



New Hope In Hungary

By Rev. Patricia Frame and Rev. Gary Cristofaro

The first Jewish people in what is Hungary today were the inhabitants of a province in the Roman Empire and settled there in the 2nd century CE. Roman legions were sent from this region to crush the Bar Kochba revolt. The victorious troops returned and brought back Jewish slaves with them.



For the next 1900 years the Jewish people of Hungary were subject to the whims of different leaders as kingdoms and empires would rise and fall. They would experience royal protection in the mid 13th century and later heavy taxation during the reign of the Ottoman Turks. But when the Turks were expelled the Jewish people became victims of slaughter. Early in the 20th century during the short lived Hungarian Soviet Republic some 3,000 Jews were murdered. But the worst was yet to come. By the late 1930s the first of a series of anti-Semitic laws were enacted, restricting socio-economic activities. Large-scale deportation of Jews to the Nazi death camps began after the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944. Up to 600,000 Hungarian Jews perished in the Holocaust.

Unfortunately the end of the war did not bring an end to anti-Jewish sentiments in Hungary. During the 1956 uprising against the Communists, 20,000 Jewish people knew they were unwelcome and made it out of the country. Then with the collapse of the Soviet Union, all restrictions regarding ties with Israel were lifted.

Today there are about 100,000 Hungarian Jews and about 80% of them live in Budapest. Hungarian Jews are the largest Jewish community in Central Europe and they are currently still free to return home to Israel. Yet one more obstacle stands in their way, poverty.

Increasing poverty is the reason Ezra International recently began a work in Hungary. There is also an interesting historical parallel to the birth of this work. 100 years ago last summer Raoul Wallenberg was born. He was a young Swedish diplomat from a very influential Swedish family who successfully led initiatives to save nearly 100,000 Jewish people from Hungary during the war. While working in a Dutch bank in the region then known as Palestine, he met Jewish people who had escaped from Nazi Germany. He was deeply affected by the stories he was told. Wallenberg was later appointed First Secretary at the Swedish legation and specifically tasked with starting a rescue operation of Hungarian Jews. His methods were unconventional but effective. Sadly, on January 17, 1945 he left Budapest with a Russian escort and his fate remains unknown.

Today anti-Semitism is again on the rise in Hungary and the economic situation is only worsening. Thus, Ezra International faces a familiar challenge of helping 100,000 Hungarian Jewish people home to Israel. The work of Raoul Wallenberg is not finished. Will you take the Wallenberg Challenge? Will you become the Raoul Wallenbergs of our generation? You can start by praying for Ezra International as we build our network of local volunteers. They are the "fishermen" who will help in the aliyah from Hungary. Pray also for God's protection on the Jewish community as anti-Semitism rises. Pray that they will hear God's call for them to return to Israel. Then finally, pray how you can help financially. As we continue to expand the work in Hungary the need for your financial support will also grow.

This is a new beginning for Ezra International. More importantly it will be a new beginning for the Jewish people of Hungary as together we help give them hope for a new life in Israel. May The Holy One of Israel bless you for all you are and will do for His people.