

The Jerusalem Road
April 3, 2004

Persecution. Just saying the word makes us cringe inside. We think of being discriminated against, beaten or worse. We also think of it happening to someone in the news, in a foreign country – never to us.

Christ promised us persecution in John 15:20 “...if they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” In fact, Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.” (Matt 5:11) This doesn’t just mean pastors and missionaries – this means all believers.

In the last week I have had the opportunity to see persecution of believers from a new viewpoint – standing with them. During the last five days I have watched a growing unrest caused by a militant group here in Arad. They have launched an attack against the Messianic Jews, believers in Yeshua. The members of this sect were being rude and threatening to everyone, but more so to believers. Apparently this is nothing new as testified to me by various residents here. They yell at people, stand outside their houses putting curses on them and tell everyone what to do. They come to our chess club and take our books and Bibles, twice confiscating all the books being passed out and making threats. The Messianic Jews are always careful not to confront them or attempt to interfere with their beliefs in any way, living quietly. This Yeshiva group refers to every believer as a “missionary.” Each one of us needs to make that statement true, don’t we?

This week the campaign has been stepped up to a new level, now targeting each individual and demonstrating outside the homes of the believers. They carry signs telling everyone the believers are bad people, they are stealing Jewish souls and are lying to everyone. One home they are targeting is a widow with nine children. Eighteen to twenty of these students outside their home each day, scaring the children. They have been at our house daily, as well as other leaders of Messianic congregations.

Tomorrow, Sunday, we are facing an increased threat. This militant group has called for reinforcements, Yad L’Achim, from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, to join them in the demonstrations. These particular groups are known for their violence: spitting, stoning, forcing people out, shootings, beatings and burning out Messianic congregations. One of the families moved here to Arad after being forced to leave Be’er Sheva. The husband was forced to leave his job or his employer would lose his business. His wife and children are frightened, remembering the last time. They threatened to kill him. Now they are coming after him again. This man has a quiet, beautiful spirit. His constant prayer has been salvation of the individuals in these groups.

This evening we had corporate prayer, determined to meet their aggressiveness with kindness, returning their curses with blessing. These men are obviously blinded, choosing to follow their own rules rather than God’s. We pray for their eyes to be opened to the salvation that is offered and safety for all. We have determined to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us and give us His words, if we are to speak to them at all.

Please pray that we may follow the scripture from Paul in Romans 12:14 in blessing those who are threatening the believers here.

We are continuing our work in spite of the current events. The chess club is doing well and we are giving out book every day. Peoples of various nationalities are coming in and asking questions. Daily testimonies of contact for Yeshua are shared as we take turns watching the shop. Several times a week I take shifts at the chess club handing out books, literature and Bibles and praying for the people who stop in. The Russian players come and go all day.

Last week Lura and Eddie were able to go on vacation for one week. During that time I was at the chess club every day. I was able to give my testimony to a Black Hebrew, give literature to a Romanian couple, hand out books to several Israelis, and a number of Russian immigrants. Even some of the chess players are beginning to take an interest in the books. The majority of the Israeli people are secular, not attending synagogue or following their religious heritage. They are looking for hope, even stating they believe they have no hope. Many of them are open to hear what we have to say.

Today we made deliveries to 42 Holocaust survivors. The city of Arad donated boxes with wine, matzoh, flour, rice, and a few other items to make sure they had their Pesach (Passover) meals. There was no one in the city to deliver these boxes, but Eddie and some Russians pitched in with their muscle and volunteered.

Over the past two months I have been developing relationships with a number of different people. As I have mentioned before, there are a vast number of nationalities represented in Israel. I would like to introduce you to some of those people:

I met a woman originally from Burma, divorced, children grown, alone and now cleaning houses to survive. She is a new believer and struggles with bitterness from things in her past. She has few friends and I hope to be counted as one of them. Sometimes she sits with us and listens to Christian tapes.

Weekly I see a single Indian Jewish woman who is employed by the city Cultural Center as the Dance Instructor/Event Coordinator. She is also a licensed massage therapist, giving massages in her home. Many times she must wait one or two months to get paid as the city runs out of funds. It is fairly common and generally accepted. All utilities and bank accounts are allowed to run in the red during these times. It is simply understood. Massage therapy enables her to earn enough to at least buy food. I had the opportunity to spend a day with her and some friends, touring the Israeli countryside looking for wild flowers in the desert. She also invited me to her home for a typical Israeli dinner. Like many young people here she is into New Age, but is open to hearing the gospel.

I am coming to know an entire Romanian family consisting of the grandmother, parents and three daughters, two of whom are married with children of their own, all having immigrated here to Israel. All are believers and attend Messianic Hebrew congregations. The father is unable to work due to a heart condition but volunteers at the chess club five days a week. We also keep him busy translating Russian, Romanian and a little Hebrew when needed. He is a real evangelist, desiring to speak to as many people as possible about Yeshua and hand out books. One of his grandchildren was born without functioning kidneys and has been on weekly dialysis for two years. Even as I write this newsletter his daughter, the mother of this child, is in the process of donating one of her kidneys to him.

I was introduced to an American woman whose Israeli husband died after moving here fifteen years ago. She is raising three teenage boys on her own and taking in foster children to support them. She has brought several foster kids to the Lord. Her latest acquisitions are three children from Argentina whose mother died of cancer. One of her sons is in the military and all three are actively witnessing for Yeshua. Some of those foster children are also boldly telling others of the true salvation through Christ. This is very important as they can speak to teens and younger children whereas adults may not. A law here will quickly send an adult to jail if they should tell anyone under 18 years of age anything about Jesus or give them material about salvation. As a result we must always be on guard at the chess club to make sure the children stay away from the books and Bibles we give and display.

I truly enjoy a tiny, elderly Israeli woman who runs a yarn shop, sometimes assisted by her daughter. The shop is located in the old market area. The entire shop is approximately 9' x 12' with shelves on every wall, reaching to the ceiling. Each shelf is crammed and overflowing with yarn of various colors, brilliant and soft, intermingled. If you have more than three people in the shop at one time, there is no room to turn around! She is absolutely thrilled when someone makes a purchase, smiling and nodding, "To-DA ra-BA!" (thank you very much!).

Across the road from our house live seven Chinese foreign workers. They are crowded into the small house that belongs to the contractor for whom they are working. Eddie discovered they barely have enough to eat and deliver two sacks of rice to them. Gratitude was obvious in their beaming faces.

I have made friends with an American Jewish woman who has been here 13 years. She and her French husband became believers before making aliyah (immigration to Israel). They have an eight year-old son born here in Israel. Her husband works for a landscaper, putting in 10 and 12 hour days in the hot desert sun. A work/school week here is six days, having off for the Sabbath, when everything closes. Work is difficult to find in Israel and pay is not usually commensurate with the cost of living. One way they make ends meet is receiving leftover food from a restaurant twice a week. She collects any combination of couscous, mashed potatoes, carrot salad, cucumbers and sometimes meat. Taking it all home she divides it up to share with three or four other families in need.

Rachael, an Israeli restaurant owner at the shuk, struggles to stay open. She has a kosher kitchen, serving meat, which means there is nothing dairy anywhere in her shop. Her food is delicious and she offers good service with a smile. She has proven to be a real friend and ally after opening the chess club across from her place. We pray for her daily.

My sister knows well a family of six Bedouins, all believers, living in poverty. They have all embraced her as a close relative. The father has diabetes, already having had part of his foot removed. Because he could no longer work he lost his restaurant, which was their only source of income. He looks for employment daily, painfully walking in shoes that no longer fit. His wife is unable to find work as Arab women are not generally hired by anyone. They live in a small two bedroom apartment with two teenage boys and two girls. Because they stand for Yeshua they have been targeted for their beliefs. Last month their tires were slashed by the same orthodox group, leaving them without any transportation. They literally live day to day, trusting in God for their help. Even so, they always have a smile and graciously welcome people into their home. Their twelve-year-old daughter is bold in her faith, sharing at a family gathering how praying to Yeshua helped her get a good grade on a difficult test. Being formerly Muslim, this is a bold step indeed as Muslims here risk their lives for their stand.

We met an Arab guard at the Mc Donald's outside Metar who willingly took some literature telling of the Messiah, Yeshua. He engaged Lura in a discussion at some length and has invited us to his home to discuss this further. Many people here are hungry for hope and open to hear more.

Black Hebrews are prevalent here, but most are not open to any discussion concerning Jesus. They believe he was a good man and nothing more. Living under Old Testament law, embracing their own unique interpretations of scripture.

Ethiopians, a growing sector here, are quiet and beautiful people. They have a sense of confidence not commonly seen in most people. Amharic is their native language and they generally keep to themselves.

Then we have the Russians, many of them older, men being the more visible. Most of our contact with them is through the chess club and with the Holocaust survivors. We have all made friends with the men who come to play chess each day. Josef is the local celebrity, being a chess master and having played the well-known Boris Spasky. I keep track of the players with a few nicknames: The Singing Chessman, Blue Jean Guy, The Standing Chessman and the Kissing Rabbi. Obviously, the names come from their looks or actions. The 'Kissing Rabbi' is not really a rabbi but he is Traditional Orthodox. He is a little man, elderly, with a white beard, a big smile and lots of chutzpa. Each time I am there he kisses me on the cheek, says "Yo fee!" (pronounced 'yo fay' meaning beautiful), puts his hand on his chest and sighs. Good old Irish blarney right here in Israel. ☺ The Singing Chessman has decided to teach me Russian. Oy vey!

The majority of people here have very little. They are grateful for any help offered, appreciate friendship and share even their meager items with others.

The Lord also is using a small talent He gave me that I have never thought much about. Would you believe crocheting? I have been using yarn and making different items for people. It is not only a way to bless those who have so little, but it is a great conversation opener as I sit at the club and do my needlework. We never know what talents we possess that God will use. They may seem small and insignificant to us, worth nothing. But everything we do and have, gifts from the Lord, are for His service and glory, not ours. What talents and anointing do you have that God is waiting for you to give over to Him? Be sure to let your abilities be used by the One who created them.

I want to thank each of you for your prayers and continued support. This truly is a faith mission, day by day. The people here in the Holy Land are varied in origin, dreams, beliefs and situations. But they all have one common need and that is salvation through Jesus Christ. Thank you for helping me carry the Word, our Lord and Savior, to those who are searching.

Shabbat Shalom! (Peaceful Sabbath) ☺

A servant of Yeshua – Sue

If you feel the Lord is leading you to help, support can be sent to:
Cindy Dillingham c/o Sue Heagy, P.O. Box 65228, San Antonio, TX 78265

We thank you so very much for your love sent through gifts.