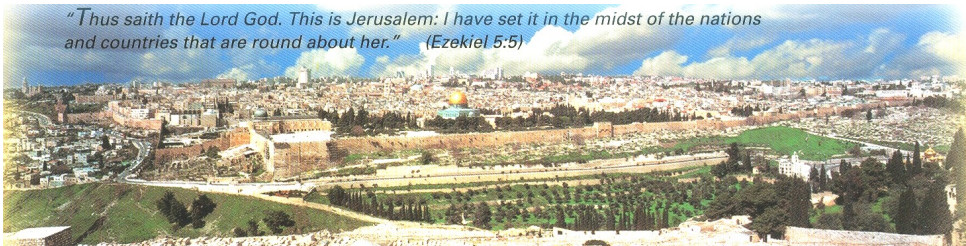


"Thus saith the Lord God, This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her." (Ezekiel 5:5)



LINKING GOD'S PEOPLE TO REACH THE UNREACHED

# The Bridge Report

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## PRAY FOR THE PEACE OF JERUSALEM

The Arab Spring, the removal of cruel dictators and change of regimes, civil war, and unrest in many of the Arab nations, has brought tremendous instability and uncertainty about the future of the nations in the Middle East. Added to that, is Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's public rhetoric that all Jews must be killed and Israel wiped off the geographical map, a view that is becoming more widely accepted in the Middle East, specifically among the leaders of the ruling party, Hamas, in Gaza who denies Israel's right to exist. Then the scary fact that Iran is very close to have completed building nuclear weapons which their government has promised will be deployed over Israel — all are sobering facts that underscore the significance of King David's command written to his people in Psalm 122:6 three millennia ago: *"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem..."*

In these tumultuous times, **we should seek to be like the men of the tribe of Issachar, who had knowledge to discern the times and wisdom to know what to do (1 Chronicles 12:32). It is essential that Bible-believing Christians revisit and have a strong stand on the Scriptural support of Israel!**

Many ask if modern Israel indeed has a place in God's end time plans. The Replacement Theology which is prevalent within some evangelical churches, states that Israel was replaced by the Church after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul, encountering that view in the early church, rejected it by exclaiming in Romans 11:1, *"God forbid!"*

The Bible's many Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel often pointed to current or coming events of that time, but simultaneously pointed across the ages toward the last days when they will be fulfilled. God's end time plans intertwine the destiny of the nation of Israel and the Church (Romans 9-11). Christ will physically appear in His second coming by planting His feet on the actual Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (Mt. 24:29-31, Acts 1:6-12). That said, it is important that we distinguish between God's plans for Israel as a people and as a land, and the geo-political and economic decisions made by Israel's secular government that may or may not line up with God's purpose —but God has the last word! We are asked to pray according the Lord's prayer, *"...May Your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven..."*

## 1998 GOSPEL OUTREACH TO THE PEOPLE OF GAZA



The sight was unusual: Police vans - lights flashing, packed with men in combat uniforms pointing machine guns through their open car windows - surrounded the three tourist buses as the cortege sped without stopping through the narrow, busy streets of Gaza. The escort drove straight to the little strip on the beach containing only a handful of Western style, upgrade hotels in a city marked by poverty and deprivation. Inconspicuously squeezed between the lead police van and the first bus was a car filled with a precious cargo: boxes containing 5000 New Testaments in Arabic ready for distribution, largely financed by Bridge contributors. **Who would have thought that a Muslim terrorist police force would protect the Word of God at gunpoint to ensure that they reach their destination!**

During Easter week 1998, I joined Norwegian evangelist, **Aril Edvardsen and 110 Scandinavian prayer warriors and intercessors at a historic Gospel campaign in Gaza** where 1.7 million people crowd into a 139 square mile strip of land along the South-Western coast of Israel. With the highest population density in the world, and a present 40% unemployment rate, Gaza was then ruled by the Palestinian National Council, also

called the Palestinian Authority (PLO), under their **President Yasser Arafat**.

Norway has traditionally been a strong supporter of Israel. Since the Oslo Accord in 1993 which ratified the controversial Peace Agreement between Israel and the Palestinian territory, Norway has also built a special relationship with the Palestinian people. In 2007, **Hamas**, identified by the Western world as a terrorist organization, won the election against the Palestinian Authority and is presently the ruling party in Gaza.

Aril, a Gospel pioneer to unreached nations for fifty years, considered one of the most influential Christian figures of all time from Scandinavia (he died in 2008) always sought and seized the opportune time for preaching the Gospel by working closely with local leaders, and had a unique entrance into many Muslim countries. He sensed that the time might be right to do a Gospel outreach in the predominantly Muslim Gaza, where there are approximately 5000 nominal Christians, and only a couple of hundred born again believers.

Due to Aril's entrance as a Norwegian statesman, Arafat allowed him to conduct his campaign in the city's largest hall, seating app. 700, and bringing the New Testaments for distribution. Aril brought a gift from Norwegian Church Aid: a plane-load of hospital medical equipment. **Even a terrorist leader like Arafat responded to love expressed!** The whole group of Norwegians were invited to a personal audience with Arafat at his compound, during which Aril personally spoke with him and gave him a Bible in Arabic. While Arafat shook each of our hands, I prayed that the Lord would reveal Himself to him and change his heart.

The campaign was permitted only under the watchful eye of the Orthodox and Muslim religious leaders of the city. They shared the platform with Aril and gave their politically and religiously “correct” introductions each evening. When Aril began speaking, a hush fell over the hall filled to overflowing as he brought with much sensitivity toward his Muslim audience the message of Jesus as Son and Lamb of God. I looked around and my eyes caught a whole row nearby of handsome, young men in uniform. They were Arafat’s personal bodyguards. Leaning forward on the machine-guns stuck between their legs, eyes fixed intently on Aril, they listened attentively when he told about our forefathers, the much feared pagan Vikings who were once the terrorists of Europe. Pillaging and murdering wherever they set foot, our ancestors changed from being Viking terrorists to a peace-loving people when faith in Christ took root in their hearts. He then told the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. When Aril prayed that each one would come to know the Prince of Peace, these hard-core young body guards, tears running down their cheeks, bowed their heads with the rest of the audience.

When the invitation was given, hundreds raised their hands to receive Jesus into their hearts, while the guests from afar wiped tears from their eyes in silent joy as they saw years of labor back in Norway in prayer and intercession for the Middle East be fulfilled. Everybody received one of the New Testaments.

On Easter Sunday, our delegation visited the Orthodox, Catholic and the Baptist congregations, the three officially recognized churches in Gaza. In

answer to my prayers for “divine appointments”, I met a beautiful young Palestinian, a born again believer who, at great risk, secretly meets with a group of young believers in his home. *“We believe that Jesus is the Messiah, so we come together, read the Bible and worship the Lord. I am training them to become evangelists to my people, but right now we are learning to operate as a active Body of believers. My people here in Gaza need hope by seeing the demonstration of living faith in Jesus.”* “Are you and your group members in danger?” I asked. *“Not now - but we will be,”* he said matter-of-factly. I pray Eph. 1:15-23 for this man and the young people he mentors.

While in Gaza, Aril influenced Arafat to give the United Bible Society permission to sell Bibles in the city. For years they had a Bible bookstore that had brisk sales, frequented by many university students and other interested readers. In 2007, however, the owner was murdered, and there have been difficulties selling Bibles since then.

Returning from Gaza, our group thanked the Lord for the privilege of having witnessed the Spirit of God bringing the message of peace through the Gospel to the Palestinian people. End



In the last few weeks there has again been an escalation in the ever present conflict between Israel and her Muslim neighbors. This time, the Hamas government of the Palestinian territory in Gaza was the provocateur, launching scores of rockets and long-ranged missiles, suspected to have been delivered by Iran, aimed at civilian populated areas inside Israel proper. In retaliation, Israel has used drones to bomb weapon depots and military installations inside Gaza and has targeted and killed several Hamas leaders. Finally, at the moment of my writing, a truce has been negotiated between Hamas and the Israeli government, brokered by Egypt and the United States. The truce is very fragile indeed; if it breaks, there might be an Israeli ground invasion of troops into Gaza which will have tragic consequences both for the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples.

I have been directly in touch with all our partners and friends in Israel. They are safe and well, however, some of their lives have been disrupted by a constant run into bomb shelters as the sirens have gone off. Their lives are stressful!

Here, I am not endeavoring to analyze the very complex history and geo-political issues that drive the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians—I leave that to the media and those far better qualified than me to do so. I have, however, found a secular website by the U.S. Central Foreign Relations which gives a rather objective, clear timeline and a good overview over the Middle East conflicts from the 19th Century till today which provides good background information for those who seek a clearer understanding of the conflict. Please copy in your browser: <http://www.cfr.org/israel/crisis-guide-israeli-palestinian-conflict/p13850?gclid=CNGd66by4rMCFbKiPAod4B0AUQ>.

I have received many emails from partners and friends who strongly condemn the Palestinian’s aggression and sympathize with Israel. However, as believers in Jesus Christ, we need to step back and remember that we have a broader mandate from the Lord: **We are commissioned to love all nations and reach all ethnic groups with the liberating Gospel—good news—of Jesus Christ’s redemption. God so loved the Jews AND the Palestinians that He gave His only begotten Son! While we were yet sinners, He died for us all!** Let us remember that, in war, there are innocent victims on both sides! With that in mind, I am reprinting an article from my visit to Gaza in 1998, where I participated in a Gospel outreach to the Palestinian people. Among them, I met some of the finest believers in Jesus Christ. **As you pray for Israel, please also pray for the Palestinian Christian believers in Gaza — they are perhaps suffering the most!**



13762 State Road 84, Suite 423  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33325  
USA

Ragnhild K. Ulrich (“R.K.”)  
Executive Director

Tel 1.954.916.0521

Fax 1.954.916.8740

E-Mail:

[TheBridge@BridgeInternational.org](mailto:TheBridge@BridgeInternational.org)

Website:

[www.BridgeInternational.org](http://www.BridgeInternational.org)

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