



A Look at

THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL TODAY



MISHKAN

A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People

ISSUE 46 / 2006

General Editor: Kai Kjær-Hansen

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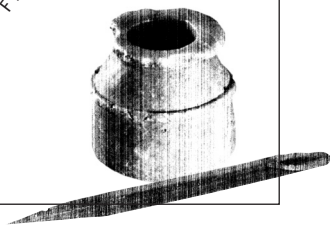
Mishkan's editorial policy is openly evangelical, committed to the New Testament proclamation that the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus (Yeshua) the Messiah is "to the Jew first."

Mishkan is a forum for discussion, and articles included do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Becoming Bolder

By Kai Kjær-Hansen



This issue of *Mishkan* focuses on the Messianic Movement in Israel. When asked what has happened in the movement over the last 10–20 years, one of the leaders answered, "People are becoming a lot bolder."

As readers of this issue will see, many other positive things have happened as well. However, without such boldness it is difficult to see how Israelis will ever hear the good news about Jesus and come to believe in him.

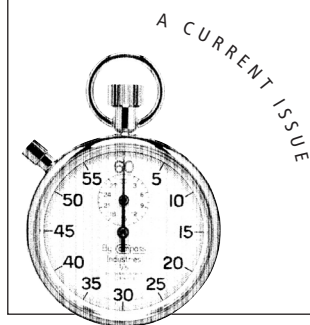
Boldness includes openness, and by being open people also make themselves vulnerable – not only to criticism, but also to harassment and persecution, often initiated by the anti-mission organizations.

This is the price some people pay for being open in the name of Jesus. One of the items in the *News From the Israeli Scene* column at the end of this issue is "Persecution in the South." This refers to the Messianic congregations in Arad and Beer Sheva, and what they have experienced over the past year or so. It is hard to believe that these things are taking place in a democratic state, and with the knowledge of the police. Apparently, this is also Israel.

It is both challenging and encouraging that one of the believers in Arad says, "We need to keep this persecution in proportion. We remind our congregants that believers in other countries are being murdered for their faith." The leader of the congregation in Arad "sees it as imperative to encourage us all to pray for our persecutors and to teach the flock a non-vengeful response."

Well said!

In spite of what is happening in Arad and Beer Sheva, this issue of *Mishkan* shows that evangelism in Israel is, indeed, still possible.



Conversions to Judaism in Israel

By Kai Kjær-Hansen

In Israel people are literally lining up to get permission to convert to Judaism. That is if one is to believe the *Jerusalem Post* (June 22, 2004). At that time – so it is maintained – there were “some 60,000 people interested in conversion who have not for any number of reasons come before the relevant authorities.” And most of them are unlikely to do so, according to Alex Grass, past chairman of the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency.

These are new immigrants who have come to Israel according to the Law of Return, but who are not halachically Jewish. Despite the fact that they have studied Judaism in order to convert, their conversion is often prevented, or the issuing of conversion certificates is delayed.

The obstacles come mainly from orthodox circles, where there is a fear of converting people too easily. Furthermore, there is tension between conversion on the halachic level, where a gentile becomes a Jew, and conversion on the civil-legal level, with the social rights and citizenship a convert receives in Israel.

Easily or not, conversions happen in Israel. The government encourages conversion of immigrants; public relations campaigns are organized and given financial support in order to increase the number of converts. All of this is natural in a Jewish state.

The Israeli government and the Jewish Agency “funneled some NIS 50 million to the various conversion bodies in 2005,” according to *Haaretz* (January 10, 2006). The article also stated that then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was of the opinion that it is in the nation’s interest to convert as many as possible.

How many conversions have there been in Israel in recent years?

The Jewish Life Information Center (ITIM), which presents itself as “an independent, not-profit organization, dedicated to making Jewish life accessible to all,” says on its web page that there are about “300,000 Israeli citizens living in Israel today who are not Jewish and also not members of other religions.” In recent years approximately 4,000 people have converted annually in the State’s courts, it is maintained.

Exact figures for the first three quarters of 2005 were presented to the Israeli cabinet on October 9, 2005 by Rabbi Haim Druckman, head

of the Conversion Administration created by the Prime Minister's Office. Druckman stated that "5,546 people had received conversion certificates during the first nine months of 2005, compared to just 3,599 during all of 2004" (*The Jewish Week*, New York, October 28, 2005).

According to information from ITIM, some 800 immigrants were converted by rabbinical courts in 2005, compared with 923 in 2003 and 852 in 2002 (*Haaretz*, January 10, 2006).

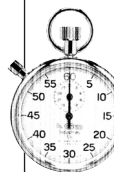
Military conversions should be added to these figures. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is actively pushing to convert non-Jewish soldiers by introducing special courses and programs during their army service. From 2001 through 2003, 1,100 male and female soldiers converted in the four-month course, according to the army's chief education officer in an interview in *Kol Ha'ir* (Jerusalem, September 30, 2004). The IDF mainly targets female soldiers with a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, and 70% of their converts are women. During the first nine months of 2004, 859 women and 255 men converted.

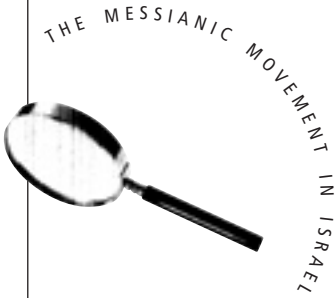
The IDF head of manpower, Major General Elazar Stern, says in *Haaretz* (November 23, 2005) that there are currently some 5,000 non-Jewish soldiers serving in the IDF, and he is convinced that 20 percent of immigrant soldiers will convert every year. Stern is described as the "father" of the immigrant soldier conversion project. His motivation for this project came when he heard that an education officer had ordered "600 New Testaments for non-Jewish soldiers who had asked to swear allegiance on them at their graduation ceremony instead of the Hebrew Bible."

If one adds the number of conversions in the civilian sector to the number of conversions in the IDF and the rabbinical courts, the total is at least 6,000-7,000 annually.

The Messianic movement in Israel is estimated by some of its leaders to number around 10,000 people today. I would like to state my reservations about this number; perhaps it is exaggerated. In any case, non-Jewish congregation members seem to be included in the number of Messianic believers. This increase in the Messianic movement comes mainly from the same 300,000 people described by ITIM as "people who are not Jewish and also not members of other religions."

Therefore, current claims that Russian immigrants' coming to faith in Jesus constitutes a threat to continued Jewish existence need to be called into question. The number of non-Jews in Israel who convert to Judaism each year seems to correspond to – or perhaps exceed – the total number of Messianic Jews in Israel today.





Evangelism in Israel, 1979—2005

By David H. Stern

My wife Martha and I made *aliyah* in 1979, and we have seen many changes in the evangelistic climate of Israel in these 26 years. When we arrived, few Israelis knew that Jews who honored Yeshua as the Messiah even existed. It was not uncommon for newspapers and magazines to print lies and blasphemies about Yeshua. Rarely was anything favorable to Christians published outside scholarly circles. We were truly a down-trodden minority, and too many of us also saw ourselves that way. There was little cooperation or even communication between believing congregations, although one helpful joint activity was summer camps for believers' children. Very little evangelism was done in public, largely because of the high level of fear in the hearts of believers, but secondarily because of unfamiliarity with some of the ways evangelism could be done. The number of Jewish believers is always uncertain, but I can safely say that at that time there were hundreds, not thousands.

Today estimates vary from 5,000 to 15,000. A good deal of the increase is due to *aliyah* of Jewish believers from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. But much is due to evangelism, which has grown and developed both in quantity and in methodology.

There are probably over 100 congregations and house groups in Israel, and many of them are actively spreading the gospel. In the early 1980s

There is a so-called "Anti-Missionary Law," passed in 1977, which makes two things illegal: offering anyone material benefits to change his religion, and evangelizing minors. No one has ever been prosecuted under this law.

congregational leaders set up a National Evangelism Committee, which has been organizing cooperative outreaches ever since. Also active are a number of para-congregational organizations headquartered outside the country which are dedicated to evangelism, notably Operation Mobilization, Jews for Jesus, and Chosen People Ministries.

Generally speaking, evangelism is legal. There is a so-called "Anti-Missionary Law," passed in 1977, which makes two things illegal: offering anyone material benefits to change his religion, and evangelizing minors (persons under 18). No one has ever been prosecuted under this law.

For this article I asked leaders actively evangelizing in Israel some questions; the article is organized around these questions, which I have used for the section titles.¹ At the end are some of my own thoughts on the subject.

1. What methods of evangelism have you been using?

All the respondents gave first priority to one-on-one conversations, that is, friendship evangelism. Giving out Bibles, testimonies, tracts and other literature works together with personal interaction, but many dismissed tract distribution by itself as provoking more opposition than favorable consideration of the gospel. Several leaders noted that the observable movement away from passing out tracts and toward personal conversation is because tract distribution has become associated with cults.

Advertisements explaining the gospel have appeared in major Hebrew-language newspapers. One placed at Yom Kippur showed why Yeshua is the culmination of the sacrificial system set forth in the Torah.

Joseph Shulam has an hour-long daily radio program in Hebrew six days a week, with one day in Russian (on 1350 AM, at 10 PM). The content includes Bible teachings, worship music, and evangelistic messages.

Meno Kalischer bought time on the TV screen at Tzomet G'ilot, a major highway junction; it cost \$4,000 for 12 days, during which time he had 1,200 8-second clips per day referring people to his website (www.yeshua.co.il). The website includes evangelistic messages, Bible commentary, and discipleship information, all in Hebrew, and one can obtain books, CDs, and videos there. While the ads were running at G'ilot, the site was getting 3,000 hits per month, compared to 1,000 at other times. While other methods of evangelism work best for an outgoing personality, internet evangelism is ideal for introverts, who can sit at their computers without having direct contact with people.

In Jerusalem, believers rent space for evangelistic posters on municipal billboards. People opposed to them tear down the posters six times a day, but the believers park nearby and keep putting them back.

At congregational meetings, when new believers tell how they heard the gospel from a friend, came to a meeting, and accepted the Lord, their testimony encourages non-believers to accept the Lord and believers to keep on witnessing.

At one congregation, members take three minutes to say how they witnessed to someone during the week. At this congregation 70-80% witness every week.

For the educated and upscale, one leader recommends Bible studies for 6 to 12 people, with two-thirds of them non-believers, in a private home. Since most Israelis are ignorant about both *Mashiach* in the *Tanakh* and

¹ Altogether 11 persons answered these questions during the month of November 2005. These 11 people were chosen to give a broad, fair, and representative picture of the evangelism situation in Israel during the years covered in this article.



the life of Yeshua, these meetings allow the participants to understand first what the *Tanakh* has to say about who the *Mashiach* will be and what he will do, and then draw their own conclusions about whether Yeshua fits the requirements.

While a number of respondents are wary about having gentile Christians evangelize in Israel, Yaakov Damkani has a different view. He urges gentile Christians to lose their fear of evangelizing in Israel and shows them how. He teaches his Christian helpers first to thank Israelis for the Bible, for God, for the New Testament, for the Messiah – “It’s all from you; otherwise we would still be ‘alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.’” They wear T-shirts quoting Ruth’s *Amekh ami ve’elohaikh elohai* (“Your people is my people and your God my God”). Second, he has them tell Israelis, “We’re here to encourage you. The whole world is rising against you, but fear not – God is with you, and so are we.” Third, he has them ask forgiveness for what the church has done in Yeshua’s name: “He taught us to pray for our enemies, to turn the other cheek, to love, to serve, to give when asked – and we’ve done the opposite. But please find the courage and wisdom to understand Yeshua the Messiah as he really is.” Finally, he has them give out his testimony-plus-evangelism book, *Lamah Davka Ani?* (published in English as *Why Me?*), which for years has been the best such book in the Hebrew language. He has distributed 200,000 of them free. These believers from the nations share their personal testimonies as well.

2. What success, numerically, have you seen in your evangelism?

Reported rates of people coming to faith in the several congregations surveyed varied between five and fifty per year. One congregation reported that half of its 200 members became believers during the last two years.

The *Jesus* film – known here as the *Yeshua* film, because it has been outfitted with a Hebrew soundtrack – has been distributed all over the country in the last five years, with positive results. On average, four people see each videocassette. The first 2,500 were passed out in the Haifa area, and it is estimated that in consequence about 100 came to the Lord. Thirty thousand were passed out to homes in North Tel Aviv, with a 1½-2% response rate of people wanting more information; in Bat-Yam, a city south of Tel Aviv, the response rate was 6%.

3. What venues and situations are best suited to evangelism?

Among the places and situations named were: outreach on the streets, in parks, and on the beaches; invitations to movies, concerts, picnics, and meals (especially Passover Seders and other Jewish holiday celebrations); congregational outreach evenings for members’ unbelieving families and

friends; and regular congregational services – provided that a gospel message or salvation testimony is heard. Essential to such gatherings is a spirit of hospitality among the congregation members, so that they reach out with warmth and time to the unbelievers who show up.

Yaakov Damkani considers Tel Aviv an ideal place to preach the gospel, because its people are largely secular. “Capernaum,” he says, “was Yeshua’s base, because there was little opposition. Tel Aviv is today’s Capernaum.”

Ayal Frieden runs a club called “The Jamm,” where there is music (mostly rock and folk, with many songs by believers), drinks (non-alcoholic), and teaching (about Yeshua and our faith). The customers are young people, both believers and non-believers. The setting encourages conversations about the Lord.

Eight years ago Israel’s first New Age festival was staged. These festivals, usually three days long and held at the major holidays (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot), draw teenagers and twenty-somethings who come and camp out by the thousands. There are restaurants and chai shops; stores with clothing, books, and art items; and various New Age religious organizations make their information available. But the kids, far from being hard-core New Agers, are mostly there for live music and good times. Four years ago the National Evangelism Committee, together with several congregations and Operation Mobilization, began evangelizing at these festivals, with anywhere from 50 to 100 believers participating in the outreach. We have a booth where people stop by to talk, and we give out Messianic books free of charge. We have a chai shop where we can engage people in conversation over tea, and a campsite where we welcome visitors, notably at mealtimes. Jews for Jesus also sets up a conversation-and-literature booth. At one festival, the Evangelism Committee campsite had a big sign saying *Kfar Yeshua* (Yeshua’s Village), to let the people know who we are. Workshops are popular at these festivals, so we started doing them too. At ours the speaker explains the gospel, maybe gives part of his testimony, and asks if anyone has questions or wants to believe in Yeshua (in a different setting this would be called a sermon). In the last two years some have said “Yes.” The “Boombamela” festival held at Passover in 2004 was attended by 40,000 people; in relation to Israel’s population, that is equivalent to four Woodstocks! At this festival the believers handed out 1,900 Hebrew New Testaments. My wife Martha and I have been attending these festivals for three years; we can testify that they give wonderful opportunities to have deep heart-to-heart conversations with young people, many of them open to the truth.

4. One hears the term “pre-evangelism.” What does this mean to you? Do you do pre-evangelism? In what ways?

Some definitions I received: “Pre-evangelism is activity that precedes a direct gospel presentation.” “In a way, any friendship that leads to evangelism is pre-evangelism.” “The mass giving out of books, tracts, or broad-



sides is pre-evangelism.” “Pre-evangelism is, first of all, prayer – it’s our greatest weapon. In our congregation we emphasize prayer according to the will of God: ‘all Israel shall be saved,’ ‘God is not willing that any should perish.’” “Pre-evangelism is getting to the level where the person is and working with him up to the level where the gospel is. You can’t just shoot five memorized verses at someone and think you’ve shared the gospel with him – he may not have understood a thing.”

Yaakov Damkani agrees with this last definition; he puts it this way: “When you communicate the gospel anywhere but in Israel, you start at zero and bring them to ten (salvation), but in Israel you start at minus twenty. The majority of Jews are genuinely not passive regarding Yeshua, but ‘anti.’ So pre-evangelism is getting them from minus twenty to zero. I’ve had thousands of conversations that *didn’t* lead to faith. Getting people to where they can even *think* about Yeshua is already an accomplishment. That’s why I don’t lose heart when I don’t see hundreds coming to faith every day.”

Recently John Pex and his wife Judy, owners of a hostel in Eilat, walked the Israel trail from Taba, in Egypt, to Tel Dan, near Lebanon, in 42 days. “We printed a thousand tracts and gave out 800. ... That was pre-evangelism. Later on, many of these people came [to the hostel] to hear more – and what we did then was evangelism.”

There are two kinds of pre-evangelism. The above definitions focus on the individual, and this makes sense, since it is the individual who will accept or reject the gospel. But there is a second kind of pre-evangelism which is communal, directed at the Jewish world in general, and its object is to change the overall negative mindset of the Jewish people toward Yeshua.

Following are some of the methods used or proposed to get the Jewish community as a whole “from minus twenty to zero.” One respondent said, “After two thousand years of negative relationship between the official representatives of Yeshua in the world and the Jewish people, and after the Holocaust of World War II, it is unreasonable to expect to be able to evangelize the Jewish nation. We must first build the kind of trust that will show that the wrongs done by the church to the Jewish people do not truly represent who Yeshua is and what Yeshua can do for the world and for the Jewish nation. That is pre-evangelism.”

In the last few years, more and more Israeli believers have become involved in normal life in ways that can affect the mainstream. For example, currently there are several hundred believers serving in the Israeli army, most of them very open about their faith; many get selected for official commendation. Believers are now involved with tourism, public relations, the legal profession, politics, and charitable work – such as assisting the poor and helping victims of terror. Believers have initiated contacts with journalists; the result is that newspapers, TV, and other media are treating us more fairly. We’re shown to be patriotic and stable citizens who pay our taxes and do what good citizens are supposed to do, whereas persecuting us is being treated more often as unjust. A recent newspaper

article described Messianic Jews as “those quiet people, they don’t fight back.”

Two believers hired a top-notch public relations firm, one well connected and sympathetic to our cause. They helped prepare a “question box” – issues for us to bring up when interviewed by the media. Immanuel Rosen did a segment on his Channel 10 TV talk show demonstrating that Israeli society and the government unrighteously discriminate against us. What was the response? Jewish believers whose families had thought they were in a religious cult called to say, “Now we understand you’re normal and not a reincarnation of the Inquisitors of Spain.” We should continue to openly confront the ultra-Orthodox propaganda against us.

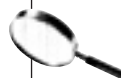
Evangelical Christians all over the world support Israel, and this is touching the hearts of Israelis. Various Christian organizations here in the land, which have been doing good works and supporting the country for the last 25 years, have built a more positive image of Christians. This is pre-evangelism, and one result is that a group of ten or fifteen appreciative Knesset members have formed a committee to be in liaison with the evangelical Christian world.

One leader said we must fight the image that evangelism targets the poor, the needy, and the uneducated – “After all, the Good News of Yeshua is not Amalek, tailing behind Israel, victimizing the stragglers and the weak! Rather, the Good News of Yeshua is God’s truth, strong and available to anyone who will taste and see that it is good.” This leader operates a soup kitchen and does not exploit the opportunity to evangelize those receiving food. This is pre-evangelism.

This leader adds that we need to “get the Israeli public to see us as honest truth-seekers, not lackeys working for ‘gentile Christian’ bosses, and not ‘hunters for souls’ out to be paid for everyone they manage to bring to the ‘church.’ They and the official Jewish authorities need to see us as fellow Jews seeking to do God’s will, and even at times fumbling around while trying to discern God’s truth. Right now the dominant opinion of the Israeli public is that evangelism is the long arm of the ‘world church’ that hates Jews, and wants to see their souls destroyed and assimilated away from the Jewish community and swept into the Protestant churches. If we don’t change this image, our service to the nation of Israel and to our Lord Yeshua will always be misunderstood in Israel, and the effectiveness of the message will be limited.” Changing this image is pre-evangelism.

As for the “traditional” kind of pre-evangelism, intended to bring the individual to the point where he can hear and respond to the gospel, most of the responses were within the range that *Mishkan’s* readers are already familiar with. One leader thinks of pre-evangelism as presenting the Bad News – the person’s own sin and the world’s sorry state – and

We need to “get the Israeli public to see us as honest truth-seekers, not lackeys working for ‘gentile Christian’ bosses, and not ‘hunters for souls’ out to be paid for everyone they manage to bring to the ‘church.’”



asking what this will come to; when he reaches the point of despair is the time to talk about Yeshua.

This leader thinks of healthy Messianic congregations with a Jewish culture as an important component of pre-evangelism, because people who accept Yeshua may be forced out of their family and present circle of friends; they need to know that a loving and functioning community is there to receive them.

Still, the most frequent response to my question about pre-evangelism was one-on-one, heart-to-heart relationships, dialogue, and conversation, coupled with a demonstrably normal and Jewish lifestyle for individuals, families, and congregations. In this way we show that we come from within normal Jewish Israeli society and are not aliens bringing a "foreign religion." At worst we become just another group that thinks differently, enabling people such as the organizers of New Age festivals to trust us; their fear level drops.

But the pitfall of *pre-evangelism* is that we become satisfied with merely being "accepted" into Israeli Jewish society and fail to go on to *evangelism*. We must go past being merely "nice neighbors" to showing our neighbors that Yeshua is relevant to their lives.

5. What differences, if any, are there between evangelizing Jews and evangelizing gentiles?

Yaakov Damkani spoke about the national aspect of the gospel: "With Jews I emphasize that the Kingdom of God is at hand. It comes with repentance (and that is the same for gentiles), but for Jews the fact that Yeshua died for the nation (John 11:49-52) is critical. The nation has to receive Yeshua and say *Barukh haba b'shem Adonai* ('Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD') – it's an essential part of the gospel for Jews. The church emphasizes salvation for individuals – and it's all true and biblical. But the Kingdom on earth does not come apart from Israel as a nation. God doesn't want anyone to perish, but he's waiting for the Jewish people to say, *Barukh haba b'shem Adonai* – and history is moving to the point where they will."

Shira Sorko-Ram made a similar point: "Jews should understand that the gospel covers how God deals with every nation, and in particular the nation of Israel. Also the Jewish people are called to be a light to the nations, and Jews have to understand that too as part of the gospel. That's the reason the Jews exist."

Noam Hendren touched on the same point, again in a different way: "God chose the Jews to be God's tool for worldwide redemption. Therefore Jews need to see that the gospel is simply the continuation of the plan of God described in the *Tanakh*, and the Messiah is just the logical outcome of this expectation. There must be repentance from personal sin, but ultimately there must be national repentance too. So the gospel should be presented in its full communal and worldwide sense. It's *not* that you will be plucked out of the Jewish community and be saved."

Joe Shulam adds: “When we preach Yeshua, we should present him as the Israeli Jew he was and is. In this way we bring Yeshua home, home to Israel and home to his Jewish family, and they will discover the real Yeshua for themselves. We should not preach ‘Christianity’ or any Christian denomination, because these are messages that divide the Body of the Messiah in Israel and in fact everywhere. There is too much importing of doctrines from Western churches that have very little to do with the gospel and only cause division and controversy – things like ‘predestination versus free will,’ ‘charismatic versus non-charismatic,’ and end-time speculations. Part of evangelism is putting into practice the maxims of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:19-20 and Romans 12-15. The Romans passage focuses on morality, and so must we. The Corinthians passage supports the idea that Jewish believers in Israel should live a Jewish lifestyle, keeping kosher, celebrating the biblical (Jewish) holidays according to the acceptable traditions, etc.”

Here are a number of interesting “sound bites” which I heard in response to this question: “Make sure a Jew understands that Yeshua did not come to bring another religion into the world but the completeness of God’s revelation given to Israel.” “With gentiles I can open to the New Testament right away, but with an Israeli Jew I go first to the prophecies of the *Tanakh* and to its discussion of the *korban*. Isaiah 53 touches on both.” “With Jews, the idea that God came down to earth as man seems like heresy. I show that in the *Tanakh* God did this, for example, in Genesis 18. This is a major difference.” “It’s the same gospel for Jews as for gentiles – all need God’s forgiveness – but Jews usually need more explanation about sin and forgiveness than gentiles. This is why the ‘four spiritual laws’ can speak to gentiles, but a fuller presentation is needed for most Jews. However, Israeli Jews can be told that Yeshua *is* the Jewish Messiah, the Son of David – a piece of information that doesn’t speak to gentiles.” “In Israel you have to get over the hurdle, ‘Isn’t Jesus for the gentiles?’ You explain that he lived, died, rose from the grave, and will return a Jew; you explain that the promise that all the peoples of the world would be blessed through Abraham is in a major way fulfilled through Yeshua. In other words, you have a very introductory kind of conversation. And there are sensitivities and nuances – for example, with Jews church history comes up; this isn’t part of the dialogue with gentiles.” “It’s a lot easier with a gentile – he doesn’t see Jesus as his enemy.”

6. What differences, if any, are there between evangelizing Jews in Israel and evangelizing Jews in the diaspora?

The main difference, said most respondents, is that the Israeli Jew has a stronger sense of his identity as a Jew, and therefore doesn’t feel threatened by being told that he can believe in Yeshua and stay Jewish. This is reflected in the way Messianic Jewish congregations in the USA put more emphasis on cultural aspects, like using a *tallit* or *kippah*. Here a Messianic Jew doesn’t have to prove his Jewishness, it’s assumed.



Noam Hendren: "In 1996 an article appeared in *Commentary* magazine on what American Jews believe; the only common element was that Jews don't believe in you-know-who. The confidence Israeli Jews have in their identity enables them to hear the gospel more easily – 'faith comes by hearing.' But there are social pressures against accepting Yeshua here, too, maybe more monolithic than abroad. This could be why a number of Israelis who came to faith did so in Holland or America – or in Eilat."

Joe Shulam: "Evangelism in Israel can stress Ezekiel's prophecy that when the Jews return to the land of Israel, God will give them a new heart and a new spirit. In the diaspora Jews need to be snatched from the hands of the assimilationists. When Jews in the diaspora are led to faith in Yeshua they need, at the same time, to come to faith in the fate of the Jewish nation that is inseparably connected to the land of Israel and to God's promises to the nation and the world."

7. What do you think has happened in evangelism in the land, good or bad, in the past 10 or 20 years?

Eitan Shishkoff: "Many good things. The New Age festivals opening to evangelism, the multiplication of Messianic congregations, the utilization of the *Yeshua* movie, the improvement in the media's portrayal of Messianic Jews. All these point to the beginning of Messianic Judaism's emergence as a normal faith among Jews in Israel."

Shira Sorko-Ram: "By now Israelis have heard of Messianic Jews. A surprising number will even say they have a relative or friend who is one. Also they have learned that Christians who follow Yeshua love the Jewish people, and the farther Christians are from the Bible the less they love Israel. When I came to the land, in 1967, 99% disliked Christians, even feared them. The greatest positive influence has been the support of evangelicals; but because of Popes John XXIII and John Paul II, the Catholic Church too has become far warmer toward us than, say, the Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists with their divestment plans. The whole nation watched when John Paul II came to Israel in 2000."

Jonathan Goldberg: "Congregations are taking the Great Commission seriously, although we haven't yet reached 'the ends of the earth.' When the best young leaders are reaching the ends of the earth, God will bless."

Josh Myers: "One really good thing – people are becoming a lot bolder."

Noam Hendren: "It's good that more congregations are taking evangelism seriously. In the early 80s it seemed that only the National Evangelism Committee organized outreach."

I agree that this is progress, but I would go further and say that there is no such thing as a healthy congregation that doesn't evangelize! Which is why I like what Meno Kalischer says: "We've come from the Stone Age to Space Technology! Twenty years ago we had just started. Then congregations hid their faith; now we compete to see who's doing more. The

young leaders emphasize evangelism. There are ads in the newspapers. All the congregations are using tracts and evangelizing. CDs and videos can be found not only in congregational meeting places but also outside. And we use all the media the secular world uses.”

8. What role do congregations play in evangelism? Is evangelism better left to those with a “call” to it?

Eitan Shishkoff: “Community-based evangelism is the heart of what must happen. And no, I would not leave evangelism to only those with a ‘call’ to it. We are all instructed to be witnesses of Yeshua and his disciples.”

Shira Sorko-Ram: “We encourage everyone in our congregation to evangelize.”

Two other leaders pointed out that there are those in a congregation whose role may not be direct evangelism but prayer or practical helps, such as preparing food, literature, and transportation.

Yaakov Damkani: “The ‘call’ is to the local congregation. When leaders don’t take it seriously, they penalize their own people, they limit their vision and God’s blessing on them. True, there is a call – the fivefold ministry includes evangelists – but all have a duty to present the risen Lord.”

Josh Myers: “Evangelism should be coordinated with the local congregations. In the past evangelists operated on their own, and the people ‘won to the Lord’ often got lost or damaged. Congregations can correct the evangelists, so that their work is more effective.”

Noam Hendren: “Congregations should be doing evangelism, for they give the context of a living, loving Messianic Jewish community, which may clear away the last obstacle to faith. Those with a call should be leading and teaching it, but others can and should do it too. Fear can drown out a still small voice telling you to talk to your neighbor. Relational evangelism is for everyone.”

Meno Kalischer: “All evangelism should be directed by the congregation, not done by free-lancers. A tract should have a congregation name, phone number, and address; and the ‘father’ or ‘mother’ of the tract should be identified. Everyone should be able to defend the gospel. The congregation should encourage those with the gift to evangelize and should encourage others to help the evangelists.”

Jonathan Goldberg and Meno Kalischer call attention to the financial side of evangelism. Jonathan: “When the Israeli *kehillot* start giving money and resources to reach out is when evangelism will get into full stride. The *kehillot* are still in the receiving mode, not giving. Giving would be a blessing.” Meno: “Ask what percentage of a church’s budget is given to evangelism, to missionaries. How many churches in Israel support missionaries inside and outside Israel?”

I have mainly let these evangelists and congregational leaders speak for themselves. They’re the hands-on people, and I hope what they have said communicates the state of evangelism in Israel.



And now, a final thought of my own: For over thirty years I have believed that one of the greatest barriers to evangelism has been wrong ecclesiology. The three main culprits have been Supersessionism, which says the church has replaced Israel as God's people; Dispensationalism, which considers the church God's heavenly people and the Jews God's earthly people; and Two-Covenant Theology, which says gentiles need the New Covenant and Jesus to come to the Father, but Jews don't need Yeshua because, through the Abrahamic Covenant, they are already with the Father.

All three of these ecclesiologies, by giving the church a distorted image of both itself and the Jewish people, make the church dysfunctional in relating to the Jewish people. All three also disenfranchise non-Messianic Jews from being God's people, though still in need of salvation. And none of them describes properly the role of the Messianic Jews. Any proper ecclesiology must do justice to all three elements mentioned by Paul in his olive-tree analogy of Romans 11:17-24 – cut-off natural branches (non-Messianic Jews), grafted-in wild branches (gentile Christians), and natural branches grafted back in (Messianic Jews).

A correct ecclesiology will portray the church as having *joined up with* the Jewish people through faith in the Jewish Messiah, the King of the Jews, but without having converted to Judaism. It will describe non-Messianic Jews as still being one component of the People of God, even though they lack faith in Yeshua, which they need. And it will consider Messianic Jews as the bridge, 100% Jewish and 100% with faith in Yeshua. Thus together, each in their own way, non-Messianic Jews, Messianic Jews, and Messianic gentiles will be recognized as constituting the People of God. I pray that the Body of Messiah will correct its ecclesiology, think through the implications for behavior, and begin expressing this corrected ecclesiology in its actions. When this happens, I expect that evangelizing Jewish people, both in Israel and abroad, will become much easier and more successful.

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Messianic Institutions for Theological Training in Israel

THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL



By **Ray Pritz**

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). How often has this verse, in its King James rendering, been used to motivate young Christians to attend Bible school. No matter that the Greek word does not mean “study” in today’s English, and in the other three places it appears in Paul’s letters it is translated by the KJV correctly as “be diligent.”

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that study of the Scriptures is an important and never-ending challenge for the Bible believer. In the very same letter, nearing the end of his life, Paul makes a special request that books be brought to him (2 Tim 4:13). Earlier in the letter he reminded Timothy that the sacred writings, which Timothy has known from childhood, “are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,” declaring that “all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:15-17). From childhood to old age, the word of God demands to be studied.

This, of course, was in keeping with Paul’s own Jewish experience. He had participated in formal study of the Scriptures as a young man (Acts 22:3), in the closest equivalent to a Bible school that existed in his time. For at least two hundred years after Paul, generation after generation of Jewish boys would continue to study the Bible as perhaps the only book they would ever see. And while universal male education would not be a part of Christian tradition for a long time, it was certainly required that any man who aspired to be a leader in the church would attain a formal education in the Scriptures.

It is strange, then, to consider that a relatively small percentage of leaders of Messianic congregations in Israel have any kind of formal biblical or theological training. We read in *Facts and Myths (Mishkan 30-31, p. 25)*, written in 1999 by Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt, “Only few of the Jewish [congregational] leaders have a formal theological training of more than three years; some have a year or more of Bible School, but many have a long period of ‘on the job training.’”

There seems to be an almost intuitive sense among believers that it is important to learn, not to stay static in one’s knowledge of the Bible and

of God. This does not always express itself, of course, in the individual seeking formal training, but on the corporate level it does frequently lead to attempts to establish some framework for studying. This may be within a given congregation, in a program separate from its routine teaching ministry. Or it may be a private initiative such as the "Jerusalem Bible Institute," begun in 1967 by seven students (three Jews, four Arabs) and lasting only a few months. Sometimes it is a collective effort including the pooled resources of several congregations.

There is a well-known phenomenon in countries where there is a relatively under-developed church: Those who feel a strong desire to study Bible and theology, finding no framework to meet that need in their own country, go abroad where it is available. That in itself is not necessarily a bad thing; however, it has numerous pitfalls. These people are often, by the nature of things, the ones with the more active minds; to study abroad means they are likely to know another language. To be able to pick up and go abroad means they are probably young, unmarried, and not yet established. Perhaps they have just finished secondary education or even a university degree. Education abroad takes time, three or four years at the time of life when people are naturally ripe for finding a mate. In the rarified atmosphere of Bible school, the student often finds a life partner, perhaps one who is not interested in leaving home. If conditions are easier (spiritually or materially) in the "Christian" country where

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The end result can be a kind of drain on the most promising human resources of a growing church in a Christian minority country. The potential leaders leave and don't come

back. This phenomenon is well documented and has been the impetus for the establishment of many educational institutions. In the early 1980s two institutions were begun in Israel to try to meet this challenge. Only one of them is still in operation today.

Beit Immanuel Study Center

One of the first attempts to stem the drain was the Beit Immanuel Study Center, located in the coastal town of Yafo (Jaffa). It was begun in 1981 on Anglican property and with an Anglican director, Walter Riggans. Riggans was replaced in 1986 by Salim Munayer. The program began with about ten students, and at its peak reached close to sixty students. This was a training program, and no academic credit was involved. Subjects covered included things like discipleship, spiritual discipline, leadership, studying scripture, and counseling. Special emphasis was placed on mentoring. Several of today's congregational leaders received a significant propor-

tion of their formal training here. In 1989 the Study Center was closed due to disagreements between the faculty and the Anglican landlord.

Caspari Center and TELEM

The other attempt to meet the challenge of the drain of potential leaders came with the founding of the Caspari Center in 1982. The initiative for the Caspari Center came from a Lutheran ministry in Norway. Its first three directors were Norwegian Lutheran pastors, and financial backing came mainly from Norway. While any Lutheran doctrinal bias disappeared long ago, in the minds of a few Israeli old-timers Caspari is still identified as a Lutheran entity.

At the heart of the Caspari operation was a program called TELEM, an acronym for *tochnit lehachsharah meshichit*, "Program for Messianic Training." TELEM was the Israeli expression of an idea first developed in Guatemala in 1963. It was called Theological Education by Extension or TEE. The idea was that many people want to learn more about the Bible, but do not have the time or money to leave home and attend a school. TEE took the classes to the students, sending out teachers to places where several students were located. In principle, study material was prepared to meet the local situation. The students studied individually, and then met as a group in their own location with the teacher or mentor to discuss the material. By the early 1980s TEE had spread to many countries in South America, Africa, and Asia.

Five study books were prepared at the start of the TELEM program and were published between 1984 and 1987: *How to Study the Scriptures, Psalms and the Worship of God, Luke, Acts, and Romans*. Since then other titles have been added, including *Genesis, Biblical Ethics, Hebrews, Jewish Roots of the New Testament, and Jewish Influences in the Early Church*. Most of them are available in Hebrew, English, and Russian. Soon to appear are *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* and *A History of the Relations between the Church and the Jews*.

TELEM courses were structured on the TEE model. In those years there were relatively few Messianic congregations scattered around the country, and there were small groups of believers in places where there was not much access to a congregation. Some of the students who participated are today leaders in congregations. TELEM courses were not for credit, nor were the earlier course books written to be at university level.

As the number of Messianic congregations grew, fewer believers felt isolated from the availability of regular Bible teaching. The TELEM program underwent a metamorphosis. Courses began to be offered within the framework of congregational teaching, either as special courses or in existing midweek Bible studies. At the same time, the "level" of TELEM books was raised so that they could be used in academic courses. This was done in part in consultation with the Israel College of the Bible.

The Caspari Center is today able to offer academic credit in two ways. Caspari has an agreement with Meningshets Fakultet in Oslo, Norway. A



student in Israel, with an advisor supplied through Caspari and approved by the university, can obtain credit toward an MA. Credit gained in this way is generally recognized internationally, although there is some question whether it will be recognized by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, which takes a very tight line on what credit it recognizes from other institutions.

The second credit possibility relates to a program begun two years ago for training young or potential leaders. This training is not actually biblical or theological, but more on the level of practical ministry. The program, called "Hearts to Serve," consists of seminars on subjects like counseling, cross-cultural communication, time management, and conflict resolution. By an agreement with the Israel College of the Bible, certain participants in Hearts to Serve can receive credit toward a degree at ICB.

www.caspari.com

Messianic Midrasha

Around the year 1990 the member congregations of the National Assembly of Messianic Congregations attempted in several sessions to establish a Messianic midrasha (college). After several frustrating meetings, it was clear that there could be no consensus on some fundamental issues, and the joint effort was abandoned. However, the idea was not dropped completely. The participants agreed that unilateral initiatives could go ahead. One of the participants in these discussions, Joseph Shulam, pastor of the Netivyah Congregation in Jerusalem, decided to start a college based on the principles he had advocated.

In 1993 the Messianic Midrasha opened its first classes. Since then it has offered something over thirty courses to around one hundred students. Its courses are not accredited, and its teachers are a mix of academics and congregational leaders. While the Midrasha's website states that it is "non-sectarian," it does have clear leanings, some of which were points of contention in the failed discussions of the National Assembly. The subtitle on the website hints at these: "Messianic Jewish Education in Israel from a 1st Century Perspective." Together with general courses on subjects like Bible Survey and Archaeology, one also finds courses on Rabbinic Literature and Practical Theology in the lives of Messianic Jews. Articles available from the same website (written by Shulam, the Midrasha's primary lecturer) include titles like "A Messianic Yeshiva" and "Doing Messianic Jewish Halacha."

There is no doubt that the Messianic Midrasha is meeting a certain need. There exists a segment of the believing community (probably more immigrants than native Israeli believers) who feel the need to express their Messianic faith in rabbinic terms.

www.netivyah.org.il

Israel College of the Bible

Another institution that resulted from the failure of the efforts of the National Assembly of Messianic Congregations was the King of Kings College. This was the 1990 initiative of the King of Kings Assembly, pastored by Wayne Hilsden. Hilsden served as the first principal, but was replaced the following year by Ilan Zamir, who held the title of president. In 1998 KOK College was renamed Israel College of the Bible (ICB). Zamir continued as president until his untimely death in the year 2000. His presidency gave expression to the college policy that its leadership would be in Israeli hands, but at his own request his replacement was David Boyd, a Canadian.

ICB achieved accreditation first of all in Asia and then, in 2001, in Europe. It is at present the only Messianic/Christian academic institution in Israel where Israeli students can get a bachelor's degree with studies in Hebrew. In the 2004/5 academic year ICB had about seventy students in its Hebrew courses and about fifty in English courses.

While ICB offers the most extensive academic program of all Messianic institutions in the country, the selection of courses in any given semester does not normally compare to a similar institution in the West. In the fall semester of 2005, for example, fifteen total course hours were offered in Tel Aviv in Hebrew. A student with a schedule conflict or other problem would have had to travel to Jerusalem, where two other courses were offered.

Two general degree programs are offered, in Theology and in Biblical Studies. ICB operates on three campuses, in Jerusalem (primarily courses in English), Tel Aviv (courses in Hebrew), and Haifa (courses in Amharic). To date only a handful of Israeli students have completed enough hours to qualify for a BA degree. ICB does not at present have an MA program, although it is in their long-term planning.

www.israelcollege.com

Bible Training Center for Pastors

The Bible Training Center for Pastors (BTCP) was brought to Israel several years ago on the initiative of Noam Hendren. The original materials were developed in 1990 by Dennis Mock, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary (of which Hendren himself is an alumnus). The program consists of ten separate courses. Meeting four hours a week, it is possible to cover all the material in about two years. The ten courses are based on the program for an MA in Biblical Studies offered at Dallas. The program is designed to be self-perpetuating: a person who completes it is then qualified to teach it to others.

While the material in the program aims to be non-cultural, it does not completely avoid a certain North American worldview. Hendren edits the courses to fit them to the Israeli situation: "The Church history course cries out for a supplement on Messianic-Jewish history and Church-syna-



gogue relations throughout history. Similarly, the Bible Doctrine course lacks a unit on 'Israelology.'" Mock's theology naturally bears a certain Dallas imprint; it is not to be expected that Hendren will be as successful in removing all bias from that quarter. The courses are gradually being translated to Hebrew. They already exist in English and Russian.

Following is a list of the ten courses:

1. Bible Study Methods and Rules of Interpretation
2. Old Testament Survey
3. New Testament Survey
4. Preaching Biblical Messages and Pastoral Ministry
5. Bible Doctrine Survey
6. Personal Spiritual Life
7. Congregational Ministry / Administration / Education
8. Teaching Principles and Methods
9. Church History Survey
10. Missions / Evangelism (including Apologetics) / Discipleship

Hendren is presently working with two groups of students, composed of active ministers from different congregations, including elders, pastors, evangelists, and youth workers. The program is designed for small groups, and the two present groups number between five and ten participants.

While BTCP is not designed to be for academic credit, arrangements have been made in that direction in Israel. The Israel College of the Bible can offer credit if someone completes the course, takes an appropriate exam (not part of BTCP requirements), and pays ICB tuition.

University of the Holy Land

In 1986 Stephen and Claire Pfann established the Center for the Study of Early Christianity. This Center later gave birth to the University of the Holy Land (UHL), located in Jerusalem. Courses are in English and include such subjects as Greek, archaeology, early church history, and various Bible subjects. A total of 21 academic course hours are offered each semester, some of them jointly with the Hebrew University. In addition, UHL offers courses in academic English for non-native English speakers. The student body (except for academic English) is not particularly large, despite the large-sounding name of the institution. There are usually some Israeli believers among the students, and several have graduated with MA degrees and gone on to teach in the UHL program and in ICB. UHL is currently the only Christian institution in Israel open to Israeli believers and offering an MA degree.

www.uhl.ac

Challenges

The two most fundamental components of an academic institution are students and teachers. It is these two components – or the lack of them in sufficient quantities – that create the biggest challenges for Messianic learning institutions in Israel.

Students pay the tuition, and without them it is impossible to pay the bills. Several of the institutions described in this article depend to no small degree on income generated by students from abroad, who often pay a higher fee than local students. Unfortunately, Israel is perceived abroad as an unsafe place to live. While it is statistically much safer to study in Jerusalem than, say, Chicago or Paris, parents often veto a student's desire to study in Israel.

It can also be difficult to locate Israeli students in sufficient numbers to sustain an academic program. For one thing, the Israeli believing community (Hebrew-speaking) is quite small, so you are starting with a small pool. Secondly, academic study after high school is not as much a part of the culture in Israel as it is in some other countries. Universal military service for both men and women means that high school graduates do not continue automatically to university. While in the army, many learn a profession or meet a marriage partner.

If the pool of potential students is small, the number of available qualified teachers is even smaller, especially when the ability to lecture in Hebrew is taken into the equation. The number of believing Hebrew-speakers with a PhD in a Bible-related field can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The situation with MAs is somewhat better. A number of the people with MAs will soon have PhDs, and the picture should improve. Like their counterparts in many other countries, lecturers at Israeli institutions of higher learning (Messianic or otherwise) are sadly underpaid.

One further observation is in order. The paucity of available students and teachers introduces a potentially dangerous tendency to lower academic standards. Rather than not offer a course because there is no properly qualified lecturer, the course might be offered using a teacher who is underqualified.

No less serious, lower demands may be placed on students lest they become discouraged and leave the program. Reading assignments tend to be shorter at Messianic institutions than at their secular counterparts. While a certain standard must be achieved in matriculation exams to be accepted into Israeli universities, the same standard is largely ignored at Messianic institutions. This is especially felt in Israeli students' proficiency in English. In many fields there is a lack of adequate scholarly literature in Hebrew, and university students are regularly assigned lengthy readings in English. If similar readings are assigned at a Messianic institution, some

Universal military service for both men and women means that high school graduates do not continue automatically to university.



students will complain loudly, precisely because their English reading skills were too low in the first place.

But we should not end on a negative note. There has been encouraging progress over the past twenty-five years. Israeli believers now have a variety of options for theological training beyond what can reasonably be supplied by the local congregation. It is to be hoped that more options for academic credit will be developed in the coming years, that additional MA and even PhD programs will become available, that more and more Israeli believers will become qualified to teach, and that all this can be done at a level that does not compromise either on spiritual commitment or on academic excellence.

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A Look at Leadership in Israel's Messianic Community



By Lisa Loden

Introduction

With the steady, ongoing growth of Israeli Messianic congregations, issues of leadership are a continuing reality. There are now over one hundred congregations and fellowships that have an increasing need for qualified leadership. This paper will explore the current leadership situation in Israeli Messianic congregations. Leaders and leadership structures in the congregations will be examined, as will aspects of relationship between the leaders of Israeli Messianic congregations. Finally, the paper will look at areas of concern and encouragement as expressed by a number of pastors and elders in various congregations.

Individual Leaders

A Profile

Given the relatively young age of the Israeli Messianic congregations and the fact that the majority of believers are first generation, it is understandable that the leadership should reflect this situation. According to the only survey and statistical analysis that has ever been done of the Messianic Community in Israel,¹ the average Israeli congregational leader was, at the time of the publication of the survey, male, under the age of 50, married, and had come to faith outside of Israel. The survey showed that 70% of the senior leadership was ethnically Jewish, with the rate of intermarriage being approximately 50%.² Although this survey was done in 1999, and is therefore over five years old, from observation of the situation at the end of 2005 the information and percentages do not seem to have changed greatly, even though the number of congregations and believers has increased considerably.

A large number of congregations established in the 1970s through the

1 Kai Kjær-Hansen and Bodil F. Skjøtt, *Facts and Myths About the Messianic Congregations in Israel* (Jerusalem: United Christian Council in Israel and Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, 1999).

2 Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt, 24.

1990s were formed around individuals or couples with a perceived calling or vision to establish a congregation. As these groups grew, and the need for additional leadership became evident, newer leaders were appointed or, in some few cases, elected to their positions.³

Women in Leadership

It has been mentioned that the average Messianic leader is male. In fact, the leadership of the Messianic body in Israel is overwhelmingly male. In 1999, according to the survey, only four congregations had women co-pastors – where the wife served as co-pastor with her husband – of which two were Russian speaking.⁴ Since 1999, an Ethiopian congregation has been formed that has a woman pastor.

The survey examined attitudes to women in leadership and discovered, surprisingly, that more than 50% of the Russian speaking congregations established in the 1990s were open to having women in leadership positions as pastors or elders, but did not implement this due to a desire to be sensitive to the movement as a whole. Women, however, are frequently “key persons” in the congregations.⁵

Education and Training

Since many of the congregations were formed around individuals, many of whom immigrated to Israel without having been sent by an organization, the level of specialized education and training for ministry is quite low. While the majority of leaders do have a BA degree, the fields in which the degrees were earned are remarkably varied.⁶

Levels of formal theological training are also low, with few leaders having any training beyond three years. A larger number of leaders do have one year or more of Bible school, but the majority of leaders have “learned as they go.”⁷ A number of the newer leaders have been mentored by senior leaders in their congregations.

Leadership Structures

The majority of Messianic congregations in Israel have a multiple leadership structure. Some have boards of elders while others have multiple pastors. It is generally the older congregations that have multiple leadership. In the main there is one recognized senior leader, the pastor, even if the official structure is one of multiple leadership. Few congregations are structured according to a co-equal eldership model.⁸

Many of the congregations have home groups with leaders appointed

3 Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt, 34-35.

4 Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt, 35.

5 Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt, 35-36.

6 Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt, 25.

7 Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt, 25.

8 Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt, 34.

by the pastor or elders of the congregation. Frequently this is the location of “on the job training” for new leadership. Deacons exist in many congregations and can be male or female.⁹

Forums for Leaders

The Messianic congregational scene is characterized by the fact that each of the many congregations sees itself as autonomous. This implies that they are not accountable to any body outside themselves. However, this does not mean that there is no relationship whatsoever between the individual congregations or their leaders. We will see that in fact there is a high degree of cooperation among the various congregations. This cooperation is frequently seen between congregations that have a similar theological basis or mode of expression.

National Pastor’s Conference

This forum for pastors and elders began in 1981 and has continued until today, twenty-four years later. During the festival of Succot in 1981, Moishe Rosen, the founder of the U.S. based organization Jews for Jesus, called together a group of leaders from the Messianic congregations in the land for two days of conversation and discussion about evangelism. At that time, Rosen was considering the possibility of beginning work in Israel. As a result of the meetings he decided not to do so, but said, “We suggest that you discuss the possibility of establishing a local framework for nationwide gatherings of leaders, along the lines of this meeting.”¹⁰

Those present decided to follow Rosen’s suggestion, and thus the National Pastor’s Conference was born. A committee was elected with the mandate to arrange future gatherings and decide on topics for the conferences. This conference was designed for pastors and elders of Hebrew speaking Messianic congregations, and would be nationwide in scope.

The National Pastor’s Conference meets three times a year. New organizing committees are elected on a regular, rotating basis. Several times during the history of this conference attempts have been made to broaden its mandate to include greater authority to speak in the name of the congregations in Israel. A three-year attempt was undertaken to write a broad statement of faith that would serve as a theological basis for all the congregations. In the end, none of these attempts to establish the conference as a central body for mutual accountability and authority succeeded. The mandate remains as it was: to organize the conferences and choose topics for discussion.

Although the National Pastor’s Conference has systematically rejected all attempts to increase its authority, it is responsible for the formation of the National Evangelism Committee and the Messianic Action Committee.

⁹ Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt, 35.

¹⁰ Tsvi Sadan, “Twenty Years for the National Pastor’s Conference,” *Kivun*, no. 24 (2001), 5.



Both of these committees are active in areas of common concern for the Hebrew speaking Messianic community.

In recent years, an increasing number of pastors and elders from Russian and Amharic speaking congregations have begun to attend these gatherings. The meetings, however, are conducted in Hebrew, without translation into other languages.

Men Meeting with God – Jerusalem¹¹

In the late 1990s, Tom White from the United States visited Israel to hold a prayer summit for leaders in the Galilee. After that summit, he had a strong desire to see a forum for Messianic leaders established in Jerusalem. At that time, the Jerusalem congregations were experiencing a time of upheaval due to divisions and controversy on the subject of renewal. Feelings ran high and many leaders were not speaking to one another.

Tom White contacted Wayne Hilsden, pastor of the King of Kings congregation in Jerusalem, several times in an attempt to start something. In Wayne Hilsden's words, "I thought it was a great idea but I didn't have faith for it." After Tom White's numerous overtures, Wayne Hilsden began making phone calls, and to his surprise eighteen leaders responded positively to his invitation to go away for a four-day retreat. This was the beginning of Men Meeting with God, a leader's meeting in Jerusalem.

This group of between 18 and 25 leaders now gathers monthly for breakfast in different venues throughout Jerusalem. They also regularly (twice yearly) go on retreat together for two days.

From the first, these leaders have met together with no agenda other than their unanimous agreement that "Jesus is Lord." Their time together is spent in prayer, fellowship, and worship. Beginning from a context of division and misunderstanding, already in the first gathering there was mutual forgiveness and embrace one of the other. Arab leaders from Jerusalem evangelical churches have been invited to attend, but to this date they have not responded to the invitation. The gathering has been a forum to call for citywide events such as prayer meetings and a healing meeting.

Sitting at Yeshua's Feet

This forum for leadership is a retreat movement that began in 2001. It is an offshoot of Men Meeting with God, and is structured along the same lines. Twice yearly, an invitation goes out to the pastors and elders of the Messianic congregations to go to the desert to seek the Lord together. These meetings last for 3–4 days and have no set agenda. They are attended by 50–65 men.

Over the past three years, a strong initiative has been taken to include

11 I am indebted to Wayne Hilsden for the information presented in this section (from a personal telephone interview, Dec. 1, 2005).

pastors and elders from the Arabic speaking congregations in Israel. Today a significant number of Arab leaders attend these gatherings. These retreats are opportunities for fellowship and prayer support, and help create of a sense of national identity.¹²

Haifa Leaders' Prayer Meeting

On a weekly basis, the pastors and elders from the three Hebrew speaking congregations in Haifa meet together for prayer. They meet in the early morning and their only agenda is to pray for the city of Haifa and for one another. These meetings have been going on for a number of years, and have contributed greatly to the sense of unity in the body of Messiah in Haifa.¹³

Amana (the Pact) Meetings

This is an initiative taken by Baruch Maoz, pastor of the Grace and Truth Assembly in Rishon LeZion. Baruch Maoz called together leaders from the area of central Israel (broadly defined as from Arad to Netanya) to discuss matters of inter-congregational discipline. There are quarterly gatherings that focus on the issues of a pact (*amana*) that can be signed by the leadership of the congregations. The *amana* strikes for a certain kind of authority, accountability, and appeal that transcends those of the individual congregations.

The *amana* itself is a document that consists of a confession of faith which would be binding on elders, pastors, and members of their congregations. The *amana* provides a basis for inter-congregational accountability, and attempts to answer the question, "to whom are the elders responsible?" To date nine have signed the pact; the meetings, which are open to leaders regardless of whether or not they sign the pact, are attended regularly by 13 people.

It is significant to note that both those who attend and the signatories to the *amana* come from widely diverse theological streams within the Messianic community. To date there have been two cases determined according to the terms of the *amana*.¹⁴

Messianic Congregation Leadership Network (MCLN)

In 1997, with the rise of the internet, an email network was formed for Messianic leaders in Israel. It is interesting to note that this was at the initiative of a computer savvy visitor to Israel, who saw the potential for communication and connection among Israeli leaders. Today this network

12 Personal interview with Evan Thomas, Pastor Elder, Beit Asaph Messianic Congregation, Netanya, Nov. 25, 2005.

13 Personal telephone interview with Shmuel Aweida, Pastor, Beit Eliahu Messianic Congregation, Haifa, Nov. 29, 2005.

14 Personal interviews with Baruch Maoz, Pastor, Grace and Truth Assembly, Rishon LeZion, November 23, 2005; and Ray Pritz, Pastor, Modiin Congregation, November 28, 2005.



has more than 80 members and is widely used to disseminate information to the congregations.

This network is open to leaders of congregations and organizations. In earlier years this network served as an open forum for discussion and interaction on pressing issues, but in recent times has not been used for this purpose. Several years ago a need was felt to restrict certain communications to the pastors and elders, and to exclude leaders of organizations from more sensitive communications that related to congregational issues. For this reason another network, the ICLN (Israel Congregation Leaders Network), was formed.

Signs for Concern and Encouragement

To write this article, I interviewed five Messianic leaders from different congregations and geographical locations.¹⁵ They were chosen so as to represent and reflect different theological streams, older and younger leaders, and different locations. All five of them are pastors or elders of Hebrew speaking congregations. In addition to supplying information, they were asked to articulate areas that both encourage and concern them in regard to the current state of leadership in the Israeli Messianic Community.

Signs for Concern

These men all had a common concern for the development and education of new leadership in the congregations. They lamented the lack of Israel based training programs and facilities for both theological and practical leadership training. While they all recognized that today there are many more opportunities than before,¹⁶ they agreed that much still remains to be done to meet the increasing need. They also pointed out the lack of some sort of criteria for determining just what is adequate and acceptable training for leadership in the congregations.

Another shared concern was the tendency for isolation among the leaders of the Russian and Amharic speaking congregations. While numerous attempts have been made to include the leaders of these congregations in the inter-congregational leadership frameworks, this has met with limited success.

Ray Pritz voiced concern that present leadership tends to be monarchical in nature, as it is based on a Protestant evangelical model both in terms of structure and doctrine. While a number of congregations have multiple leadership, they all (with few exceptions) have one senior pastor who has the final authority. This is not in keeping with the New Testament scriptural pattern for congregational leadership.

15 Ray Pritz, Modiin; Baruch Maoz, Rishon LeZion; Wayne Hilsden, Jerusalem; Evan Thomas, Netanya; Shmuel Aweida, Haifa.

16 Israel College of the Bible, Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, The Messianic Midrasha, Lech Lecha, and Revive Israel offer theological education, discipleship training, and leadership training programs.

Baruch Maoz expressed concern that leaders are often chosen for their strong personalities rather than for their pastoral gifts. He is saddened by what he sees as a lack of cultivation of personal holiness, humility, and selflessness in the current leadership. He points to the personal insecurity of many leaders as leading to an overemphasis on identity issues, organizational issues, and autocratic leadership.

Evan Thomas pointed to the lack of resources for persons in leadership. He is concerned that there are no facilities for leadership retreats, counseling, and families in trouble. Together with Baruch Maoz, Evan Thomas expressed a concern that many of the current leaders lack a sense of history.

Signs of Encouragement

All five of the pastors interviewed said they were encouraged by the growing awareness of the need for training and education; first for the current pastors and elders and then for the newer leaders. They were encouraged that more and more of the senior leaders are actively seeking out and identifying younger men and women with potential. They were also encouraged by the number of younger leaders who are currently studying – or plan to do so – in various frameworks. Several highlighted the personal mentoring that is taking place, with the more established leaders taking the younger ones under their wings.

They were all encouraged by the increasing degree of cooperation and relationship among the leaders of different congregations. Another related encouraging sign is the willingness to be inclusive, and the subsequent inclusion of Arab pastors and leaders in the leadership gatherings, resulting in increased cooperation.

The general attitude expressed by these men was positive and optimistic. While they are aware that there is much room for development of leadership in the Israeli Messianic community, they are unanimously encouraged by the progress that has been made in the last decade.

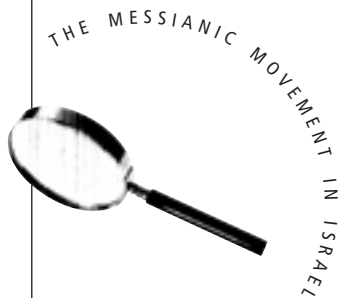
Conclusion

Israel's Messianic body is rapidly expanding. New leaders are being raised up on a regular basis. While this article is not a comprehensive presentation of the situation, it has tried to present an accurate picture of the situation as it exists today. In a short time the picture will be different. What can be said is that God is raising up pastors and shepherds after his own heart to guide his flock in Israel today. May the flock be continually led to green pastures and still waters as the leadership grows and matures.

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Messianic Music in Modern Israel

A Thirty Year Perspective

By David Loden

“Do we have to throw away the Brown Book?”

“Of course not,” was my answer to the plaintive question of this dear sister. The time was the early 1980s, and a new kind of worship had begun to be popular. New believers (or new arrivals) were singing a new song in a new style, and had even begun to distribute these worship choruses in small booklets. The “Brown Book” was the book that the older, established congregations were using, and was in a very real sense *her* book.

The first comprehensive volume of songs for the congregations was *Shir Chadash* (“A New Song”), published in hard cover in 1957 by Dor Publishing and Ruth Lawrence. It was a collection of two hundred and twelve hymns in four part harmony, taken primarily from the traditional churches and rendered in Hebrew translation. Bernice Gibson, who assembled this work, states in the preface: “This book has been created because we are convinced of the need for a volume of Messianic worship songs, with musical notes, in the Hebrew language ... from all over the world.”¹ Most of the songs were translated by Moshe Immanuel Ben Maier. We probably have no inkling how difficult it must have been to assemble, translate, edit, and publish this wonderful book *in Israel!* How much we owe to these early pioneers, so wholly dedicated to equipping the Messianic assemblies of Israel to praise the Lord.

The second book appeared on the scene in 1976, collected and edited by Arieh Bar David and published by Keren Achva Meshichit in Jerusalem. *Hallel V'Zimrat-Yah* (“Praise and Sing to the Lord”), or the famous “Brown Book,” was an astounding four hundred songs! A third of these were taken from the previous book, *Shir Chadash*. It also contained twenty songs by Peter Van Voerden and fourteen from M. Chavez. The rest were additions from a wide variety of Christian praise music. The inspired translations of Moshe Immanuel Ben Maier and Amikam Tavor were foundational to the early worship experience of the Israeli fellowships,

¹ Bernice Gibson, *Shir Chadash* (Israel: Ruth Lawrence and Dor publishing, 1957), Introduction.

and all of us who have followed are indebted to these men. The “Brown Book” even included a number of spirituals from the African American tradition, some songs from the Catholic renewal movement, and other more “chorus-like” offerings. A revolutionary development was the inclusion of these newer songs with only melody lines and guitar chords (soon to be the norm in Messianic music). This “Brown Book” was still quite fresh when the revolution struck in the Israeli Messianic scene, and thus the question posed by that sister was indeed relevant.

New Songs and New Cultural and Theological Challenges

For the early groups of Jewish believers in Israel (a scant handful in the early 1970s), the existing worship tools were hard-won and precious. But a new thing (or more correctly, a newer thing) had already started, and like it or not, the new will often overtake the old until such time as history has her say and discerns what is worthy to remain. New arrivals, new songs, new styles, new books ... so many changes ... it was just too much and too fast for the older, established congregations. In addition, the new growth presented both cultural and theological challenges to those pioneers who had, at great sacrifice, laid the foundations of the Messianic faith in Israel. The new arrivals were not primarily from European roots, but tended to be from the English-speaking world, mostly from North America. Most of these had found the Messiah in the turbulent 60s, and were from the disaffected generation which produced the Jesus people, the hippie movement, and a strong youth counterculture. What they lacked in experience and theological training, they made up for in enthusiasm and a fresh perspective on worship.

The new songs they sang resembled folk music (both from the country of origin and from Israel) far more than traditional hymnody. Rather than appropriating the familiar harmonic and melodic designs of the historic church, these songs were simpler and much more popularly accessible. Instead of choosing texts reflecting weighty theological or apologetic content, the writers opted for short phrases or thoughts, usually relying on scripture verses repeated several times. An important factor in their choice of lyrics was the inability of these “new” new immigrants to come to grips with the level of Hebrew required to write more creatively. This was frustrating to the more established congregations, accustomed to the rich translations of Ben Maier, Tavor, and others. The new songs were basic in content and egalitarian in style.

This new style was less dependent on musically trained presenters, did not rely on the classical composing instruments, such as piano or organ, and required little musical ability on the part of the worshipper. Rhythm became as important as melody, harmony, and text – indeed in many

What they lacked in experience and theological training, they made up for in enthusiasm and a fresh perspective on worship.



cases more important, sometimes overwhelming the other elements in the process. These songs were written to be played on popular instruments. The guitar became the instrument of choice in assembly worship, in contrast to the piano, which required much training to play. The guitar was easier to learn (indeed almost everyone knew three or four chords), and was certainly far more reasonable, both to buy and to transport from place to place, than a piano. One of the drawbacks of the new popular style, however, was that songs written by untrained musicians could be either very good or very bad, and regardless of the quality of composition or suitability of music to text they were eagerly embraced. No means of training yet existed to help these budding composers.

The first of the new song booklets to be distributed was a slim volume of fifteen of our (David and Lisa Loden) early songs. Published in 1976 with the title *Roni Bat Tzion* ("Rejoice, Daughter of Zion"), the notes and text were hand done originally by David and Lisa Loden, then in a second edition by Talila Ha'ephraiti, a graphic artist, with cover design by Pamela Suran (nee Morrow). Published independently, and in spite of some questionable parsing of the Hebrew, it quickly became a foundation stone for the new move of God in the land and an example of what could be done independently and with limited means. A recording was made for the purpose of teaching the songs, and the cassette and book were distributed as a set. It was at this time, and partly as a result of this work, that the Messianic music conferences started.

Messianic Music Conferences

One of the loveliest things about worship music is its ability to bring hearts together in praise of God despite differences of background or biblical position. A dramatic example of this was the relationship which developed between David and Lisa Loden and Arie'el Bar David. Arie'el, a second-generation Israeli believer, was the compiler of *Hallel V'Zimrat-Yah*, the so-called "Brown Book." A skilled Hebrew scholar and professional musician (playing contrabass in the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra) who invested years in the "Brown Book" project, it was remarkable that he recognized in the new songs a fresh approach to worship in the land. He responded by investing his time and considerable talents in developing the next generation. Together we saw the need for encouragement of new composers and for training them in both composition and the Hebrew language. The idea of a weekend conference was born to redress those lacks. The first such meetings were held in 1979 and 1980, and included workshops in composition, manuscript writing, Hebrew, guitar accompaniment techniques, and worship leading. From these first conferences the little book *Bo'u Lefanav* ("Come Before Him") was produced in 1980; it included twenty-six new songs from eight contributors. Again we were privileged to see the ability of worship music to unite souls, as not only the new groups, but many of the established congregations also began to use it (in addition, of course, to the Brown Book). It was a

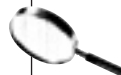
great encouragement to us that at that time Baruch Maoz and HaGefen Publishing undertook to distribute these materials; this cooperation also testified powerfully to “How good and pleasant it is for brethren to work together in unity” (if I may be permitted to paraphrase Psalm 133).

The music conferences continued at a rapid pace, producing *Sos Asis* (“I Will Rejoice”) in 1981, with twenty four new songs; in 1982 *Hallelu-Hu* (“Praise Him”), with twenty songs; and in 1987 a larger offering, *B’libi Tzafanti* (“Hidden in my Heart”), with fifty one songs written between 1983 and 1986. As with our first booklet, cassette recordings were produced for all the conference collections. Ann Hilsden was an important addition to the musical map of that time. In 1986, she took part in the music conference which resulted in the production of *B’libi Tzafanti*, the last of the individual booklets. Her contribution to Messianic worship from that time to the present has been enormous. As a part of the music committee responsible for the evaluation of musical material and organization of conferences, and in the production of concerts and recordings, she (and her family) has been a constant support and encouragement to a whole generation of writers and musicians.

About this time it became quite unhandy to continue producing small books, with the attendant difficulties of sequential numbering, various solutions for binding, etc. The time had arrived for a more comprehensive assembling of these songs, and so the challenge was taken up by the Peniel congregation in Tiberias. The resulting volume, *Shiron l’Kehilot M’shichiot* (“Songbook for the Messianic Congregations”) first saw light in 1993. A definite improvement, it brought all the booklets together in a more permanent binding. The songs were numbered in sequence and indexed according to titles both in Hebrew and English transliteration. This book was updated in 1997 under the name *Zimrat Ha’Aretz L’Yeshua* (“The Song of the Land for Yeshua”). More recently, the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel has undertaken both to organize the music conferences and to publish the new songs. This initiative has resulted in two new collections, named *Zimrat 2002* and *2004*, and produced by Nava Loden. As the number of believers and congregations in the land continues to dramatically increase, it is easy to forget our humble beginnings and the contributions of so many dedicated people. Without the faithful support of people like Arie Bar David and Moshav Yad Hashmona, Ann Hilsden (and indeed the whole Hilsden family), Baruch Maoz and HaGefen Publishing, the early pioneer work of composers such as the Lodens, Elisheva Shomron, Batya Segal, Zippora Bennet, and many others might have been much more difficult to preserve and use.

Native Israeli Songwriters

Apart from the obvious fact that there are now many more people engaged in writing worship music, what is different today from the early years? First, the songs are composed for the current spiritual context, instead of being borrowed from other sources and translated. Second, they



are written by people who were and are still a part of the modern move of God in the land. As such, these composers and musicians dedicated themselves both to voluntarily produce work for the local body of believers and to improve their own skills in composition and in the Hebrew language. The result of this dedication is clear as one tracks the development of worship music by these writers over the last thirty years. As growth has continued, one of the most significant things, in my opinion, is the number of native Israelis who are now writing. Until the early 90s, there were only three native born Israelis writing songs, and although some of these songs were quite good and the texts were exemplary Hebrew, they were not often sung in the congregations, due to the limited language abilities of the immigrants. I am happy to say that this is no longer the case, and the songs of Shaul Tzuela, Israel Harel, and David Tel Tzur are more popular now than ever.

A quick look at the compositions produced in the last five years reveals quite a different landscape from those early days. Fully one half of them were written by composers either raised or born in the land. The quality of their offerings, from a musical standpoint, is far better than average and some songs are really superb. Obviously, these writers have been challenged creatively by what they have seen and heard over the years. Also, for them the language is not a barrier to expression, and so instead of only the "safe" verses of Scripture, we see songs of personal faith, prayer, testimony, and even some with theological and apologetic content. Shall we indeed write Israeli hymns one day? I hope so.

The new has supplanted the old, but in the end it remains for history to judge. To a limited degree we see that process beginning even now, as the national Messianic community begins to grow some gray hair (I hope that is not too personal). Although the early believers held on to their precious songs against the onslaught of new music, and the newer arrivals resolutely continued to produce their own resources against the often vocal protests of the old guard, at this time the strident protectionism has all but disappeared. More and more the veterans have grown to appreciate the new, and the later arrivals have taken inspiration from the beauty of the old. I think we are on the cusp of a breakthrough in the Messianic community in Israel.

A social structure is known by its culture, and the face of that culture is most often the artistic work it produces. A new appreciation of each other's contributions; a better understanding that we as Israeli (or as Jewish) followers of Yeshua are part of a far larger picture, namely, the Body of Messiah worldwide; all this is leading us to a level of maturation as a society. This process is beginning to be seen in the emergence of a distinctive culture, with the creative arts in the forefront. It is exciting to see children grow (for all the frustrations which accompany that), and watching the Body of Messiah develop in the land is awe-inspiring. I have asked the question, "will we indeed write Israeli hymns one day?" Will we produce lasting works of music that will stand the test of history, symphonies and operas of excellence, oratorios and anthems of surpassing glory? I would

not be in the least surprised to see it, since it is a natural side effect of growth in the society of God. Most of us are keenly interested in seeing congregations and worship expressions which are, as Evan Thomas has aptly stated it, "... characteristically Jewish and recognizably Messianic."² For the producer of worship music, the future is an open ticket, but not without some serious challenges as well.

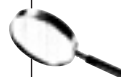
Musical Quality and Artistic Integrity

In the future, we will be forced into an ongoing evaluation of our work from the standpoint of musical quality and artistic integrity. Our songs are no longer used only by Israeli believers, or by Messianic congregations around the world, but are being judged in the larger context of the believing community worldwide. We need standards! The process of education and evaluation, once an inseparable part of the production of worship music in Israel, has fallen rather flat recently. The good is lumped with the mediocre, and little attempt is currently being made to either critically evaluate new songs or to train and challenge new talent to produce better work. I am calling for a standard of excellence. We must, in my opinion, be more diligent to improve the quality of our offerings. Only the best was good enough for the temple services, and those who labored in the sanctuary spent years in preparation. Even though the sacrifices of the poorest worshipper were accepted, their offerings were subjected to a quality check before being placed on the altar. God is interested in our attitude, and therefore we must be zealous both to give him the best we have and to be the best we can be.

One abiding memory I have is from the first music conference. An Israeli brother came to me with a request to present a song he had written. I of course agreed, but when he stepped onto the platform, it became immediately obvious that he had just recently learned three guitar chords (approximately) in order to play the song. He was no singer, and the melody was unrecognizable and the text unintelligible (despite the fact that he was a Sabra). In short, there was nothing there to recommend him as a composer. What was I to tell him? He had tried hard, but was not equipped. I simply thanked him for a good effort and encouraged him to improve his guitar skills and to give more thought to the melodies he might write, and to try to get some help in singing. The next two music conferences he brought two wonderful songs, which remain to this day treasured standards in the Messianic repertoire. My point is two-fold. First, he was encouraged. This is extremely important to new writ-

Most of us are keenly interested in seeing congregations and worship expressions which are ... characteristically Jewish and recognizably Messianic.

2 Evan Thomas, *A Profile of Beit Asaph Congregation* (Netanya, Beit Asaph, 2000).



ers, who often produce their first works from the fires of the heart and are therefore very vulnerable to hurt. Second, he went home and worked on his abilities to great advantage. The lessons here are clear: encourage, but stand for quality!

One of the endemic weaknesses of the Body of Messiah throughout the ages is shortsightedness. We seldom see far enough to be able to judge from an eternal perspective. The Faith is alive. She will express herself. She bursts forth with new song in every age. She can be trusted to communicate the right sound in the right time, from generation to generation. The continuing struggle for the senior generation is to hear correctly and to judge according to the Spirit, realizing that the new must be allowed expression. The challenge for the younger generation is to realize that the new is always built upon the old, and that despising those foundations will only weaken the house. The critical tension is not between new and old, but between relevance and excellence. The Spirit is relevant to the times, but our call is to excellence for a God who is eternal. Time is always needed for acclimation to a new expression. After thirty years of involvement in this process, I am constantly encouraged and repeatedly amazed by the faithfulness of the Lord and the openness of his people to hear the voice of the Spirit in new worship sounds. Please don't throw away the "Brown Book." Buy the "New Book" to add to it!

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Continuing on the Road of Reconciliation

THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL



By **Brittany Browning**

“The climate of hopelessness created for both communities brought reconciliation to a front-burner status,” says Evan Thomas, pastor of Beit Asaph Congregation in Netanya. The conflict between Palestinians and Israelis penetrates many levels of society, from the political realm, to the economic situation, to the grass-roots population. As the dust from the second intifada settles and the new political realities of the separation wall and disengagement materialize, grievances still have not been addressed satisfactorily.

In light of the current situation, the issue of reconciliation is on the forefront for believers living on both sides of the conflict. For some, the issues of the conflict are so polarizing that they do not feel compelled to reconcile across the divide. Some Palestinians feel that reconciliation means normalization, or giving up their demands in favor of the status quo. Some Israelis think that reconciliation with Palestinians means compromising Jewish claims to the land. Many forgo reconciliation with the other side because of the numerous political, theological, historical, and cultural obstacles. For others, the events of recent years create an urgent need to do something to counteract the tide of conflict and violence. A growing number of groups and individuals are making concerted efforts to bring believers together in various contexts. This article will explore the theological foundations and biblical principles that motivate believers to practice reconciliation. It will also discuss current initiatives by various ministries, the process and stages of reconciliation, and the challenges that believers encounter.¹

Motivation for Reconciliation: Developing a Theology

Biblical principles provide motivation and a foundation from which to approach reconciliation. As a result, believers are beginning to develop, refine, and live out a theology of reconciliation. Believers in the land are

¹ This subject is explored here from the perspectives of various practitioners of reconciliation, through interviews and correspondence. It is ripe for further research on an academic level.

in various stages of developing and practicing reconciliation theology, some agreeing and some disagreeing with certain approaches or emphases. The process is long, with many challenges.

Salim Munayer² offers some insight into the role of reconciliation theology:

In the current situation, theological positions exist on both sides that exclude the other from the work of God. The dispensational theology concerning Israel and the land is perceived by Palestinians as if they are excluded from the redemptive acts of God. Palestinian liberation theology does not address the needs of Jewish Israel.

A theology of reconciliation is centered upon the cross and its message of embrace, which gives hope and calls for redemption for both communities. The core of reconciliation theology is on the cross, and as such it addresses the need for justice that Palestinians are seeking and also gives hope for Jewish Israel. If the body of the Messiah does not address the culture of hatred and enmity that exists, and instead internalizes the non-biblical values created by the conflict, this will hamper its growth and its witness to the community.

Munayer reflects on two important biblical principles that provide part of the foundation for reconciliation: Christ's death and resurrection as an act of reconciliation between God and humanity, and believers' unity as a proclamation of the gospel.

Jesus' death on the cross reconciles us to God and brings us into God's household (Eph 2:16-19). It is a principle of embrace.

For us as Israeli and Palestinian believers this means an end to our hostility toward each other. We are no longer strangers, and cannot desire to destroy the other group. Now we are equals, on the same level and part of the same family, all together under the judgment and grace of God. This unity diffuses the tension by adding a new aspect to our identity as Palestinians or Israelis. Our new identity as the people of God brings us together as a community that embraces rather than rejects one another. Our unity has the purpose of building a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.³

Reconciliation is a fulfillment of Jesus' prayer: "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23). Believers embracing one another point to the Messiah as the one who brings true peace. Our

² Salim Munayer, PhD, is the director of Musalaha, a ministry of reconciliation based in Jerusalem.

³ Salim Munayer, "Reconciliation and the Cross," in *The Cross: Reflections from Christians in Islamic Contexts*, ed. David Singh (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, forthcoming).

testimony of relationship based on forgiveness and embrace provides an alternative that stands out in societies marked by hatred and violence. A story from a Musalaha Desert Encounter, where Palestinian and Israeli young adults journeyed together through the Jordanian desert, illustrates this point:

During our second night in the desert, when our speaker was talking about the conflict and how we can use it as an opportunity, I saw that everyone was paying full attention and wanted to learn and change, but what shocked me most was seeing the Bedouin watching and listening. When the speaker finished, one of them called him over; we thought it would be an argument, but to our surprise the man said that hearing his talk about love and reconciliation made him feel that he has been away from Jesus and is missing a lot of his life. He then asked our speaker to pray with him and talk to him about faith.

We see here that reconciliation is of eternal consequence and value. In a conflict influenced by end-times theology and apocalyptic obsessions, reconciliation has important eschatological implications. Certain end-times scenarios include the destruction of nations, and in this way eschatological interpretations influence people's attitudes. Some hold negative or uncritically positive attitudes toward other groups based on their understanding of the end times. Amidst all this, we cannot neglect a vision of final reconciliation. Professor Miroslav Volf discussed this idea in a reconciliation seminar:⁴

The world to come is a world of love. How can you come to the world of love? Final judgment is a judgment of grace, for those in Christ it will be a justice of grace and acceptance that will find fulfillment in the final days. It is also a social event. In the Old Testament when judgment is passed, it is not just on a single individual behavior. It is not only individual souls standing before God; it will be a social thing. There will be judgment on what we have done toward each other.

The walls that separate us here will not exist in heaven. We will stand before the Father together, with all the events of history, negligence, oppression, and injustices that we have inflicted coming under his judgment. The implications are two-fold. First, because final judgment is the Lord's, we can be assured that he will administer justice. We are liberated from the cycle of revenge and violence because vengeance is his. In addition, the fact that in heaven we might meet those who are traditionally

4 Miroslav Volf, PhD, is professor of systematic theology at Yale Divinity School and author of *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Abingdon Press, 1996). This excerpt is from a seminar based on the book.



our enemies on earth surely has implications for our behavior toward each other before we reach those final days.

Living Out a Theology of Reconciliation: Trends and Practices

As we continue taking steps toward embracing one another, we find that reconciliation is not a linear process of climbing rungs on a ladder, but a circular process of stages through which we continuously pass. We do the work of reconciling, which is then undone by events or circumstances.

Authentic and enduring relationships move through a series of phases in reconciliation. First people come together with a mixture of excitement, curiosity, and hesitancy. As we build relationships, we begin to take risks, sharing more information and grievances. Issues arise, and at a certain point the parties are overwhelmed by each other's grievances and there is often withdrawal. In withdrawal people question the process and explore the difficult challenges to their identity. We make decisions about whether or not to continue. Some choose to commit to the process of reconciling differences and building relationships. Throughout the process, we are continually faced with the choice to respond either by withdrawing or by persisting in reconciliation.

What has kept believers in the process is a shared commitment to Jesus the Messiah, to following his commands, and, simply put, a commitment to each other. Relationships based on biblical principles have become the backbone of the reconciliation process. As relationships are built, reconciliation becomes a way of life and not a series of meetings or one-time events. An Israeli Messianic woman shared how reconciliation has become a part of her life:

It seems as though it's become life for me, a mind set rather than something I do that is extraneous to who I am ... to respect and understand the Other no matter how it appears that our philosophies diverge. I mean, it's so much simpler to invalidate and not listen, to maintain our own point of view to the exclusion of the Other. ... I don't think that I am on any mission. It's simply my life in him and the way in which I function. My life is infinitely richer and deeper because of it.

In any encounter between groups on opposite sides of a conflict, the issues arise. People coming together will eventually bring out their different feelings and perspectives, and even more so, the pain surrounding the issues will emerge. It is a human instinct to run in the opposite direction and to protect oneself from further pain. In many encounters, this is the point of impasse. Ignoring the issues that emerge is a cheap form of reconciliation, where all the differences, disagreements, and pain are hidden under the rug for the sake of fellowship that remains superficial. Like most cheap purchases, it will not endure and will not satisfy for long.

These encounters, often in the beginning stages of the process, are vital because they bring people together who normally lack contact. As such, the very act of meeting is important. However, stopping there, after sharing a plate of humus, stunts the process. The differences and issues will emerge eventually.

Evan Thomas says that there is an emphasis on fellowship rather than issues: "Leaders have participated in [reconciliation] initiatives and have learned a model that is safe and effective." A growing number of groups and individuals are in the early stages of the process, bringing Israeli and Palestinian believers together and beginning to build contact between the communities. "The issues come later. This is not sweeping the issues under the rug, we have no choice but to deal with them." Organizations such as Musalaha, the only locally based initiative that focuses entirely on facilitating reconciliation, are developing and practicing methods of building relationships that enable believers to confront difficult issues.

Challenges in Reconciliation: The Issues That Arise

The current reality presents challenges on many levels to those involved in reconciliation efforts. One main challenge is that the populations of Israel and the Palestinian territories are becoming increasingly isolated from one another. The construction of the wall and tightening of checkpoints solidify the boundaries between Israeli and Palestinian areas, and it is increasingly difficult to get permission for Palestinians to enter Israel. One result of this is that many organizations within Israel focus their efforts on encounters between the Messianic and Palestinian Christian communities within Israel. While there is a tremendous need for this, it results in the Christians in the Palestinian territories feeling isolated; their needs and voices in reconciliation are neglected. A strategy for facing this challenge used by Musalaha and other organizations is to conduct events outside the country, where everyone is in somewhat neutral territory.

Another challenge that our situation presents is an imbalance of power. Palestinian Christians and Messianic Israelis live in a context where there is an asymmetry in who holds the power. Messianic Israelis are members of the powerful majority, but at the same time are a minority that is not readily accepted by Israeli society. Palestinian Christians are members of the Palestinian Arab minority, and as Christians are a minority within that mostly Muslim group. When believers meet together, they are faced with the challenge of addressing the issues of power and minority/majority relations. Research published by the Abraham Fund finds that Arab–Jewish encounters are most effective when the issues of symmetry are addressed in participation and facilitation.⁵

Besides the logistic realities, there are many differences that can serve

5 Ifat Maoz, PhD, "Evaluation of Jewish-Arab Coexistence Programs Funded by the Abraham Fund," The Department of Communication, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2000.



as breaking points in the reconciliation process. Theology is often the first point of contention. Some object to reconciliation between believers altogether, saying that Jesus reconciled us two thousand years ago and the work is dealt with in the past. This approach fails to acknowledge and address the pain that we have caused one another.

In our context, theologies of the land and the end-times are issues that continually arise. Viewpoints are rarely reconciled, and many believers are willing to agree to disagree on these issues. However, for a few agreement has become a requirement for fellowship; they have difficulty meeting and worshiping together with those who hold different interpretations. This is evident on both sides. The issue of justice is another challenge. Discussion of this topic leaves people feeling dissatisfied and antagonized.

These issues can lead to arguments, personal attacks, polarization, and feeling pushed to defend one's people. When addressed outside the framework of relationships that include trust, the parties come away frustrated and dissatisfied, and return to their corners. The difficulty is to participate in reconciliation without ignoring the issues, but also without allowing the issues to undermine unity. Finding the balance is a profound challenge.

Initiatives in Reconciliation: Moving in Stages

Many ministries are involved in bringing people from both sides together, often for a common purpose such as leadership training or worship services. These frameworks are a good introduction to the process, even though they do not always have a deliberate focus on reconciliation. Many groups in the land are in these initial stages. The reality is that there are still a large number of both Palestinian and Israeli believers who have little or no knowledge that believers even exist on the other side. Therefore the first steps of making contact between the communities – bringing Palestinians and Israelis together, hearing each other's languages, seeing each other's faces, and recognizing the work of God in each other's lives – is vital. Many ministries and groups face the challenge of moving beyond these initial stages and progressing in reconciliation. The following is a brief list of reconciliation initiatives.

Reconciliation Ministries. Musalaha is a “non-profit organization that seeks to promote reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians as demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus. We seek to be an encouragement and facilitator of reconciliation, first among Palestinian Christians and Messianic Israelis, and then beyond to our respective communities.”⁶ The Musalaha board is half Palestinian and half Israeli, and tries to maintain that balance in participation and leadership. Musalaha has developed a methodology of building relationships through activities such as Desert

6 From Musalaha's mission statement; see www.musalaha.org.

Encounters, Summer Camps, Family Conferences, and Women's Retreats, and from there moving to deal with key challenges and issues in reconciliation. As relationships and trust are developed, Musalaha conducts conferences and leadership training on biblical principles of reconciliation, understanding one another's histories and culture, conflict-resolution, and "hot topics" such as theology of the land and prophecy. They also publish books on reconciliation and materials – such as an Arabic/Hebrew worship songbook – for use in joint meetings. Musalaha is the only local organization whose primary focus is promoting reconciliation based on biblical principles. Many other believing organizations exist that include reconciliation as part of their program and philosophy, but not as their main function.

Congregations, Worship Events, Prayer Meetings. There are a number of congregations that have members from both Israeli and Palestinian backgrounds, or that have developed relationships with congregations from the other community. The Emmanuel congregation in Ramle meets every few months with the Ma'ayan and Hesed Ve'emet congregations for services. The Messianic congregation at Beit Immanuel puts a strong emphasis on reconciliation, and works closely with the Arab congregation in Jaffa, which also meets at Beit Immanuel, as well as with the Ethiopian Messianic congregation. As part of their vision statement, Carmel Assembly in Haifa emphasizes the "One New Man" from Ephesians 2: "We believe the Lord has called us as a congregation of Jews, Arabs, and other Gentiles, to demonstrate in our ministries and daily activities this unity of true peace through the Messiah in the face of the terrible tensions which rage throughout our land in these difficult days."⁷ They are also involved in outreach to all communities, particularly through the Beit Nizachon rehabilitation center.

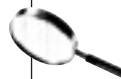
Some Messianic congregations have partnered with congregations on the other side to help with specific projects or initiatives. One example out of many is when a Messianic congregation raised funds for chairs for a Bethlehem church.

The International House of Prayer conducts large worship and prayer conferences with Israelis, Arabs from around the Middle East, and international believers. The emphasis is on sharing and praying for participants' ministries.

On a small scale, a number of individuals and small groups have initiated prayer meetings between Palestinian and Israeli believers. One example takes place at the Finnish School in Jerusalem, where women from both sides meet for prayer and different activities on a monthly basis. The group, started by an American believer, has also met for retreats, dinners, and other celebrations.

Leadership Training and Conferences. Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies offers leadership training programs in which both Israelis

7 www.carmel-assembly.org.il/vision.html.



and Palestinians participate and lead sessions. SAYF (Sitting at Yeshua's Feet) is a retreat for leaders and pastors. Previously the group included those from Messianic congregations; in recent years leaders involved in reconciliation initiatives pushed for inclusion of Arab pastors. As a result, pastors from Bethlehem and the Galilee are now involved.

Student Activities. The Israel College of the Bible and the Bethlehem Bible College have occasional joint meetings on the faculty level, and in the past have had joint student meetings. FCSI (The Fellowship of Christian Students in Israel) started 25 years ago as a joint ministry of Arabs and Jews; the board and student committee of FCSI are half Arab and half Jewish. They have student groups at many universities and a few of the smaller groups are integrated, but in general they are divided into Arabic and Hebrew speaking groups. FCSI conducts one conference each year that brings together the Arabic and Hebrew speakers. The leadership feels that "there is a need for both sides to work together on a common basis of faith."

Youth and Children. King's Kids is "a ministry bringing Arab believing youth and Messianic youth together as one in Christ. Here in Israel, where political issues take a huge space in our lives and things happen so fast that it is too hard to grasp them all, we come together as Jews and Arabs once every other week to share our faith, love and compassion through praise and worship, bible studies, games and definitely what King's Kids does best, learning dances and pantomimes with Christian famous music to practice them all and get ready for outreach."⁸ A new and growing initiative for young people is in the area of sports ministries. Believers from Palestinian Christian and Israeli Messianic congregations brought their boys together for a soccer camp for the first time in 2005.

Initiatives bringing Israelis and Palestinians together are growing among believers in the land. The challenge is to move forward beyond the initial stages, into deeper understanding and embrace of one another. Each stage requires greater risk and greater effort; through them we make progress in reconciliation based on the grace given to us by the Messiah.

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Nostra Aetate: Between Hebrew Catholics and Messianic Jews

THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL



By **Gershon NereI**

October 2005 marked the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* ("In our time"), the renowned Roman Catholic *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, a leading statement of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Forty years later, a variety of solemn events took place in order to re-evaluate the legacy and the impact of *Nostra Aetate*. One of these occasions was an international colloquium organized jointly by the *John XXIII Foundation for Religious Studies* at Bologna, Italy, and the Department of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.¹ At this conference, just as with the other worldwide events in commemoration of Vatican II, the agenda ignored a significantly relevant Jewish aspect. Namely, the pertinence of *Nostra Aetate* to modern Jewish believers in Yeshua.

Paragraph III of the "Jewish Section" (IV) of *Nostra Aetate* reads as follows:

"She [the Church] also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's mainstay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people."²

However, while the Catholic Church does remember the primitive Jewish disciples of Yeshua, today the question arises regarding the relation of the church to modern Jews who originate from Jewish families and firmly maintain Jewish identity, yet at the same time also accept Yeshua as the Messiah and the Son of God. In other words, while Jewish believers in Yeshua (= *JBY*) nowadays belong to both Jewry and the *ekklesia*, the universal body of believers in Yeshua, the following topics need special assessment:

1 The theme of this conference, 30 October – 1 November 2005, was "*Nostra Aetate*: Origins, Promulgation, Impact on Jewish-Catholic Relations." The chief organizers were Yosef Lamdan, former Israeli Ambassador to the Vatican, Prof. Gedalyahu G. Stroumsa, Head of the Center for the Study of Christianity at the Hebrew University, and Prof. Alberto Melloni, of Bologna. See www.csc.huji.ac.il and www.fscire.it.

2 *Nostra Aetate*, Chapter 4, paragraph 3, at www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council.

1. Today, does the church consider JBY as an integral part of Judaism and Israel?
2. While the church promotes her official dialogue with Orthodox Judaism, is she also willing to communicate openly and formally with Jews who believe in Yeshua, i.e. groups which are rejected and banned by Orthodox Judaism?
3. What are the implications of the theological differentiation between Hebrew Catholics, on the one hand, and Messianic Jews on the other?

In this paper I wish to present a preliminary introduction to the above mentioned issues.

The Church Faces Several Judaisms

Paragraph V of the "Jewish Section" of *Nostra Aetate* (IV) reads as follows:

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is so great, the Council wishes to foster and commend mutual understanding and esteem. This will be the fruit above all, of biblical and theological studies and of brotherly dialogues.³

Nostra Aetate talks about brotherly dialogue with the Jews (*Judaeis*), but the document avoids the term Judaism. In reality, the church still faces several Judaisms today. A major spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is the belief in the Messiah. Yet with regard to this issue one observes the existence of several messianisms within the Jewish world.⁴ Therefore, the church is challenged by the different modern messianic Jewish movements, which re-introduce and reshape the historic debates between the messianic faiths of Judaism and Christianity.⁵

Two contemporary groups of Jewish Messiah-believers are of particular interest in our context: first, the Hebrew Catholics, who aim toward their canonical recognition as a Hebraic branch within the Latin Church,⁶ and second, the Messianic Jews, who attempt to become a fifth branch within Jewry, alongside Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Secular Jews.⁷

As the Catholic Church officially converses with Jewry – her "Jewish

3 *Nostra Aetate*, Chapter 4, paragraph 5. Latin text at www.ewtn.com/library/councils/v2noslat.htm.

4 See, for example, Seffi Rachlevsky, *Messiah's Donkey* (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Ahronot/Hemed, 1998; Hebrew).

5 See David Berger, "The Rebbe King Messiah," *The Scandal of Indifference and the Threat to Israel's Faith* (Jerusalem: Urim, 2005; expanded and updated Hebrew edition).

6 See recently, for example, David Moss, "Jewish Identity Within the Church," *The Hebrew Catholic*, vol. 81 (Winter–Spring 2005), 34.

7 Cf. J. Neusner, W. Scott Green, E. S. Frerichs, eds., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), ix–xiii. See also Gershon Nerel, "Qumran, Messianic Jews, and Modern Self-Identity," *Mishkan*, 44 (2005), 52–59.

mother,” and not merely her “elder brother” – she actually discovers today a revolutionized Jewish religion. The chapter on the Jews (IV) in the *Nostra Aetate* “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” begins with the following statement:

As the Council searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond which spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to the offspring of Abraham.

While searching into the mystery of the church, Roman Catholicism also explores the mystery of Israel. This bilateral search into the mysteries of both the church and Israel compels Rome to face the modern movements of Jewish Yeshua-believers as well.

The Church and Contemporary Jewish Yeshua-Believers

The Catholic Church, according to the “Jewish chapter” (IV) of *Nostra Aetate*, awaits the future day “known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord with a single voice”;⁸ namely, the church believes that the Jews too will accept Yeshua. Nowadays, in fact, the numbers of Jewish groups that believe in Yeshua are constantly growing.⁹ Therefore, while the Roman Church fosters her ecumenical relations of respect and collaboration with normative Judaism, which is, by her own definition, a “non-Christian religion,” she is increasingly challenged by those modern Yeshua-Jews who do believe openly in Yeshua as “the way, the truth, and the life.”¹⁰

Messianic Yeshua-Jews not only come from Judaism, but also remain within Judaism and actually represent a new stream of Judaism. For the Roman Church, this reality provokes the theological *status quo* which existed for centuries, when JBY had no corporate sovereignty. Unlike the Protestant/Reform groups and some eastern denominations, contemporary Jewish Yeshua-believers cannot be accused by the church of having a schismatic history. JBY are the root and the source of the church, as *Nostra Aetate* affirms. JBY not only belong spiritually to the people of the New Covenant, but also physically to the authentic stock of Abraham.

Both Hebrew Catholics and Messianic Jews accept the scriptural canon of the Old and New Testaments as a *fait accompli*, with no attempts to canonize new texts of their own. They give full credit to the church for shaping and preserving the canon of the New Testament.

8 *Nostra Aetate*, Chapter 4, paragraph 4.

9 Larry Derfner and Ksenia Svetlova, “Messianic Jews in Israel Claim to Number 10,000,” *The Jerusalem Post* (April 28, 2005), 1.

10 John 14:6. *Nostra Aetate*, Chapter 2, “The Different non-Christian Religions.”



Hebrew Catholics Inside the Church Establishment

Unlike Messianic Jews, Hebrew Catholics are integrally incorporated into the Latin ecclesiastical establishment. The church smoothly absorbs the groupings of the various associations of Hebrew Catholics. In the State of Israel, for example, in October 2005 the church celebrated the 50th anniversary of its local Hebrew speaking community organized under the Society of St. James. Actually, during a short period of twenty months (Nov. 2003–June 2005), they even had, by pontifical initiative, the late bishop Jean-Baptist Gourion as a prelate of their own. However, through the lens of *Nostra Aetate*, even Hebrew Catholics who live in Israel and normally use colloquial Hebrew in their liturgy cannot belong to Judaism, since Judaism is a non-Christian religion. Within such parameters, Hebrew Catholics are simply treated by the church as converts – converts to a historic system of another established religion.¹¹ Consequently, the church avoids their appellation as *Jewish Catholics*, and instead uses the term *Hebrew Catholics*.¹²

However, while *Nostra Aetate* speaks categorically about Judaism as a “non-Christian religion,” in 1973 the French Episcopal Commission issued a new “Jewish Declaration” of its own, which states as follows:

... it is not possible to regard the Jewish ‘religion’ simply as one among the religions that presently exist on this earth.¹³

Moreover, recently the Capuchin theologian Raniero Cantalamessa, who is the preacher of the Pontifical Household, asserted as follows:

For us Christians, Judaism is not ‘another religion,’ but rather an integral part of our own religion. We worship the same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who for us is also the God of Jesus Christ.¹⁴

Thus, four decades later the Catholic Church elegantly re-interprets and rectifies *Nostra Aetate*. Rome acknowledges that Israel and the Jews, and not just Judaism as a religion, have a unique and separate status among world religions. In other words, unlike with Hinduism, Buddhism, and

11 See, for example, Elias Friedman, OCD, *Jewish Identity* (New York: Miriam Press, 1987), 73–135; 207–208; 212.

12 Cf. Gershon Nerel, “Bishop Jean-Baptiste Gurion and Two Modern Yeshua-Movements,” *Mishkan*, 40 (2004), 57–63. An updated Hebrew version of this article, after the death of Bishop Gourion in June 2005, appeared in *Ariel*, 173 (2005), 77–80.

13 Friedman, 199. Cf. Marcel J. Dubois, *L’Exil et la Demeure* (Jerusalem, 1984), 149–158.

14 “Appropriate Attitude Toward the Jewish People,” Father Cantalamessa Comments on Sunday’s Gospel, in *Zenit News Agency – The World Seen from Rome*, Rome (Sept. 30, 2005; Code: ZE05093001).

even Islam, it is only with and through Israel and the Jews that the church shares a brotherly chosen patrimony – past, present and future.¹⁵

Messianic Jews Outside the Church Establishment

Unlike Hebrew Catholics, Messianic Jews are not registered members of the historic churches, although practically they are not far from the Protestant-Evangelical world. Usually, Messianic Jews stress their organizational independence as well as their unique theological hermeneutics. Consequently, they refuse to be called converts to the religion of Christianity. Their self-definition as Jews “completed” or “fulfilled” in Messiah Yeshua signals that they are not converted to any non-Jewish religion.

With *Nostra Aetate’s* categorical definition of Judaism as a “non-Christian religion,” the church still struggles with the difficulty of Messianic Jews who regard themselves as an integral part of the Jewish national heritage or religion, while at the same time also believing in Messiah Yeshua. For the absolutist church, the modern phenomenon of Messianic Jews is both an enigma and a dilemma. Even when some Catholic theologians are willing to regard Messianic Jews as a kind of prophetic beginning, the church per se is reluctant to express her clear voice on this topic, except for dealing with Messianic Jews “behind the curtain.”

A major Catholic argument against Messianic Jews is that they lack uninterrupted historic continuity, like all Protestants. Namely, they exist without a sacred tradition, without an authoritative hierarchy, and without Apostolic Succession. Thus, the Catholic Church rejects the option of recognizing Messianic Jews as a legitimate Jewish-Christian church or a modern *Kehila of the Circumcision*. Needless to say, at least for the time being, the concepts of Christian (Messianic) Judaism or, alternately, Jewish Christianity, are de facto viewed by the Catholic Church as religious syncretism.

From an ecclesiological point of view, the Roman Church regards Messianic Jews, with their Messianic Judaism, as an individualistic and outsider “Christian-Jewish Religion.” Yet while Rome is willing to consider Messianic Jews as Protestants of Hebraic descent, she formally insists that they are unqualified to partake in a Catholic Communion service.

As the church consciously calls her members to return to Jewish/Hebraic roots, she also finds the Messianic Jews. The unique contribution of Messianic Jews is to heal the schism between gentiles and Jews within the People of God. Clearly, the co-existence of Jews and gentiles within the *ekklesia*, the universal body of believers, is not just a matter of co-existence between two religions, Judaism and Christianity. Only the sover-

15 See also, for example, Jean-Miguel Garrigues, “Dans quelle mesure un Juif croyant en Jesus Christ demeure-t-il Juif?,” *Nova et Vetera*, vol. 81 (2006), forthcoming.



eign restoration of JBY into the organic body of all disciples of Yeshua, as it was with the primitive church, will heal the church.¹⁶

All in all, Messianic Jews stress that they are not only a new prophetic phenomenon, but that they also have a fresh prophetic and divine authority in spiritual matters. In other words, that God is able to work today even beyond the historic churches and their traditions.¹⁷ For the readers and followers of *Nostra Aetate*, this is a unique challenge.

A “Second Jerusalem Council”

The *Nostra Aetate* declaration is instrumental in the facilitation of the attempts of some Catholics and Messianic Jews to convene a “Second Jerusalem Council.” Daniel Juster, a Messianic Jew, and Peter Hocken, a Roman Catholic, write in this respect as follows:

For the greater part of Christian history, the Christian Church did not allow for any specifically Jewish component, within which Jewish believers in Jesus could retain a Jewish identity. For this reason, the Messianic Jews see themselves as a ‘resurrection from the dead’ in the words of Romans 11:15 ... The *Toward Jerusalem Council II* initiative (TJCII) is a direct consequence of the rise of the modern Messianic Jewish movement, for the vision of TJCII is the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile within the one Body of Christ-Messiah.¹⁸

Today, some Messianic Jews and charismatic Catholics are looking together at the feasibility of organizing a “Second Jerusalem Council,” following the model of Acts 15. They share the common vision of full mutual recognition and acceptance. Yet the “resurrection from the dead” of JBY does not take place within a vacuum. The history of church and synagogue, past and recent, has much to say. It is particularly in Eretz Israel, the land of Israel, that one discovers today a dual emergence of the local “mother church” – namely Palestinian Christians – on the one hand, and JBY on the other. The question of who represents the genuine mother church in the land is not an academic query. Messianic Jews claim that they are the historic and authentic continuation of the first *Kehila*, i.e. the first entity/congregation of Jewish Yeshua-believers in the early centuries as described in the New Testament; there is also the Palestinian

16 Cf. Gershon Nerel, “Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern Thought of Messianic Jews,” in Simon C. Mimouni and F. Stanley Jones, eds., *Le judéo-christianisme dans tous ses états* (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 399–425.

17 See, for example, Arye Powlison, “Restoring Ecclesiastical Authority Via Messianic Judaism,” in *Kesher*, vol. 10 (Winter 2000), 20–37.

18 Daniel Juster and Peter Hocken, *The Messianic Jewish Movement – An Introduction, Toward Jerusalem Council II*, Ventura, California (2004), 5. See also www.TJCII.org.

claim that Arab Christians are the heirs of the mother church in the land.¹⁹ The impact of these competing claims is only beginning.

The Vatican, as an established institution, currently ignores the delicate issue of “who represents the authentic mother church” in the promised land. Meanwhile, individual Catholics, like Peter Hocken, can clearly observe that “the reappearance of a distinctively Jewish Christianity is itself a sign of the coming fulfilment of Paul’s affirmation that ‘all Israel will be saved,’” and that “Messianic Judaism represents the first time, since the early Christian generations, that Jews are able to accept Jesus as Messiah without abandoning or diminishing their Jewishness.”²⁰

“Canonical” Supersession

On the formal level, there is no doubt that *Nostra Aetate* revolutionized the historic relations between Catholics and Jews, yet concepts of theological supersession still survive within the linguistic relationship of the church toward Jews. The use of certain vocabulary continues to shape theological interpretations concerning Israel, referring, for example, to Jewry, Judaism, the Jewish State, and especially the Jewish Bible. This topic becomes salient within another important Catholic document, promulgated in 2002. The statement *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*²¹ is a direct continuation of *Nostra Aetate*, and can only be read as such. Within the context of the relations between the church and modern JBY, the definition and exegesis of the biblical canon is of fundamental significance, particularly with regard to nomenclature that relates differently to the “Jewish Bible” and the “Christian Bible.”²²

From a Messianic Jewish perspective, one can find terminological supersessionism in talk about the “Hebrew/Jewish Bible”²³ on the one hand, and the gentile (Christian) Bible²⁴ – as if only “for the Goyim,” the non-Jews – on the other hand. For example, it is not uncommon for mainstream Jews to speak about “their own Bible” as opposed to the “Bible of the gentiles.” Yet for Messianic Jews, who do believe in the New Testament, this book is no less Jewish Scripture than the Old Testament,

19 Gershon Nerel, “Spiritual Intifada of Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews,” in Fred Wright, ed., *Israel: His People, His Land, His Story* (Eastbourne, East Sussex, 2005), 207–208.

20 Peter Hocken, *The Glory and the Shame* (Guildford, Surrey, 1994), 146; Cf. Idem, *God’s Masterplan* (London, 2003), 101–103.

21 See *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, The Pontifical Biblical Commission, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (2002). On the Internet: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html.

22 See, for example, Lawrence Boadt, “The Role of Scripture in Catholic-Jewish Relations,” in Eugene J. Fisher, A. James Rudin, Marc H. Tanenbaum, eds., *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 89–108; and also Michael J. Cook, “The Bible and Catholic-Jewish Relations,” *Ibid.*, 109–124.

23 *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, 50, 55, 57.

24 *Ibid.*, 13.



so that the New Testament is not a “gentile” book but a Jewish one. This is true since JBY do not consider themselves “converted from Judaism,” as the document *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* says.²⁵ Rather, as “completed Jews in the Messiah,” JBY find their brethren on both the Jewish “side” and the gentile “side,” and obviously they do not talk about two separate Bibles. When JBY talk about the Jewish Bible, they mean the one Holy Scripture – from Genesis to Revelation.

When the Catholic statement *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* mentions “Israelites” and “Israel,” it refers predominantly to biblical times, almost completely ignoring the Jews of today. Theologically, this document bypasses modern Israelis, modern JBY, and the modern Jewish state. The church still has a theological difficulty, even a theological fixation, with the renaissance of the Jewish state of Israel, especially when she says:

Christian faith recognises the fulfilment, in Christ, of the Scriptures and the hopes of Israel, but it does not understand this fulfilment as a literal one. ... It would be wrong to consider the prophecies of the Old Testament as some kind of photographic anticipation of future events.²⁶

Only One Jewish Bible

The modern restoration of Jewish sovereignty among both mainstream Jewry and JBY de facto provokes and even undermines the traditional “Israelology” of the historic churches. Thus, for example, while the church talks about the Pauline theology of “end of the Torah [Law]” (Rom 10: 4),²⁷ JBY talk about their Jewish identity through the Torah (e. g. circumcision, calendar) – yet certainly without getting salvation in the Torah. As for Jerusalem, JBY believe that Israel’s ancient/modern capital city is not only symbolic and heavenly.²⁸ For Messianic Jews, physical sovereignty in Jewish Jerusalem and in the land promised to the Jews has a unique significance according to biblical prophecies regarding Israel’s restoration in the end times (Luke 21:24).

Many Messianic Jews would prefer to see another title for this Catholic document, namely, *The People of God and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Jewish Bible*. In other words, in the perception of JBY, the entire Bible is Jewish and was composed by Jews, including the New Testament. This is in line with their full identification and integration within the Jewish/Israeli world, as a simple matter of physical and natural continuity. Therefore,

²⁵ Ibid., 80.

²⁶ Ibid., 48.

²⁷ Ibid., 100.

²⁸ Ibid., 111–112.

JBY point to the continuous chain between biblical and contemporary Israel, also manifest in the Jewish land and Jewish state.

Unlike certain churches today, JBY make no distinction between the (biblical) Jewish people and modern Israel. "Israel" in the church document *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* refers only (or mainly) to biblical Israel, while ignoring modern Israel. The historically loaded concept of "Verus Israel," the true Israel, still needs a new and clear definition. Modern Messianic Jewish thinking has the unique tools – perceptual, linguistic, and exegetical – to meet this need.²⁹

While Messianic Jews talk about the Jewish Bible, comprising Old and New Testaments, they do not talk about a "Christian Bible." Therefore, the canonical, complete Jewish Bible from Genesis to Revelation is the fundamental basis for their full theological authority. Although they do not possess their own apostolic succession with a tradition of many centuries, JBY strongly rely upon canonical authority. More than semantically, the revived *ecclesia ex circumcisione* today cannot accept the current definition of the historic *ecclesia ex gentibus* that the biblical canon is just a Christian Bible.

The tradition and history of the past two millennia have many interpretations, and so does the biblical canon. Indeed, text and context go together. The modern Messianic Jewish movement accepts the Jewish Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation as canonized partly by the synagogue and partly by the church. JBY also shape their own Jewish identity by a contextualization process with both Jews and gentiles. Therefore, the total faith in Old and New Testaments is not a monopoly of gentile Christianity. So while the Catholic document *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* talks about two different groups, Jew and Christians who claim to be the "peoples of the book," such a parlance is irrelevant for Messianic Jews because they speak of only one truth, one Bible, and one people of God.

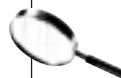
Consequently, because semantics and appellations are of great significance, another "titular" solution will help to define the Judeo-Christian/Messianic canon of the Bible, namely, *The Book of Covenants*. This name is already in use in Israel, both in Hebrew and in English printings of Holy Scripture. This way we avoid having a "Gentile Bible" vs. a "Jewish Bible."

Normalization between the Church and Messianic Jews

Beyond issues raised by M. Kinzer in *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*,³⁰ I wish to sharpen the question that, in my view, the Holy See will have to

29 See, for example, Gershon Nerel, "'Verus Israel'?: Jewish Believers in Jesus – A Challenge for the Church," at <http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/absdynam.html>.

30 Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).



answer as a subsequent statement to *Nostra Aetate*: “What would be the right way to normalize the abnormal relationship, caused by a historical schism, between the ‘daughter gentile church’ and her ‘resurrected mother Jewish *kehila* (church)’?” In a broader sense, would the reshaping of the theological identity of both gentile Christians and Messianic Jews enable the reunification of the “parted ways” between the “repentant daughter” and her “restored mother”?

Kinzer argues that the normalization process between the predominantly gentile church and modern JBY is not only possible, but mandatory, as both sides redefine their self-identification vis-à-vis the other. Consequently, both sides also reshape their mutual conduct. Thus, when the church openly disengages from her supersessionist theology, and JBY restore their theological status in the footsteps of the early Jewish mother *kehila* (*ekklesia*), then the entire universal body of believers in Yeshua will be engaged in a healthy theological brotherhood. Additionally, Kinzer envisions a significant outcome of the normalization process: JBY functioning as bridges between mainstream churches and normative Jews.

Following the ecumenical pattern of *Nostra Aetate*, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* depicts the divine plan for the Jewish people through irrevocable election and covenant. Consequently, modern Jews/Israelites, including JBY, need to maintain a distinctive national existence. Therefore, the church should rehabilitate St. Paul, a faithful national Messianic Jew, not just a “Christian,” from any supersessionist manipulation since ancient times.³¹ Paul and other JBY taught and still teach that the church as a whole does not and cannot replace the Jewish people; instead the gentiles, grafted into the “cultivated olive tree,” join Israel’s election.³²

While *Nostra Aetate* refers de facto to dialogue between “divorced” Jews and Christians, Kinzer firmly promotes the principle of a distinct dual *kehila* system on the universal level – one for the *ecclesia ex circumcissione* and the other for the *ecclesia ex gentibus*. He also supports united expressions of Jewish and gentile faith in Yeshua, and insists that “a bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel affirms Israel’s covenant, Torah, and religious tradition.”³³ However, his strong dependence upon Jewish religious/halakhic tradition – i.e. the oral law, which is mostly unbiblical – assumes an authority that is not really scriptural.

Within such an ecclesiology, which is *one body* – symbolically one olive tree – consisting of two parts, Jews and gentiles, both sides have to avoid either judaization or gentilization of the other.

***Nostra Aetate* and Messianic Jews**

The ecumenical policy of *Nostra Aetate* explicitly speaks of “Christians and Jews,” namely of two distinct religious groups, and not of Christian

31 See also John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2000), passim.

32 Kinzer, 97, 102.

33 Kinzer, 300.

Jews or Messianic Jews. Actually, in a supersessionist way, *Nostra Aetate* excludes any possibility of a corporate entity of Messianic Jews. When the document mentions, for example, that “the [Christian] Church is the new people of God,”³⁴ this can (though need not) be understood in a supersessionist manner. *Nostra Aetate* disregards the implications of modern JBY for ecclesiology and the church’s own self-definition. Therefore, in his book Kinzer justifiably quotes the following:

If the church acknowledges the abiding reality of Israel’s corporeal election, it will naturally expect baptized Jews to maintain faithfully their Jewish identity. But if the church truly believes that it has superseded God’s covenant with Israel, it will prohibit or discourage Jews from preserving their identity as Jews and members of the Jewish people.³⁵

Consequently Kinzer argues that the problem of supersessionism turns on the church’s capacity to acknowledge the “abiding religious significance of Israel’s corporeal election and hence the abiding religious significance of the distinction between gentile and Jew.”³⁶

However, one should again highlight the fact that when Messianic Jews maintain their Jewish identity and fully participate in the Jewish commonwealth, this does *not* mean that they belong to another religion; in *Nostra Aetate* Judaism/Jewry is, by definition, “a non-Christian religion.” Torah observance (Matt 5:17), for JBY, is not a “non-Christian/Messianic religion,” and therefore when Jews believe in Yeshua they do not abandon or desert one religion and enter another.

Epilogue

In our time, as the Catholic Church continues to implement the Jewish guidelines of *Nostra Aetate*, she increasingly realizes that just like Christendom, Judaism is neither monolithic nor uniform. In our time, there exist a multiplicity of Judaisms, including the Chabad messianists. But while *Nostra Aetate* is significant within the formal ecumenical dialogue between the church and the majority of Jews, on the official level contemporary Messianic Yeshua-Jews are absent from the church’s approach to the Jewish people. The church should acknowledge that the time is ripe for a new, real, and wide-open encounter with JBY – and not just as another part of an inner-Christian debate. Messianic Yeshua-Jews belong uniquely to both Israel and the Messianic/Christian *ekklesia/kehila*.

34 *Nostra Aetate*, section IV, paragraph 6.

35 Kinzer, 182, quotes R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 11-12, and Michael Wyschogrod, “Letter to a Friend,” *Modern Theology* 11:2, April 1995, 165-171.

36 *Ibid.*



Slowly but surely more and more Catholic theologians are coming to the conclusion that not all Messianic Jews are merely "Protestant Hebrew Christians."³⁷ As JBY avoid assimilation in order to retain their Jewish identity, they face the great challenge of forming their own genuine congregations. This challenge should focus on the State of Israel, not the diaspora. Such authentic Messianic assemblies need to be anchored in Scriptural teaching interpreted by the guidance of the Holy Spirit – *not* in rabbinic/diaspora Judaism, Protestantism, or Catholicism.

Ecumenism and dialogue between Christians and Jews is the leitmotif of *Nostra Aetate*, yet in our context one should not forget the significance of prophetic and eschatological aspects. It is imperative that all churches, not only the Catholic Church, realize that Israel and JBY are in the center of the eschatological signs of the time. Therefore, one should not just talk about Judaism and Christianity as two religions, but rather about Jews, Christ-believers, and Messianic Jews, examined in terms of space, time, and metaphysics.³⁸

In summary, different types of Christians and Jews use the same "road map" of the Bible, but they walk in different ways. The close relationship of JBY to both Israel and the universal *ekklesia* is part and parcel of their calling and their normality. One may expect that in the near future the Roman Church will officially dialogue also with modern Messianic Jews. It is hoped that long before a third Vatican council is convened, Rome will issue a new *Nostra Aetate* regarding Jews and Yeshua, in which the Jews will be liberated from the historic demand to convert to the Christianity of the churches.³⁹ Such a future document will not have to deal with the religions of Judaism, Catholicism, or Protestantism, but rather will have to elaborate on topics like biblical hermeneutics, the true Israel (*Verus Israel*), missions and witness to the Jews, Palestinian Christian supersessionism, neo-marcionism, biblical Zionism, and the second coming of Yeshua.

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37 See, for example, Kinzer, 296.

38 Cf. Ora Limor, review of Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 95; Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2003), in *Zion*, vol. 70:2 (2005), 242–247 (Hebrew).

39 Cf., for example, Tsvi Sadan, "Nice, But Something is Missing," in *Kivun*, vol. 47 (Sept.–Oct. 2005), 3 (Hebrew).

Claudius Buchanan:

Scotland's First Missionary to the Jewish People



By **John S. Ross**

The Cambuslang Revival and the Concert for Prayer

In September 1741, the itinerant ministry of evangelist George Whitefield brought him to Scotland to preach in the city of Glasgow. William M'Culloch, the minister of Cambuslang, a parish five miles southeast of Glasgow, greatly stimulated by Whitefield's ministry and by the reports of his involvement in the revival in New England, was encouraged to persist in preaching the need for spiritual new birth and conversion. M'Culloch, sensing a new spiritual mood in the community, pressed Whitefield to come to Cambuslang at the first possible opportunity. Whitefield, who had heard the news from Cambuslang, arrived the following July to assist M'Culloch at his communion services.¹ During the 18th century, Scottish communion services were often held at yearly intervals and customarily spread out from Thursday to Monday. The impact of Whitefield's preaching was so great that the immediate, if unconventional, decision was made to hold another communion the following month. The crowds attending the second communion exceeded even the largest at the July gatherings. M'Culloch wrote of them to the *Glasgow Weekly History*:

None ever saw the like since the Revolution in Scotland [1690], or even any where else, at any Sacramental Occasion; Some have called them fifty Thousand; some forty Thousand; the lowest estimate I hear of ... makes them to have been upwards of thirty Thousand.²

On the final Monday more than twenty-four ministers were present, including "old Mr. Bonar," an ancestor of Andrew and Horatius Bonar, both strong advocates of missions to the Jews.³ The revival resulted in an increased concern for the expansion of the Kingdom of God, both within Scotland and further afield.

1 Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 111.

2 Fawcett, 119.

3 David MacFarlan, *The Revivals of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Johnstone, n.d.), 73.

According to the New England theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-58), such revival movements are to be understood as part of a spiritual continuum, dating back to Pentecost, whereby evangelical life is, from time to time, renewed and reinvigorated.⁴ In his *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1774), Edwards represented the revivals of the mid-eighteenth century as the precursors of yet greater blessings throughout the world.⁵ His theories, empowered by spiritual renewal, resulted in awakening the Church to its international missionary commitment. When, in around 1743, the Great Awakening in New England began to falter, Edwards attributed the slow-down to a lack of faithfulness in prayer; he believed, however, that the lost momentum was only temporary, and God would revive his work and it would continue until it had “subdued the whole earth.”⁶ In order to regain the earlier progress of revival, Edwards wrote to M’Culloch in Cambuslang proposing the launching of a Concert for Prayer – the reintroduction, on an international basis, of the old Scottish practice whereby Christians covenanted to pray for a common cause. The Concert, the result of the correspondence and friendship of the Scottish leaders – McLaurin, Robe of Kilsyth, and M’Culloch – and Jonathan Edwards, resulted fifty years later in “a gift from a Scottish Presbyterian to an English Baptist of a book by a New England Congregationalist,” leading to William Carey’s pioneering initiative of 1792.⁷ This somewhat tortuous connection between Edwards, the Concert for Prayer, and William Carey’s contribution to the modern missionary movement has become a commonplace in the historiography of Christian missions.⁸ Much less noticed is the connection between the Concert and Jewish missions.

Claudius Buchanan

The most direct link between the Great Awakening and modern missions is not through William Carey but through the little known Claudius Buchanan (1766-1814).⁹ As an infant, Buchanan had been baptized by the elderly M’Culloch, then seventy-five years of age. His maternal grandfather, Claudius Somers, was a convert of the 1742 revival and one of M’Culloch’s elders, serving the Cambuslang church as the congregational treasurer. His family entertained the hope that Claudius would enter the ministry of the

4 Cf. e.g. De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea* (Kampen: Kok, 1970), 119-121; I. H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 48-55; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 277f.

5 Jonathan Edwards, *Works* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), vol. 1, 604-609.

6 De Jong, 131.

7 Alfred Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 79.

8 Cf. e.g. Bosch, 280; George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 344; Jim Reapsome, “Carey, William” in Scott Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), ad. loc.; J. Verkyl, *Contemporary Missiology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 23.

9 Hugh Pearson, *Memoirs of the Life and Writing of the Rev. Claudius Buchanan, D.D.* (London: Seeley and Burnside, 1834), 2; cf. Fawcett, 235-236.

Church of Scotland, but he had other ideas and planned to explore Europe. His plans, however, failed and he did not get beyond London, where he came under the influence of the celebrated John Newton, then rector at St Mary, Woolnoth.¹⁰ Buchanan was educated at Cambridge under the patronage of Henry Thornton, and became a protégé of Charles Simeon.¹¹ Simeon had immense influence with students and believed passionately in the strategic importance of Jewish mission, which was, for him, simply “the most important object in the world.” He acted on this conviction by helping to found the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews (LSPCJ).¹² It was also at Cambridge that Buchanan read the works of the Scottish Archbishop Robert Leighton (1611-1684), and imbibed his strong conviction that they “forget a main point in the Church’s glory, who pray not daily for the conversion of the Jews.”¹³

In 1794 Newton suggested that Buchanan should serve in India, and after ordination and a brief period as Newton’s curate he was appointed as a chaplain to the British East India Company.¹⁴ He arrived in Calcutta on March 10, 1797, and was made vice-provost of Fort William College. Through his linguistic interests he became acquainted with William Carey, who also believed passionately in the restoration of the Jews. In May 1806, Buchanan commenced a journey to the west coast of India to ascertain “the present state and recent history of the eastern Jews,” specifically the ancient community of Cochin Jews and the Bene Israel of Mumbai (Bombay).¹⁵ Arriving in Cochin in December, he established

10 Pearson, 16; cf. Richard Cecil’s memoir of John Newton in *The Works of John Newton* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), vol. 1, 76-78, where Buchanan is styled as “Mr. *****.”

11 Cf. H. C. G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (London: Intersarsity Fellowship, 1948), 29.

12 W. T. Gidney, *The Jews and Their Evangelisation* (London: Student Volunteer Missionary Union, 1899), 273; Moule, 95-96. Simeon’s commitment to the evangelization of the Jews is illustrated by a famous incident, when, at a meeting of the LSPCJ, Edward Bickersteth, secretary of the Church Missionary Society, passed Simeon a note asking, “eight millions of Jews and eight hundred million heathens – which is more important?” Simeon’s succinct reply, written on the other side of the note, was: “If the conversion of the eight is life from the dead to the eight hundred, what then?” Subsequently Bickersteth became a leading supporter of Jewish missions, addressing, in all, eighteen anniversary meetings of the LSPCJ, and writing the introduction to the 1834 edition of Hugh Pearson’s biography of Buchanan.

13 Gidney, 89.

14 Under Simeon’s influence five evangelical chaplains were appointed between 1793 and 1813; they were Buchanan, Thomas Thomason (who preached the 1828 annual sermon for the LSPCJ), David Brown, Daniel Corrie and, most famously, Henry Martyn. Cf. Gidney, 69.

15 John Sergeant, *Henry Martyn* (London: John Hatchard, 1828), 173-4; cf. Constance Padwick, *Henry Martyn: Confessor of the Faith* (Leicester: Intersarsity Fellowship, 1953), 85; Pearson, 202. The Bene Israel maintain that their ancestors left Galilee subsequent to the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanies (175-163 BCE), and that their ship was wrecked on the Indian coast 26 miles south of Mumbai, where seven men and seven women survived to establish the community. Cf. “Bene Israel” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (London: Macmillan, 1972), ad. loc.; E. M. Jacob Gadkar, *The Religious and Cultural Heritage of the Bene-Israelis of India* (Mumbai: Gate of Mercy Synagogue, 1984), 2 vols; for Cochin Jews see J. H. Lord, *The Jews in India and the Far East* (London: S.P.C.K. Bombay, 1907), and “Cochin Jews” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ad. loc. Menasseh Ben Israel, in his *The Hope of Israel*, also speaks of the Cochin Jews, 154.



a friendship with a Colonel Macaulay, who brought to him "a copy of certain chapters of the Jewish Scriptures, which he understood I wished to see."¹⁶ Other important Hebrew manuscripts were purchased and busy conversations held with Jewish leaders before Buchanan re-embarked on his ship to "get out of the throng."¹⁷

Returning to Calcutta, he corresponded with Macaulay over certain technicalities in the Hebrew manuscripts and shared anecdotes of literary conversations held with a Jewish friend called Levi.¹⁸ Not only did Buchanan bring back to Calcutta the Hebrew manuscripts, which Carey "beheld with veneration," but also a Hebrew moonshee (secretary or writer) as well as Judah Misrahi, a Cochin Jew and proficient translator. A final visit to Cochin took place in December 1807, when Buchanan was en-route to England. Evidently he had established cordial personal relationships with local people at Cochin, for Pearson records his somewhat patronizing comment that, "all my Jews and Christians were in fine health and spirits, and highly gratified at my unexpected arrival."¹⁹ He found the community agitated by questions of the interpretation of biblical prophecy, and called a meeting to discuss the matter further. Buchanan entered into the debate with some enthusiasm, stating in a letter:

The Jews at Cochin are very unsettled in relation to the prophecies. They wonder at the attention paid by the English to these subjects for the first time. ... Some Jews interpret the prophecies aright, and some in another way; but all agree that a great era is at hand.²⁰

And again:

I am about to call another Sanhedrin on the subject, before I go. It is a strange event. I am happy I have visited this place a second time. May God direct all these things to his own glory and the good of men! ... Tell H. that the poor Jews, blind, lame, and halt, are come this morning, exclaiming as usual, 'Jehuda Ani.' I wish I could impart a better gift than silver or gold.²¹

On August 18, 1808, he arrived in London, and was shocked to discover that John Newton had been buried on December 27, the day he had arrived in Cochin.²² In the following April he visited Cambridge, depositing in the library his priceless collection of manuscripts, including a one hundred and fifty year old Hebrew New Testament, translated by a rabbi

16 Pearson, 254.

17 Ibid. 262, 263.

18 Ibid. 269.

19 Ibid. 291.

20 Ibid. 293.

21 Ibid. 291.

22 Ibid. 311.

from Travancore, who had in the course of his work become a Christian. As Buchanan put it, "His own work subdued his unbelief."²³ This version was transcribed at Buchanan's expense, with the intention that it should form the basis of a translation of the New Testament in the "pure style of the Hebrew of the Old, for the benefit of Jews, and in aid of the laudable design for this purpose of the London Society for the conversion of that ancient people."²⁴ The LSPCJ had been established two months earlier, on February 15, 1809.²⁵

Buchanan had strongly expressed his surprise and disappointment that the newly established society had made no progress in producing a reliable Hebrew translation, and urged them to consider the swift implementation of such a project:

It is with surprise I learn that as yet you have not obtained a version of the New Testament in the Hebrew language, for the use of Jews. It is surely the very first duty of your Society to execute this translation. You are beginning to work without instruments. How can you find fault with a Jew for not believing the New Testament if he has never seen it?

Although, as Gidney points out, there were in fact three Hebrew translations then in existence – Hutter's, Robinson's, and Cradick's – they were all either inadequate, unobtainable, or incomplete. Buchanan's reproof was taken to heart and the work entrusted to a Jewish scholar, Judah d'Allemand, who with a gentile colleague completed Matthew's Gospel by 1814, the other books appearing in rapid succession. Two years later, Buchanan planned a journey to Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia to investigate translation possibilities, the circumstances of the Jews in those regions, and the "extension of Christianity" among them, but his ill health led to its abandonment.²⁶

On December 6, 1813, Buchanan was visited at his home in Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, by two men known as Mr. S. and Mr. B., who had been sent by the LSPCJ to recruit him as their secretary. He felt unable to accede to their wishes, not because of any lack of commitment to the cause, but because he held "radical objections to the constitution of that society in its present form, and suggested renovation and improvement."²⁷ On December 24 the delegation returned, Mr. B. having been replaced by Mr.

23 Précis of Buchanan's speech at the public dinner and meeting of the LSPCJ, June 14, 1810, in *The Edinburgh Christian Instructor* (Edinburgh: Oliphant and Balfour, 1810), vol. 1, 206.

24 Pearson, 327.

25 The LSPCJ had evolved from a branch of the London Missionary Society, via a "small and unpretending association" connected with the Jewish Christian Joseph Samuel Christian Fredrick Frey, cf. Gidney, 34.

26 Pearson, 352.

27 *Ibid.* 410.



Lewis Way, one of the founders, but still they could not prevail upon him and he further elaborated his arguments against the society's constitution:

I declined, however, pledging myself for its support ... I desired them ... not to call their Society, 'for conversion of the Jews:' but a Society for the education of Jewish children; for diffusing the New Testament among the Jews; for corresponding with them concerning the Messiah in all lands; and for the diffusion of Jewish literature.²⁸

Although Buchanan refused to take up office in the LSPCJ, he was greatly influential in forming its policy. His view, that the society would best achieve its aims by becoming a voluntary society within the Anglican communion, eventually prevailed and led to the withdrawal of the Presbyterian members, who in 1842 formed a majority of the founders of the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Jews (BSPGJ).²⁹

Buchanan died on February 9, 1814, aged 49, and was buried near his second wife at Ouseburn, between Ripon and York in the county of Yorkshire, England.³⁰

Fifteen years later, in 1829, Joseph Wolff (1796-1862), the Jewish adventurer and Christian missionary, visited the Bene Israel at Pune and was introduced to the Scottish missionary John Wilson (1804-75), whose

work with the Bene Israel owed much to the pioneer researches of Buchanan. Wolff commented that it was "wonderful that Gentiles from Scotland should be the instruments of re-teaching the children of Israel their native language."³¹

As a result of his reading and Lederer's witness, Schereschewsky was baptized, and in 1857 entered New York Theological Seminary prior to becoming a minister of the Protestant Episcopal Church. In 1859 he left for China to serve as a missionary of his church, becoming bishop of Shanghai in 1877.

Buchanan's influence reaches down through the centuries to the present day. Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky (1831-1906), on graduating from the University of

Breslau in 1854, emigrated to the United States. Before leaving home he had read the Hebrew New Testament published by the LSPCJ at the instigation of Buchanan. In the USA, Schereschewsky met Gideon Rueben Lederer, who had been won to faith in Messiah through Scottish missionaries in Budapest. As a result of his reading and Lederer's witness, Schereschewsky was baptized, and in 1857 entered New York Theological

28 Ibid. 411, 412.

29 Frank Exley, *Our Hearts' Desire* (BSPGJ, 1942), 13f; cf. *The Jewish Herald* (BSPGJ, 1846), Vol. 1, no. 1, 1.

30 Pearson, 419.

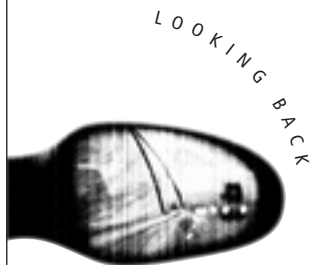
31 Gidney, 115.

Seminary prior to becoming a minister of the Protestant Episcopal Church. In 1859 he left for China to serve as a missionary of his church, becoming bishop of Shanghai in 1877. During twenty years in China his greatest contribution was work on the translation of the Bible into Mandarin, completing the entire Old Testament himself. Through Schereschewsky's Bible the story then traces a most remarkable trajectory. In 1996, Lan Yih-Ming (Grace Lan), a Chinese Christian from Taiwan, influenced by her reading of Schereschewsky's Bible, became a missionary to the Jews. The following year she commenced work with Christian Witness to Israel in the city of Glasgow, barely five miles from Cambuslang, the childhood home of Claudius Buchanan.

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Looking Back

By **John Fieldsend**

Born in Czechoslovakia into a liberal Jewish family in 1931, my early years were spent in Germany and Czechoslovakia. In 1939 I came to England with the Kindertransport and was fostered by a Christian family. I also spent some years at a Jewish boarding school. After a commitment to Christ in my mid teens and a brief industrial career, I was ordained in the Church of England in 1961.

Whilst my Christian faith was growing, my Jewishness was receding. After a time of identity crisis my real *persona* emerged. Yes, I was a Christian minister, but at the same time a Messianic Jew.

In 1989 I joined the staff of the Church's Ministry amongst the Jewish People, first as UK Director and then as Minister at Large, and for a number of years I led Kehilat Beit Shalom in London. Following my time with CMJ I become the Director of the Centre for Biblical and Hebraic Studies at the Park, Moggerhanger, near Bedford.

My Years in Active Ministry

Following my "re-entry" into my Jewish heritage I became much more involved with CMJ, and worked occasionally with the London Ministry Team as a volunteer during their main summer campaigns. In 1989 I left my parish and joined the CMJ staff as UK Field Director. A strong London Outreach Team, under the leadership first of Richard Harvey and then Stephen Pacht, was part of my overall responsibility. Richard and Stephen subsequently left CMJ to join Jews for Jesus. About this time CMJ's adverse financial situation made staff redundancies inevitable, and the Outreach Team was not immune to losses.

During this period, with the rapid development in world communications creating the "global village," many churches wanted their deputations first hand from hands-on workers rather than from the traditional pattern of area representatives. The London Outreach Team was re-named the London Ministry Team, with the brief of becoming CMJ's link with supporting churches as well as continuing their work of outreach in the London area. Following a pilot project, it was decided that a number of Ministry Teams be created in strategic areas to combine

both outreach and development of church links. Regrettably, the worsening of CMJ's financial situation led not only to the abandonment of that project but, with further staff cuts necessary, to even further reduction in the size of the LMT. It now became urgent, for the survival of the greatly depleted LMT, to develop new patterns for ministry, because the day-to-day work of open air and door-to-door outreach was too demanding for this seriously depleted team. We therefore offered our specialist giftings and resources to churches in the more Jewish parts of London and South East England, to help them in their parish missions as well as their day-to-day evangelism. In this way our ministry became more integrated into the life of local churches. We were able to offer some hands-on training to those churches, and the benefit was that the follow-up ministry could be undertaken by church members. Regrettably, though the theory was sound, the demand for our ministry was not as great as we had hoped, and most of our outreach continued as before.

Lack of Understanding from Fellow Christian Leaders

One of the most difficult things I had to cope with as a Jewish believer and Christian minister was the lack of understanding and even opposition from some fellow Christian leaders. Even some evangelicals considered the Messianic movement to be an abdication of grace and a return to legalism. Once I represented CMJ at a senior Anglican-Jewish leaders' conference at St George's Windsor. CMJ was normally represented there, and that was no problem. But that I was a Messianic Jew caused considerable opposition, not least from some of the other Anglican delegates. At that same conference John B. Taylor, Bishop of St Albans, presented an excellent paper on the uniqueness of Christ and the universality of the gospel. It really set the conference alight. We thank God for leaders who are prepared to be uncompromising for the sake of the gospel.

Outreach to "New Agers"

At this time a young Messianic-Jewish woman, who had come out of deep involvement in the New Age lifestyle, joined Beit Shalom, the Messianic Fellowship I was leading. She had a real gifting for outreach to "New Agers," and she eventually created the Fountain of Life ministry devoted to this purpose. So many young Jewish people who were deeply into the New Age were contacted through this ministry that the LMT became deeply supportive of this work. The way this work developed and prospered was amazing, and truly of the Lord. Through this person's first hand experience and knowledge of the New Age it became possible to run Fountain of Life stands at New Age festivals and other events. Providing they did not engage in overt criticism of the movement and other stallholders at these festivals, there was no barrier to the Fountain of Life stand clearly presenting Jesus as Savior and Lord to all who came to question and discuss at the stand. And come they did! Many of those



who came were Jewish, and they were really searching for a fountain of life they had not so far experienced. Eventually the founder of this ministry resigned from leadership for family reasons, and Stuart Cohen, who was now leading the LMT, has made this a major part of the team's ministry. During this time the London City Mission's Tell a Tourist summer outreach developed into a more permanent coffee shop ministry in the Covent Garden area of London, where throngs of tourists, including many from Israel, regularly visit.

Regrettably, our Beit Shalom congregation ceased to function in 1998, as differences over "Torah Lifestyle" could not (or would not) be accommodated. It is a tragedy that Messianic Judaism in Britain has continued on a path of self-destruction.

Over time the LMT and the LCM have developed a close and effective partnership in a small, but very focused and effective outreach, which is bearing fruit. I believe that had it not been for those sometimes hard and lean years the London Team would have gone on much as before. Sometimes the Lord has to bring us to our knees, both in the sense of brokenness as well as in prayer, in order to get us out of a rut so that we can recognize and take on new challenges and ways of working. Through those difficult years the Lord has developed this ministry in ways which would otherwise have been outside our wildest imaginings.

A Pattern for a Way Forward

It is too early to make major evaluations from what has been achieved, but I believe we can begin to see a pattern for a way forward. As we turn our eyes on the "field that is ready for harvest" we see patterns emerging as to where the reapers should work. This kind of ministry is going to become more and more center-stage. New Age is no longer some kind of fringe group of youthful dropouts who will become more conventional as they enter the adult "real" world. Kabala is no longer just a fringe sect within Judaism. It is spreading quite rapidly, especially among those in the entertainment and sports industries who have great influence as role models in society. Many are among the nouveau riche, and are finding that what they have gained is not providing the satisfaction they had hoped for. Alongside these is the growing school of Postmodernism. At present we may see these, to change the metaphor, as separate streams. But they are flowing in the same direction and increasing as they flow, and they have the capacity to become one mighty river. They have much in common: They are reacting against the cold emptiness of secular materialism. They are ignoring and bypassing traditional Western religions, seeing them as having been too closely involved with that materialism. And they are looking for they know not what, but anything that will satisfy their empty lives.

It is with these groups that we need to engage. If we go about it in a right way we will find that they are ready and willing for a creative dialogue. But we have to meet them where they are and answer the

questions they are asking. It has been said that modern dialogue is “tell me your truth and I will tell you mine.” Where stories remain purely in words and concepts, relativism is no problem. When we can tell our story in the form of the “life abundant” that Jesus promised, then that story will carry real conviction. From my observations this has to be the way forward for the whole body of Messiah, Jewish and gentile believers alike. However, in so far as many who are on a real heart search are Jewish, we who belong to the Jewish part of that body of Messiah have a special opportunity and a special responsibility.

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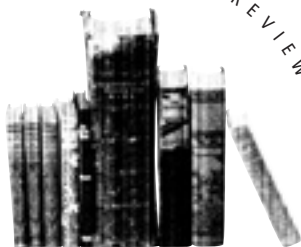
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B O O K
R E V I E W S

Hilary Le Cornu and Joseph Shulam have collaborated three times, to produce commentaries on Romans (1998), Acts (2003), and now Galatians (2005). All of their volumes are copiously footnoted and extensive in length. The Galatians commentary is nearly 600 pages.

The guiding principle of these commentaries is "the recognition that the New Testament writings are Jewish texts" (*Galatians*, p. xxv). The commentary on Galatians hopes to correct "'Christian' understandings of Paul [that] regularly understand Paul to stand in dichotomous opposition to Judaism and all things Jewish" (*ibid.*, p. xxv).

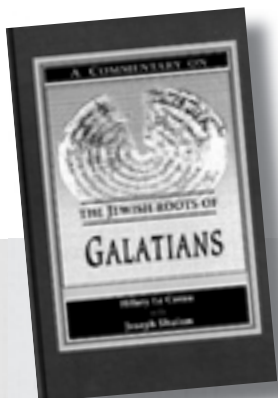
The commentary on Galatians represents a major work of scholarship, and is conver-

sant with a broad range of writings on Paul and Galatians. Unfortunately, the prose of the commentary is often needlessly difficult and the logical progression of thought unclear. This reviewer found himself reading some sentences three or four times searching for clarity. This will make Le Cornu and Shulam's commentary completely inaccessible to many potential readers.

The typical premise of commentaries on Galatians is that Jewish believers were troubling gentiles in Galatia. These Jewish believers opposed Paul and told the Galatians they needed to convert to Judaism through circumcision and obedience to Torah. Over the years, other suggestions have been made to explain the situation in Galatia, including Mark Nanos' book *The Irony of Galatians*, which posits that the influencers whom Paul opposed were Jews from Galatia, not Jewish believers.

Le Cornu and Shulam find a different situation more tenable. They believe the influencers could not have been Jews, largely on the evidence of Galatians 6:13, in which Paul accuses his opponents of not observing Torah. The influencers, Le Cornu and Shulam argue, are actually God-fearers, gentiles who attend synagogue and yet have not converted to Judaism. These God-fearers are a community in between. They are accorded the status of having escaped paganism, but they have not received inclusion into Israel.

These God-fearers have rejected Paul's message that in Yeshua gentiles have inclusion in the promises of Israel. They are indignant that certain gentiles, merely by



A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Galatians

HILARY LE CORNU AND JOSEPH SHULAM
JERUSALEM, ACADEMON LTD., 2005

faith in Yeshua, have obtained something which they lack: inclusion in Israel's promises. Though these opponents of Paul have not themselves gone so far as to convert, they insist that the Galatian believers must convert if they wish to belong to Israel. Key evidence for the view of Le Cornu and Shulam is found in Acts 13:50, where prominent gentiles, arguably God-fearers, are aroused against Paul and Barnabas.

There are other intriguing ideas and correlations in *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Galatians*, such as the comparison of Galatians with 4QMMT, a halakhic letter from Qumran. 4QMMT is much earlier than Galatians, by about 200 years, but is arguably similar in situation. Le Cornu and Shulam also find evidence of epistolary communications from the first century in the Talmuds, and make comparisons with Galatians.

In all of their commentaries, Le Cornu and Shulam cite Mishnaic and Talmudic debates as reflecting Jewish thought in the time of the New Testament. For example, they read Galatians 3:10–11 in light of the rabbinic discussion of the difference between Torah study and Torah practice. By works of the law, Paul means Torah study not accompanied by piety (Torah obedience). A text from the Babylonian Talmud (Shabb. 31b) is cited as evidence that Jewish thought in Paul's time encompassed the debate about Torah study versus piety. This method of the authors raises serious questions of historical methodology. Current scholarship on the Mishna and Talmud is nearly unanimous in its skepticism about their value for understanding first century Judaism.

In spite of reservations about the length and difficulty of this commentary, I cannot deny the value of Le Cornu and Shulam's work. Their research and their arguments about the meaning of Galatians deserve interaction. Any serious work on Galatians in the future should consult their research.

Most of all, they have launched a serious challenge to the anti-Jewish reading of Paul's letter. This is an avenue that undoubtedly needs much more exploration.

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NEWS FROM THE ISRAELI SCENE

Reported by **K. Wilson**

Persecution in the South

Over the past year and a half the small Messianic congregation in the southern Israeli town of Arad has suffered varying degrees of harassment by the largest ultra-orthodox Jewish sect in Israel, known as the "Gur Hasids."

According to Debbie Figueras, wife of pastor Yakim Figueras, the persecution started in March 2004 and was centered on one particular congregant, Polly Segulim. Segulim, a widow and foster mother, was "discovered" by the Yad L'Achim anti-missionary organization after her daughter's friend was caught on a chat line by a Yad L'Achim worker posing as a believer. "The girl invited him to Polly's house after he had seemingly expressed interest in the faith, but did not realize whom she was dealing with," says Figueras.

Debbie Figueras reports that events began with small groups of Gur Hasids protesting outside various congregants' homes, yelling "Nazis" and "whores," and holding up signs warning passers-by of "missionaries." Verbal harassment also included accusing the believers of kidnaping and baptizing children and later sending them to Canada. "Within a very short space of time the protesters had grown to over 700 and would gather in Polly Segulim's road," says Figueras. The protests have progressively become more violent,

culminating in the burning of a chess club/distribution center, an independent project belonging to two congregants, Eddie and Lura Beckford.

While most secular Israelis in the town are in favor of the Messianic fellowship, on the whole Figueras feels that they are indifferent. "Indifference becomes very worrying when the mayor of Arad acknowledges the certainty of imminent spilt blood, but in the same breath expresses that he is unable to do anything," she says. Believers in Arad have witnessed police intervention that has also been "indifferent," ranging from non-existent to sparse. However, apparently due to the international Christian community lobbying the local government, in October 2005 police arrested four Gur rioters from a mob that tried to besiege a bus full of Israeli believers. Unfortunately, police intervention seemed to wane again when, in December, the violence spread west to Beer Sheva. According to pastor Howard Bass, "a mob of five hundred Gur Hasids appeared without warning at the Sabbath meeting. The crowd forced their way onto our property in a wild religious frenzy and hostility. Furniture was knocked over, one person was hit and some were spat upon." Bass himself was thrown into the baptismal pool. "Although the police hand-cuffed a couple of the more violent ones, they let them go soon after chief Sephardic rabbi Deri arrived." Bass is unsure whether this points to collusion between the police and the religious authorities.

In September 2005, Menachem Mendel, a Gur Hasid, took the Arad district police to the Supreme Court in an attempt to challenge the police decision to deny permission for 700 demonstrators to protest outside Polly Segulim's house. The court was unable to reach a decision and at the time of this writing a final verdict is still pending.



Strategies for dealing with the harassment have included placing a full-page advertisement in the local press, detailing the severity of the intimidation and urging the public to respond “for the sake of democracy and freedom of speech.” Debbie Figueras says that despite the difficulties the support from other believers in the land has been very encouraging: “People have expressed solidarity by joining in our meetings at Arad, praying for us, and networking worldwide. We have received hundreds of emails and letters of support.”

Arad fellowship, which started off as a small house group in 1999, has grown over the last six years to around 15 families. Both Debbie and Yakim Figueras feel the spiritual responsibility of leading the fellowship through such times. “We need to keep this persecution in proportion,” says Debbie Figueras. “We remind our congregants that believers in other countries are being murdered for their faith, and Yakim sees it as imperative to encourage us all to pray for our persecutors and to teach the flock a non-vengeful response.” As a result of the events in Arad, she says, the congregation has grown spiritually. “Our collective and individual prayer life has deepened, and we have even seen two couples become believers since it all started.”

Messianic Jews Barred from Jerusalem March

For the third consecutive year the Jerusalem municipality forbade Messianic Jews to participate in the main part of the annual Jerusalem March held during the Feast of Tabernacles in October. Over the years the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel (MJAI) has ensured that a group of Messianic Jews was involved, and utilized the opportunity to march through the streets declaring the gospel.

The event, which is organized by the Jerusalem municipality, is part of a week-long series of festivities involving delegates from the International Christian Embassy of Jerusalem (ICEJ). Thousands of Christian visitors, who come to Israel annually, join local groups and march through the streets of the capital expressing their support for the State of Israel. In 2003 the Jerusalem municipality forbade the Messianic Jews to march on the main route, claiming, “they do not fall under the category of ‘sporting’ or ‘folk’ groups.” According to Arthur Goldberg, treasurer of the MJAI, “the refusal to let us participate on these grounds is nonsense, because groups such as El-Al and the National Electricity Company also join in.” Jerusalem mayor Uri Lupolianski contested the participation of Messianic Jews, arguing that “their intent is not ‘sporting’ but rather ‘ideological.’”

MJAI chairman Hanan says, “Our intent as Messianic Jews is to show support and love to our people and to our country along with proclaiming our faith in Yeshua the Messiah. While Lupolianski may be technically correct, the municipality’s decision to allow the Japanese ‘Fallon Gong’ cult to join in points to inconsistencies in policy.”

The MJAI has previously discussed with the ICEJ the possibility of marching with the ICEJ delegates. “Although it is important for us to express a Jewish and local identity – and marching among the Christian tourists would probably undermine this – nevertheless it seemed better than nothing.” However, it never worked out. Jim Schutz, liaison officer for the local congregations at the ICEJ, said in response, “We believe that the Messianic Jews should be allowed to participate, and have defended their right to do so to the authorities.” In any case, the last three years a group of Jewish believers participated in the permitted parts of the march, around the outskirts of Jerusalem.

New Age Festivals in Israel

Three festivals held throughout Israel during the biblical feasts of Passover, Shavuot, and Tabernacles attracted huge crowds once again this year. Over 85,000 Israelis attended Israel's 3 major New Age festivals: Boombamela, Shantipi, and BeReshit. Boombamela drew a record crowd of 50,000.

Janice Voth is no stranger to the Israeli New Age scene. The escalation of interest in Eastern spirituality among young Israelis prompted her to start outreaches to traveling Israelis in India seven years ago. Since then she has divided her time between India, Thailand, and Israel, working closely with various evangelism ministries and indigenous Israeli fellowships. Her first New Age festival outreach was at BeReshit 2000.

Voth is also the "brain" behind *Lo Be'Mikre* ("Not By Chance"), a Hebrew language publication widely distributed in Israel and among traveling Israelis in the East. She says, "The majority of the New Age festival goers in Israel aren't hard core New Agers or hippies. Some are in the army, others at university; many are teens still living at home with their parents." She believes that they represent a type of young "neo-hippie" who find themselves in a post-Zionist and post-idealistic society. "Most Israelis can't see any negative spiritual implications in opening themselves up to New Age experiences. Some are truly seeking; for others the festivals are 'harmless fun.'"

Voth was appalled to see young teens engaged in "Shiva worship" with Hindu priests brought over from India. "They were sitting in the Shiva Temple, surrounded by idols, passing around a pipe of marijuana and getting stoned. Smoking dope is how Shiva is worshipped." While parents may not understand the spiritual implications of their children dabbling in Eastern

mysticism, Voth says she is staggered that this is regarded as an innocuous activity by many parents. "Police are present at the festivals and some arrests are made, but as one policeman said, 'What can we do? This generation likes to get stoned.'"

Over the last five years, Janice Voth has seen the outreach team grow from just five people to over one hundred for this year's BeReshit festival. Messianic and non-Jewish believers camped out and participated in various forms of friendship and contextual evangelism. "We had a chai shop with a stage for music and lectures, a bookshop, and our large open-sided tent where we have team devotions, worship, and communal meals."

Voth believes that the relationship with festival organizers has grown from strength to strength. "It's amazing how God has opened the door and given us favor with festival organizers. They know we give out New Testaments and Messianic literature, but thank God they don't have a problem with it."

This year the organizers even agreed to have two Christian groups, *Seeds* (from Jesus People USA) and *Newsboys*, perform on the main stage. The bands gave a clear gospel message with their choice of songs and testimonies. The band members camped out with the team of evangelists, gave concerts in the chai shop, and made themselves available to chat with people. "Festival organizers were very impressed by the high quality performances and we are excited about future possibilities."

Financing such a project is not cheap. Support from the National Evangelism Committee (NEC) and donations from congregations helped fund the campaign. Those present also paid for their own entrance fees.

Voth says that Yad L'Achim and Chabad occasionally harass believers and lobby for their removal from the site, but festival organizers have defended believers' right to



be there. "The atmosphere of the festivals is such that many are there because they take pride in religious pluralism. The very raison d'être of the festival is a statement against religious coercion."

Attitudes in Israeli society are shifting. As Voth puts it, "New Age is becoming mainstream. Many Christians abroad support and pray for Israel, but they have an unformed idea of who Israelis are. They don't realize that thousands are victims of the 'spiritual terrorism' of drugs and New Age. The indigenous Messianic community is seeking proactive ways be effective agents in spreading the gospel. We have the message for this generation; after all, you can't get any more 'alternative' than to become a follower of Yeshua!"

Messianic Jew Sues Local Council

According to the Israeli press, in August 2005 the regional court of Petach Tikvah ordered the municipality of Petach Tikvah to pay over 30,000 NIS in compensation to Ze'ev Bern, a Messianic Jew. Bern, a member of Grace and Truth congregation in Rishon LeZion, was advised to sue his employers for unfair dismissal. The court found that Bern, who worked as a computer technician alongside school children, was fired from his job because of "suspicious missionary activity among students." According to the tabloids, Yad L'Achim informed the municipality in writing of Bern's faith, but the judge found "no tangible evidence" that he would "exploit his position to propagate his belief." The judge also decided that just because someone is different, this is not a valid reason to treat him with discrimination.

Oldest Church in the World Discovered in Israel

What is termed by Israeli archaeologists as "probably the oldest church in the world"

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was discovered in November 2005 in the north of Israel. Unfortunately for Israel's tourism industry, the discovery was made behind the walls of Megiddo prison, one of the country's maximum-security prisons. The site was discovered by prisoners who were digging for possible artifacts in preparation for the construction of a new security section.

The Israel Antiquities Authority believes that the ruins may date back to the third or fourth century. One of the numerous ancient Greek inscriptions on the mosaic floor says the building was dedicated to "the memory of the Lord Jesus Christ." Other inscriptions name a woman who "donated this table to the God Jesus Christ in commemoration." The table is believed to have served as an altar. Yotam Tepper, the archaeologist who led the dig on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, says, "There are no crosses on the mosaic floor, but there is a picture of two fish lying side by side – a very early Christian symbol."

Tepper told Israel's Channel Two television station that the find could help cast new light on an essential period of Christianity, which was outlawed by the Romans until the fourth century. Israel TV also reported on speculations that Israel will move the prison and open a tourist attraction in its place. Israel's tourism minister, Avraham Hirschson, said in an interview, "If we nurture this properly, then there could be a large stream of tourists who will come to Israel. There is great potential in this discovery."