produced, in addition to his beautiful fictional writings, several essays revolving around the topic of reconciliation. One of his proposals seems quite sensible: in order to attain lasting peace, Oz reasons, both parties must be willing to make painful compromises. Compromises regarding land and borders are central to the author's line of thinking.

Oz makes it sound so simple; why, then, is the conflict still alive? Fear and hatred, one can argue, prevent the parties from allowing compromise to end the conflict.

Overcoming this fear and hatred is a long-term process—one which may not be completed in our lifetime. And yet I believe we should nonetheless partake in it; it is our duty as believers. The first step is to love our enemies, one of the Palestinian participants told me. This does not imply a “yoffi-toffi, happy-clappy” embrace while difficult realities are being ignored. No, it rather implies that one has to let go of one's pride and ask for forgiveness—and be willing to forgive—in order to build a future together. It is important to keep in mind that forgiving is not the same as forgetting the past, but it does imply turning on to a new and common path.

It may sound overwhelmingly politically correct and dangerously naïve, but the ultimate goal is to change hearts on both sides. And such a change of hearts, with minds following, requires a handful of brave individuals to lead the way—and here I am convinced that believers can make a difference.

In the study of anthropology, much revolves around the central concept of identity. How do we perceive ourselves and how are we perceived by others? Our identities, some claim, are only truly expressed in encounter with “the Other.” In this encounter, we must define who we are and what we believe. And BridgeBuilders was in many ways a clash of identities. The Palestinians are influenced by the Arab honor code; the Jews are direct and upfront; the Norwegians are quiet and polite.



Human beings are, however, complex, and each comprises several distinct identities. The individual is a product of the interplay of each and every one of these identities. Nationality is for many—especially people caught in conflict—a predominant identity. Yet in this conflict, for a small minority on both sides, there exists a more dominant common identity: their identity in Christ. This is what brought the participants in BridgeBuilders to Norway, despite their suspicion, prejudice, and resentment. And this identity can give them the courage to lead the way, changing hearts one by one—until the day the Lord will cleanse us of all evil and grant us his peace.

Andreas Masvie

So, who are you really?

Just recently I spent a few weeks at Ulpan (Hebrew language school), reviving my spoken Hebrew. With the private teachers, I got plenty of practice—just as I had anticipated. But the most fascinating part of my studies were the conversations I had with my religious Jewish teachers after they found out that I'm an evangelical Christian working with Messianic Jews who believe in Yeshua the Messiah. I appreciated my teachers' sincere curiosity, their questions, and their heartfelt openness to listen to me and to share their own walk of faith. We could have concentrated only on grammar or conjugating verbs, but instead we were able to peek into each other's lives and get acquainted with different views.

Hannah, Caspari Center's summer volunteer from Britain, experienced something similar during her seven-week stay in Israel. She enjoyed her time at Caspari as well as the opportunity to explore the country and the culture.

As I had never been to Israel previously, I was unsure as to what I should expect. Torn between the readily-accepted British mentalities ranging from fanaticism to utter indifference or even hostility, I had prepared myself to be underwhelmed. In the first few days and weeks of living in Israel I found the atmosphere to be very stimulating, largely due to the incredible diversity of peoples and religions in Jerusalem. After, and even during, the initial culture shock, I came to take a great liking to the Israeli people and their culture. Although at first, I believe, the relative unreservedness can appear intimidating, I deeply appreciate the friendliness and openness that I have found amongst the people whilst living and working in Jerusalem. Israel is an important place to visit and I have found that it better enables one to remain mindful of Israel and the Jewish people having visited the land. Working in Jerusalem has enabled me to form a realistic picture of Israel, rejecting myths of hyper-spirituality but at the same time learning how to better pray for the peace of Israel and her people. I have appreciated and welcomed the chance to visit different congregations in Jerusalem and I have found it interesting and insightful to experience the spiritual life in Israel in a very tangible and real way.

In this newsletter, you can find reports on BridgeBuilders, Caspari Center's peace and reconciliation project for young Messianic Jews, Christian Arabs/Palestinians, and Christian Norwegians. The common denominator in all of these situations is to start by being open to the other side and daring to ask the question, "So, who are you really?"

Hanna Lindberg

media review ✂

Caspari Center publishes a weekly review of material from the Israeli press documenting attitudes toward Messianic Jews, the mission, and the Christian faith. To receive the Media Review free of charge by email, sign up on our website at www.caspari.com



Members of the Knesset React to New Testament

The Jerusalem Post, July 17, 19; **Yediot Ahronot**, July 18, 2012

According to *Yediot Ahronot* (July 18), "A very unusual 'ceremony' took place in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, the day before yesterday: MK Michael Ben-Ari (National Unity) tore to pieces the scripture sacred to Christians—the New Testament—in front of cameras. . . . While most MKs chose to ignore the Bibles in their mail boxes or return them to the sender, Ben-Ari chose to create a furor."

The Jerusalem Post (July 17) reported the background to the event: "Many MKs opened their mailboxes on Monday morning and were appalled to find a New Testament inside, sent to them by a Messianic organization. The Bible Society in Israel, a Messianic Judaism institution for research, publication and dissemination of holy books, sent a 'Book of Testaments,' which combines the Tanach and New Testament in one, leather-bound volume, published with references in Hebrew for the first time. While the sect incorporates elements of religious Jewish practice, it holds that Jesus is the Messiah. MK Tzipi Hotovely (Likud) sent a letter of complaint to Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin, writing that 'it cannot be that missionary materials can be distributed in the Knesset.' 'Texts that were used to persecute and harass [Jews] cannot be distributed through the front door of the State of Israel,' Hotovely fumed."

Responses were not slow in coming. According a further report in *The Jerusalem Post* two days later (July 19), ". . . Ben-Ari said he has no doubt his reaction was appropriate and called for all other MKs to throw the New Testament in the trash. . . . Attorney-General Yehuda Weinstein should press incitement charges against MK Michael Ben-Ari (National Union) for tearing a New Testament and throwing it in the trash, the Knesset's sole Christian MK, Hanna Sweid, said. 'This is hooliganism, bullying and an apocalyptic act of hatred that was baseless and unnecessary,' Sweid told *The Jerusalem Post*. . . . At the same time, Sweid thanked Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin for his 'noble and brave' condemnation of Ben-Ari in the plenum on Wednesday. 'I condemn any disrespect of holy texts of any religion, including ripping the New Testament by an MK yesterday,' Rivlin said. 'Every holy book is important to its believers.'"

Inscribed in the Book of Life



Though January 1 signifies the beginning of a new calendar year, the onset of autumn signals new beginnings for most of us. A new school year begins for students, and we all return to the rhythms of a more scheduled lifestyle after the relaxed pace of summer.

The Hebrew calendar marks the start of a new civic year each autumn. Rosh Hashanah ("head of the year"), begins at sundown the evening of September 16 this year. Rosh Hashanah is actually the first night of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar, but the new year commemoration is linked to the yearly cycle of Torah readings detailing God's creation of the world during this period. The holy day also serves as a reminder that there will be an end of days culminating in God's judgment of the world. Rosh Hashanah is the start of the ten day period known as "The Days of Awe," a time given to reflection and repentance before Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

When I was a child, I was taught that God would inscribe my name and story for the coming year into his Book of Life on Rosh Hashanah, and seal my fate on Yom Kippur. If I repented well enough during those Days of Awe, making vows and doing good deeds to prove to God that I would be a better person in the coming year, I might be able to secure a blessed future story for myself.

"This will be the year I will not bicker with my little sister," I'd promise God. "I will do chores around the house without complaining, and maybe even do a few before my mom asks me to do them. And I'll try harder in school, too. Really, I will."

When I failed to live up to my end of the bargain, which inevitably happened within a few hours of making those well-intentioned promises, I worried that maybe God was actually writing my name in his Book in pencil, and that he'd use his celestial eraser to wipe away any trace of me from the records. No matter how earnestly I repented, no matter how hard I tried to keep my vows, I was never assured that my best efforts would tip his scales of justice in my favor.

When I came to faith in Yeshua as a teen, I learned that my Judge was also my Redeemer. Yeshua did for me what I was unable to do for myself by keeping every promise, obeying every rule, and loving each person perfectly. He'd inscribed my name in his Book (Rev. 21:22–27)—and on the very palms of his own sinless hands (Isa. 49:15–16). His beautiful mercy continues to rewrite my story to this day.

When I hear the words of the traditional New Year's greeting—"L'shanah tovah tikatevu" which translates to "May you be inscribed (in the Book of Life) for a good year"—these words become my prayer for my people as I remember that there are many longing for the assurance that they are indeed inscribed in the Book of Life. Won't you join me in that prayer this year?

And may each one of us who knows Yeshua be used to communicate to those in our spheres of influence that he does not write our names in his Book in erasable pencil, but inscribes us forever on the nail-scarred palms of his very own hands.

"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (Ps. 103:11, 12)

Michelle Van Loon

Prayer Requests

Please pray for:

- *The BridgeBuilders participants who have returned home from the first session in Norway. Pray for their experiences to bear fruit in their lives and in their community.*
- *Caspari's Missiology Course in November and the participants coming from abroad.*
- *The planning and preparation of the coming Shabbat school teachers' seminars.*
- *The publishing of Caspari's 30th anniversary book and the anniversary celebration in November.*
- *The ominous situation in the Middle East and for safety and security in Israel.*

If you would like to know more about the Caspari Center and its activities, write to caspari@caspari.com or visit our website, www.caspari.com.

You can support our work by prayer, volunteering, or financial gifts to help with individual projects or the general work of the center.