

The Exodus Continues

Thousands of Jews are moving to Israel. Some are fleeing Holocaust-style threats in the former Soviet Union while others are yearning for their biblical homeland. Amid this 21st century exodus, Christians are providing Jews with humanitarian aid, prayer and hope.

Johannes Facius knows the hour is late. He can see the fear and desperation in the eyes of Jewish emigrants as they pass through the customs hall in Odessa, Ukraine, their last checkpoint before boarding a ship for Israel.

He knows one day the gates for these people will close in the former Soviet Union. Jeremiah 16:16 declares it with the ominous warning: "I will send for many fishermen and they shall fish them; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill" (NKJV).

Since 1989, more than 1 million Jews have left the former Soviet Union and "made aliyah"—an English-Hebrew term used to describe a Jewish person making Israel their home. Facius is chairman of Ebenezer Emergency Fund, a Christian organization that charts passenger ships to ferry Jews from the Black Sea port of Odessa to Haifa, Israel. In nine years Ebenezer has helped more than 60,000 Jews reach the promised land by sea and on Jewish Agency-sponsored mercy flights.

Today, more than a million Jews still live in the former Soviet Union, and with the political climate growing darker in Russia and anti-Semitism exploding in some former Soviet republics, Jews and Christians working with this modern exodus fear another Holocaust might be near.

Facius himself has heard reports of beatings in Jewish communities, and persecution at the official level occurs in some areas. One mayor in Siberia who was seeking re-election

rallied citizens with a promise to finish the work of Hitler by destroying the Jews. After he was elected he ordered Jewish families to hang a white Star of David on their doors, a marking similar to the one that taunted persecuted Jews in Nazi Germany.

"The spirit of evil has no logic," Facius says. "Some Jews are threatened if they try to make aliyah. If [local officials] hate them so much, why don't they let them get visas? Why not let them go?"

"The ridicule of the Jew is coming back," he adds. "That's the first thing that happened when the Nazis came. Then it ended with murder in the gas chambers. You can see the same pattern happening."

Answering the Call

In an effort to prevent what they see as the inevitable outcome of such ridicule, Facius and other Christian leaders are working urgently to relocate Jews to Israel. They see their mission as part of the bigger picture that God has to awaken the entire church to embrace His plans for Israel.

They say God is looking for people who will cooperate with Him in loving and restoring the Jewish people in fulfillment of Isaiah 49:22, which says He will call the Gentiles to carry the sons and daughters of Zion back to their land.

Answering the call worldwide are ministries, humanitarian organizations and individuals. Leaders who work with this modern migration believe God is drawing Jewish people to Israel from other Gentile countries as well, including the United States, which with about 6 million Jews is host to the largest Jewish population of any country.

Helping to spread the message of aliyah across North America are Bart and Deborah Kellogg, who last year founded Preparing the Way Ministries in Fort Collins, Colorado. Their organization trains volunteers to reach out to Jewish people

and to pray against the obstacles that prevent them from returning to their biblical homeland. The ministry provides the airfare—\$450 per adult, \$300 per child—for American Jews who need financial help to move.

“The West will probably be the last exodus,” Deborah Kellogg says. “In America we see the Jewish people as prosperous and secure. We don’t see the way God sees. We don’t see that the Jew is in bondage, bound by materialism and all the other gods of this nation.”

By contrast, God remains “jealous over His covenant people,” she points out, and says that the Scripture clearly outlines His end-time plan for Israel.

“God says in Jeremiah 30:10 that He will save them from the land of their captivity. He will return them to Israel to restore and give them rest,” she says. “In the end, all Israel will be saved.”

Linking that verse with Zechariah 12:10, Kellogg says the Jews then will yearn for the Messiah and that He will return to save them and set up His kingdom.

“This can only be fulfilled with the Jewish people in their land,” she says. “As Christians, we are to stand with them.”

Steve Lightle, an international speaker and key player in the aliyah for the last 26 years, believes today’s exodus is a prophetic signal to the world that the return of Jesus Christ is near.

“God is telling the church, and anybody else who will listen, to get ready,” he says. “The Holy Spirit is speaking to people in so many of the churches, and they are praying for Israel and helping the Jewish people.

“But it’s not coming from the pulpits,” he adds. “I’m not here to criticize, but anybody with spiritual eyes recognizes what

God is doing.”

Cracks in the Wall

A warm and unassuming man from Bellevue, Washington, Lightle once owned a business in Seattle called Dippy Duck Car Wash. The business’ amusing name belies the way God used Lightle and small teams of intercessors to shake the Soviet Union with prayer in the 1970s and 1980s and to help open the doors for a modern Jewish exodus.

During a key prayer mission to the Soviet Union in 1983, Lightle and the three men with him wrestled spiritually for the release of the Jewish people. At that time fewer than 100 Jews per month were allowed to leave Soviet lands. In each city Lightle and his companions visited, they circled a statue of Vladimir Lenin and proclaimed that the idol and the communist ideals it represented would fall.

Even though they dressed as tourists and operated in secrecy, the intercessors nevertheless attracted the attention of the KGB secret police. Lightle’s group was monitored so closely that in one city, as the men were praying in tongues, Lightle felt someone behind him and discovered an agent was leaning in with his hand cupped to his ear, trying to eavesdrop.

The KGB was baffled by these strange men who spoke an unknown language.

“They said I had the best-kept secret in the world,” Lightle says. “They knew I had something to do with the Jews. They couldn’t find my organization or bank account because I had none. [They] couldn’t put [their] finger on anything I’d done.”

On another trip, Lightle and a team of international intercessors stood outside the Moscow office of then-president Mikhail Gorbachev and repeated words that the Old Testament prophet Samuel spoke to King Saul of Israel: “Because you have

rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king” (see 1 Sam. 15:26).

As they walked along the walls of the Kremlin and noticed a large red star perched atop a tower, one of the intercessors was reminded of Revelation 8:10-11, which describes a great star falling from heaven.

Later, the men took a midnight walk to the Moscow River where they tied a stone to a Bible, in which they had marked passages about judgment, and threw it into the icy water.

Four months later, in April 1986, an explosion and fire at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in Ukraine sent a lethal plume of radiation over the Soviet Union’s prime farmland and water supply. As news of the disaster spread around the world, the intercessors read a New York Times article about a prominent Russian writer who had made a link to the judgment falling on the Soviet Union. He cited the same chapter in Revelation the prayer team had read months earlier in Moscow, how a star called “Wormwood” would turn bitter one-third of the water (see v. 11).

The writer explained that the Ukrainian word for “wormwood”—a bitter herb used as a tonic in Russia—is chernobyl. Gorbachev later admitted that the disaster shook the country, calling it “a turning point.”

In December 1989, as the Soviet Union began to dissolve, Gorbachev issued a reform to ease restrictions on Jewish emigration. Within 13 months, nearly 200,000 Soviet Jews had made aliyah.

The Doors Open

In 1991 the exodus gained momentum when Gustav Scheller, who operated a tour and travel company in England, founded Ebenezer Emergency Fund. The name is Hebrew, meaning “thus far the Lord helped.” Scheller says God inspired in him a vision for the ministry while he was attending an international

prayer conference in Jerusalem during the Persian Gulf War.

As Christians around the world responded with prayer and finances, Ebenezer Fund began transporting Jews to Israel by chartered planes. The ministry then completed three sailings, transporting Jews from Odessa to Haifa. Today Ebenezer Fund has volunteers scattered throughout the former Soviet Union to locate Jews, teach them God's promises and encourage them to make aliyah.

Scheller died in February at age 70, but his work continues. In his book, *Operation Exodus: Prophecy Being Fulfilled*, Scheller compares the exodus today with Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. He says God the Father's heart is broken and that He longs for His children to return home.

"Then He showed me the elder brother," Scheller writes. "We are the elder brother—because the overwhelming majority who live in the body of Christ do not care about God's chosen people, do not care what is happening with Israel. The Father is grieving over the attitude of the elder brother."

Deborah Kellogg adds: "The Lord told me He's calling the church before He comes back to become a servant to the Jewish people," she says. "Jesus wants us to help them come home and be restored. Serving is a low position in man's eyes, but not in God's."

But the serving does not stop when the refugees arrive in Haifa. Once in Israel, as legal immigrants, they receive assistance from both the government and humanitarian organizations. For some, new challenges begin when they step off the plane or the ship.

"Some come with certain social problems," says Barry Segal, a Jewish believer who with his wife, Batya, operate a charity in Jerusalem called Vision for Israel. "There is a high rate of divorce, stress and family breakups. It's not enough just to bring Jews home from the nations of the world to Israel. We

need to provide humanitarian aid to make their absorption successful.”

Segal’s organization includes the Joseph Storehouse, an aid center that distributes emergency supplies to Jews and Arabs. “We are trying to be the Wal-Mart of humanitarian aid in Israel,” he says. “We feed the hungry, clothe the naked and give out vast amounts of medical supplies. We’re trying to be a reflection of God’s love to the people here.”

From Fear to Joy

Back on the docks of Odessa, the sight of Christians working with the aliyah has surprised and confused many Jewish refugees, who have a perception of the church inflicting only pain and suffering. As they board ships in the Ukraine, Jews sometimes weep when they see Christians carrying their luggage and comforting passengers frightened by abusive customs agents.

Cruel and intimidating reprisals by customs officials against Jewish families waiting to board ship are not uncommon. Lightle and Kellogg recall how one Jewish woman had the flesh torn from a finger as an official stripped off her wedding band. An 11-year-old girl had a Star of David necklace ripped from her neck.

“Children would become hysterical when they came into the customs area,” says Kellogg, who was the Ebenezer Fund’s U.S. coordinator before beginning her own ministry. “They were afraid something would happen to them. These people had already faced persecution. I’d hold fearful ladies in my arms and comfort them. That’s what we’re called to do.”

Yet they say the refugees’ fear and anxiety melt away as they sail out of port. Fear turns to laughter for children as they play in the pool on board. For Lightle, the most moving scene is when the coastline of Israel comes into view.

“When their eyes first catch a glimpse of the seashore they

just burst out in joy,” he says. “People are cheering. I’ve never been to a New Year’s Eve party that can compare with it. Everyone runs to the bow to see the shore.”

Yet the joy of seeing Israel’s coast is only a part of the fulfillment of God’s plan for the Jewish people. Segal believes God also is removing spiritual blindness in Israel.

“We’re seeing an opening of the heart of the Jewish people to their coming Messiah,” he says. “More Jewish people are coming to Yeshua [Jesus] now than any other time since the days of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”

Christians working to help make this possible pray that all the church will see the aliyah for what it is—a homecoming that, like the prodigal son’s, thrills the Father’s heart and is worth celebrating. *

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