

MISHIKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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MISHKAN

A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People

“WORLD TRENDS IN JEWISH EVANGELISM”

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Jewish Evangelism Exists

Editorial

In the middle of the 1980s, the Mormons received permission to build a big study center in Jerusalem. Many discussions and negotiations had preceded this. The Ultra-orthodox community in Jerusalem called for the building license to be revoked because they feared that the Mormons would engage in missionary activity. The then Mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, fought on behalf of the Mormons. Today the Mormons have a beautiful building on the Mount of Olives to which they send 100 students three times a year. And why shouldn't they? Many non-Mormons also enjoy the building because of the many concerts held in the spectacular setting. So far so good.

Teddy Kollek received an honorary doctorate in Salt Lake City, Utah, the Mormon headquarter. He was, as he said to Amos Kollek in an interview in the Jerusalem Post on 25 August 1995, "received like a hero" in the presence of 25,000 people.

What should be noted, however, is the price the Mormons had to pay for the building — not in dollars but in promises. Teddy Kollek speaks openly about this, too.

He underscores that he did not fight this battle for the sake of the Mormons, but for the sake of freedom of religion in Jerusalem. That is fine. He should be commended for this.

As he also explained in the Jerusalem Post, however, in the initial negotiations with the Mormons he made it very clear that the Jewish people have lost six million people in our lifetime. No proselytizing could therefore be allowed.

Kollek continues: "The Mormons have now been in Jerusalem for eight years, and not a single case of proselytizing has occurred. Everyone who comes over, be he a teacher, a student, or a regular visitor, is told that if he distributes books or pamphlets or engages in any other form of proselytizing, he will be sent home immediately."

Kollek's words are worth noticing. Are such conditions an expression of freedom of religion? Other groups in Israel do have permission to disseminate books and pamphlets, just as Jews in other democratic countries have the right to distribute their writings.

The price the Mormons have paid in promises given far exceeds the high price they paid in dollars for the land and the building.

That is their problem.

Teddy Kollek has talked himself into a problem. Mission in Israel is not forbidden, even though some Christians outside Israel seem to think so. The so-called "anti-missionary law" of 1976 does not make missionizing illegal. Rather it prohibits the giving of bribes in order to persuade someone to convert.

Christian organizations can run into difficulties if, in their eagerness to build a big center — or receive recognition from the Israeli government — they give their word that they will not engage in any missionary work. For one thing, in making such promises the Messianic believers become losers.

This issue of MISHKAN shows that Jewish evangelism exists — both in the democratic state of

Israel and worldwide. Some will note this with regret; others will rejoice.

Jewish anti-missionaries and Christian theologians who, from different reasons and expressed in a different choice of words, believe that Jewish evangelism is the “Endlösung der Judenfrage mit anderen Mitteln” (the final solution to the Jewish question with other means), will continue their fight against Jewish evangelism. It is their right to do so.

Jewish evangelism exists. It is true that after the Holocaust some Jewish missionary organizations, especially in Europe, have ceased to exist. But when these disappear, others have often been established by people who have felt it their obligation to bring the best which the Church received from Israel back to Israel. And in areas of the world like Japan and South Korea, one can these days find a new interest in Jewish evangelism amongst Christians.

Jewish evangelism exists. One might not receive that impression merely by reading mission documents published by different church societies within the last 50 years. These documents will only reveal as an exception that the number of Jewish believers in Jesus is growing today. And only very seldom will one find in these documents a clear call for Jewish evangelism.

That is a problem for the church!

The articles in this issue of MISHKAN reflect some of what is happening in the area of Jewish evangelism at the present time. They can be read as a continuation of what was said in MISHKAN no. 10, 1/1989.

The good news is that much more is happening than what is reported in these pages.

For those of us who look forward to the salvation of Israel in the name of Jesus, this is good news indeed.

Kai Kjær-Hansen

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Present Trends in Jewish Evangelism In North America

Alan L. Bond and Lyn Rosen Bond¹

No continent escapes for a day the press and stretch of change in this rapidly shrinking global community as we approach the 21st century; and perhaps North America experiences this phenomenon she has helped to proliferate on an ever accelerating personal scale. As field workers in the Great Harvest with which we are commissioned, we experience the tension of bringing the unchanging message of Good News to all people. Humans are moving about, facing new threats and promises, and changing their minds and world views at a dizzying pace. Our challenge is to notice, reconsider, and adapt our presentation before the last trump sounds and the game is over.

MISHKAN no. 10, I/1989 dealt with Trends in Jewish Evangelism. This article is meant to update that topic and is limited to trends in Jewish Evangelism in North America between 1989 and early 1995. In 1989 the topic was addressed by Daniel Fuchs, Harold Sevener, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, and Moishe Rosen. The years of experience accumulated by these men would humble even the most arrogant of young missionaries. After the initial response of humility the next idea was to contact these men for their expert opinions. Sadly for those who miss him, Fuchs has gone on to be with the Lord. Sevener has since retired, but he graciously responded. Fruchtenbaum made time to dictate a reply from overseas. Moishe Rosen was in San Francisco for a few days between obligations and was able to respond by phone.

Additionally, an attempt to collect information from others involved in Jewish evangelism was made at the North American Lausanne Consultation (Las Vegas) on Jewish Evangelism this past February. We asked nine questions of these assembled leaders regarding shifts in methodology, deployment, and their observations on the openness to the gospel shown by various segments of the Jewish population. The 51 delegates present represented several different mission groups, schools, and congregations. In the spirit of MISHKAN, those who respond are held as experts until someone else responds!

Better Recruitment, Training, and Methods

To the questions if there has been a shift in methodology since 1989 for reaching Jewish people with the Gospel or if workers are doing anything different than they had been, responses fell into two groups, those who saw changes and those who didn't. The majority agreed with Louis Goldberg, who chaired the Jewish Studies Department at Moody Bible Institute until his recent retirement. He wrote, "regarding ... methodology since 1989 for reaching Jewish people ... I am not so sure that there has been any major shift. We still have various congregations directly

¹Alan Bond is the Chief of Station of the Dallas Metroplex Jews for Jesus work. He and Lyn have served with Jews for Jesus since 1974. They both hold a Masters degree in Missiology with an emphasis on Jewish Evangelism from Fuller School of World Mission.

involved in the ministry.” Fruchtenbaum agreed there had been no shift in methodology. He observed there are three different approaches being used. “Those who use confrontation evangelism methodology are still doing so. Others who use a home Bible study format are still doing so. Those who have a basic storefront approach are still doing so.”

Erwin J. Kolb has served with the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, as Director of Evangelism for 17 years. His desire for the Synod's participation in Jewish Evangelism helped birth the Synod's own mission society called Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism. Today he still serves as a board member. As a response to the above questions he wrote,

The shift for us has been to add to the traditional parish approach in which spouses, friends, neighbors were invited to join the local parish. This has been done by individual parish members or local committees. What has been added is some full time missionaries in five different places in the country. They have used the street ministry copied from Jews for Jesus, formed small study groups, and in one case even a Messianic congregation, the first one in the Lutheran church. This has been a big change!

Many of these L.C.M.S. missionaries, themselves trained in evangelism, are Jewish men and women who have accepted Jesus and are now members of the Synod. The Synod has benefited from a combined effort of both gentile and Jewish laity and pastors.

Galen Peterson, the director of American Remnant Mission, offers an encouraging word in response to this question: “In 1989 we started our first messianic congregation.” That was an important year for the Southern Baptists as well.

According to Gus Elowitz, the President of the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship, 1989 was the year that their organization was officially founded at the Home Mission Board. Prior to the formalization of the Fellowship, three unofficial groups held public meetings and acted as forerunners. Today there are 17 bodies of believers; nine are considered congregations and eight remain fellowships. Elowitz stated in a phone interview that there are 44,000 churches in the Southern Baptist Convention; his prayerful goal is for messianic congregations to grow to one percent of that total.

Harold Sevens's letter concerning current trends in Jewish evangelism related his perspective that there has been little, if any, shift in methodology since his (1989) article in MISHKAN; but he pointed out “there has been a refining of the methodology developed by messianic congregations, Jews for Jesus street and campus evangelism, music and drama, and media evangelism which grew out of the late 60s, 70s and 80s.” He elaborated by pointing out, “Most workers are being better trained for specific types of ministry among the Jewish people.”

Moves and Migrations

Where do Jewish people live? Sidney Goldstein wrote Occasional Paper No. 6 (by the North American Data Bank) for the American Jewish Year Book. Table three, (pp. 145-146) of that article is titled, “Region of Residence of Population, by Jewish Identity.” He has divided up the core Jewish population into three groups: “by religion, secular, and by choice.” The section titled “Non-Jewish Household Members” includes “converts out,” which is made up in part of Jewish

people who believe in Jesus.² Goldstein reported that 210,000 Jews converted out, and 25.2 percent are living in the Northeast, 22.6 percent live in the Midwest, 31 percent in the South and 21.2 percent in the West. Contrast this to the “Core Jewish Population” from which the lowest percentage, 11.3 percent, are in the Midwest, 21.6 percent in the South, 23.5 percent in the West, and 43.6 percent in the Northeast. This report shows that those who “convert out” are more likely to live in the West than those who are part of the “Core Jewish Population.”

Goldstein reported that by 1990 more than one half of the American people moved from the state where they were born. Of those who “converted out” he wrote, “the converts out of Judaism displayed greater stability” (p. 103). While it is unpopular terminology to say that Jewish believers have “converted out”, it is a testimony to the fact that the Lord does change lives. That Goldstein has noticed the change is encouraging. He offers no explanation.

An ongoing survey of Jewish believers in Jesus has been conducted by Jews for Jesus, based on Jewish individuals either coming to faith or beginning correspondence with Jews for Jesus. Each person filled out only one questionnaire. Beverly Jamison has been the custodian of the information from 1983 to present. The survey provided data from which a divergent conclusion must be drawn. Again, Jews for Jesus has not polled every Jewish person who accepted Jesus; so the demographic figures of those surveyed are useful to show states from which people have responded over the history of the survey, (and cannot be used to accurately show where the highest percent of Jewish believers live). However, the highest number of responses came from people who live in California, 21 percent throughout the history of the survey.

The statistics for New York have changed. Before 1983 12 percent lived in New York; but presently only 10 per cent live there. Florida had an increase of two percent for the same time period. Texas is tied with Illinois for the third highest population at five percent. New Jersey lost one percentage point and is currently at four percent. New Jersey and Pennsylvania are currently tied at four percent and are the fifth most populated states of the JFJ constituency. Ohio and Michigan were tied for sixth in 1983, but currently Ohio has three percent and Michigan is tied with Georgia, Minnesota, Colorado, Arizona, Missouri, Massachusetts, Maryland, Virginia, Oregon, and Washington, all with two percent for seventh place. Georgia, Minnesota, Colorado, Missouri, Virginia and Washington held the same; Arizona and Maryland, lost one percent. Massachusetts and Oregon gained one percent. The states that hold one percent are Hawaii, Iowa, South Carolina, North Carolina, Louisiana, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Nevada, Connecticut, Indiana, Tennessee, and New Mexico. (The latter ten states have stayed the same since 1983.)

The 2793 people surveyed answered the question regarding where they live; 149 people did not live in any of the states mentioned above. Those five percent are from the District of Columbia and the following 19 states: South Dakota, Delaware, Rhode Island, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, Alaska, Idaho, Mississippi, Vermont, West Virginia, Nebraska, Alabama, Kentucky, Arkansas, New Hampshire, Kansas, and Maine.

Those LCJE members who replied to the question in Las Vegas reported a migration to the sun belt, as did Sevens. The statistics in Goldstein's report verify the conclusions drawn by our

² No agreement with this category should be inferred. It is merely included to show how the statistics were reported. The disagreement in terminology stems from the belief that God created a person Jewish and the Bible explains no way in which a person ceases to be Jewish.

co-workers:

this redistribution [migration to the sun belt] resulted in a net loss of almost six hundred seventy-seven thousand Jews to the Northeast and two hundred nineteen thousand to the Midwest. By contrast, the South gained four hundred eighty-five thousand and the West netted four hundred eleven thousand. (Goldstein, p. 104).

What Has Been Effective in Reaching the Jewish People with the Gospel?

Fruchtenbaum found “personal contact and literature to be the two most successful methods.” Eli Nessim responded to the questionnaire in a word, “contextualization.” He elaborated, “more emphasis on indigenous outreach, e.g. congregations. Less reliance on the colonizing tendency of gentile-dominated missions.”

Gus Elowitz replied that what he has found most effective is renewed emphasis on prayer. He also stated that moving his meetings from Sunday to Saturday increased the number of people reached for two reasons. First, that freed him up on Sunday to do some “outdoor evangelism.” Second, (partly as a result of that evangelism), they found that more people attended the congregation's service on Saturday. He did not clarify whether this pattern held true for all the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowships or only the one he is currently leading in Houston.

Are We Reaching only the Uneducated and the Lonely?

The population of Jewish believers who filled out the survey went from seven percent before 1983 to nine percent after 1989. Beverly Jamison reported that to date there have been just over 5800 respondents to the JFJ Survey. The number of those who have responded since 1989 is 2858, 52 percent of whom (1472) are males; 48 percent (1386) are females. Single respondents numbered 1106; 58 are divorced, and 27 are widowed. In America about 50 percent of marriages terminate in divorce; so the percentage of divorced Jewish believers is substantially lower.

The educational level followed closely that of the Jewish community in general. Those Jewish people who come to faith in Yeshua are well educated. Of those surveyed since 1989: four percent did not finish high school and 16 percent completed high school and no more. Twenty nine percent continued for three more years of school and 30 percent completed four years of college. Graduate level work was done by 21 percent of the people.

The extent of education that people possessed did not necessarily reflect their ages because only one percent was under the age of 25 years while 14 percent were in the range 20 to 29 years, 36 percent were 30 to 39, 32 percent were 40 to 49, 10 percent were 50 to 59 and seven percent were over 59.

What Term to Use?

When the people Jews For Jesus surveyed were asked “Do you prefer to be called: 'Jewish Believer,' 'Jewish Christian,' 'Hebrew Christian,' 'Christian' or 'Messianic Jew,' (feel free to pick more than one),” the response was mixed. Since the question did not make the terms mutually exclusive roughly 2700 people chose 3818 terms. Therefore it can be deduced that several

individuals are comfortable with a variety of terms. Thirty percent identified as Christians, 27 percent as Jewish Believers, 17 percent as Jewish Christians, 15 percent as Hebrew Christians and 11 percent identified as Messianic Jews.

Over the history of the survey 76 percent of those who were surveyed identified themselves as belonging to a denomination; 15 percent, cited that denomination as “Messianic”. Of those surveyed after 1989 that statistic remained constant as 15 percent still reported “Messianic” as their denomination.

Jewish Immigrants from CIS

At the same time that the article on “Trends in Jewish Evangelism” was published, MISHKAN also included an article by Mitch Glaser entitled, “Possibilities and Perils: A Look at Jewish Missions.” Glaser, who currently is responsible for the leadership of the Jews for Jesus work in New York and the surrounding Metropolitan area, had the following to report by way of an update.

In North America it seems there has been an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those who have immigrated here from Russia and the Ukraine. In 1994, 390 Russian Jewish people in New York eagerly made decisions to repent and receive Yeshua. This is especially significant when it is compared to the number of American-born Jewish people who accepted Jesus at the same branch. There were forty-two American Jewish men and women who came to faith during that same time frame. The first quarter of 1995 the Jews for Jesus staff in New York prayed with 50 Russian Jewish people alone who wanted to accept the salvation of our Messiah, Jesus.

Glaser echoed the opinion given in Las Vegas that the most significant trend in Jewish Evangelism is the vast number of Russian Jewish people in the CIS and Russian Jewish people in America who are coming to faith.

Also highlighted under methodological considerations was the need for English as a second language to be taught to immigrants from Russia. Jews for Jesus and the Southern Baptist Convention are among those who have sought to help fill this need. This in itself is a change. It represents a sociological shift which has invited a return to a previously abandoned approach: In the late 19th century evangelism to the Jewish people included classes in the English language. Missions such as the American Board of Missions to the Jews held other classes which were geared toward helping new immigrants learn a marketable skill. As the immigration slowed so did the need for these classes, and eventually they disappeared. It has been observed that these classes are once again a good idea.

In 1989 Mr. Glaser wrote of his concern regarding a trend “that is seemingly positive and yet has dangerous implications for Jewish missions, which is the proliferation of ‘friendship groups.’” He defines these as “evangelical Christians who have banded together for the purpose of supporting Jewish causes.”

In a phone conversation in March 1995, he explained that this goal in and of itself is not dangerous to the cause of reaching Jewish souls for Jesus. It has become problematic because these groups divert the attention and resources of well-meaning Christians from evangelism to political and social concerns. If people could maintain a balance and be concerned for the spiritual

well being, which is less tangible than the more obvious political and social needs, there would be no problem. Unfortunately, some well-meaning people are seduced by the gratification of seeing earthly things change when some of the changes made on the eternal level are just as dramatic but often slower and less obvious in their appearance. The political and social issues are handled effectively by the Jewish community with help from gentiles in less evangelical churches where political and social reform has replaced the gospel of Jesus the Messiah. Glaser feels that these friendship groups are still active and this continues to be a concern for those who endeavor to interest evangelically-minded gentile believers in the cause of winning God's people to Jesus.

General Opposition

The very fact that there is still organized opposition to Jewish Evangelism acts as a spiritual barometer to attest that something effective is being done. Those who would pit themselves in opposition have sought to come up with a theological basis with which to cast aspersions on the apostolic doctrine; this is new. In the past, anti-missionaries (lately "countermissionaries") merely stated that a person ceased to be Jewish upon accepting Jesus as Messiah. Today at least one rabbi has set out to make theological arguments about such things as the need for blood atonement. Rabbis seem now to be preoccupied with addressing the issue, "Why Jewish people don't need Jesus."

It is also interesting to note that the response to intermarriage has a new twist. In the past Jewish men marrying gentile women was a cause for concern. Today, while it is still a cause for concern, it also seems to be an occasion for proselytizing on the part of rabbinic Judaism. In Texas, where this article originated, there has been an increase in the number of phone calls and letters from Christian parents concerned about the conversion of their children to Judaism. This almost always comes as a result of a Jewish person marrying the child of a gentile evangelical Christian. One wonders at what level that young person was ever committed to the claims of Christ. Certainly those who convert to Judaism are in need of salvation every bit as much as those who were born Jewish. Those who have chosen to pursue (rabbinic) Judaism while rejecting the Messiah worshipped by their parents need to be reached with the gospel. If we seek to reach the Jewish community, will these converts to Judaism be reached with the Gospel in the same way as the rest of the non-believing Jewish community? While they are a small percentage of the total Jewish population, Goldstein (p. 145) reported that there were 185,000 "Jews by choice." He estimated that 129,500 of the 185,000 "Jews by choice" reported actually "having been converted" (p. 89). That is to say that 70 percent of those who identify themselves with Judaism formalize their commitment by some sort of training from a Rabbi. Rabbis can no longer say, "We Jews don't proselytize."

Other causes include those people so enamored with Jewry and/or Judaism that an abandonment of biblical understanding of the Christian faith is allowed on the part of the individual. Somehow these gentiles put form before meaning in their spiritual priorities as if orthodox Christianity weren't essentially Jewish.

Smaller Branch Offices — Fewer Mission Agencies

“In all probability, 1990 will find fewer operative congregations and fewer operative Messianic ministries than 1980.” When he was asked to comment on this statement Moishe Rosen replied that the prediction was true in a sense because, while there may be more congregations, some are not as viable as those that came before them.

While Rosen noticed that within Jews for Jesus the deployment was more often to group workers in smaller clusters rather than large branches, Sevenser felt that “the era of organized Jewish Missions is rapidly disappearing. Replacing them are independent Messianic congregations, Jewish evangelism through local churches, friends, and small independent works.”

The attendance at LCJE meetings in North America definitely gives weight to the idea that smaller independent works are on the increase there. It is exciting to notice that there are many different types of organizations which employ a plethora of methods to reach the Jewish people. With God's help this will enable more people to be reached with the gospel. If Satan has his way it will merely provide more opportunity for division in the body of Jesus. The larger organizations such as Chosen People Ministries and Jews for Jesus are still going strong in the United States and Canada.

Sevenser's words regarding effectiveness should encourage us to lead a holy life. He wrote: “What has been effective in reaching Jewish people with the gospel is both the personal witness and consistent 'Christian' life of the one doing the witnessing.” Preaching to preachers is a difficult undertaking, but those reading this article (the writers included) do well to take those words to heart and seek to be a more radiant reflection of Jesus. We can all be reminded that our chosen vocation is not just a job; it is a life-style.

Perspective on the Future

Rosen noted the following four changes in Jewish evangelism since 1989:

- Jews for Jesus has become an international ministry.
- Within Jews for Jesus there has been a trend towards more numerous but smaller branches. For example, instead of putting all of the Florida workers in a Miami branch, they have been deployed to Miami and Fort Lauderdale to make two smaller “outposts.”
- Several ministries, Lamb, Manny Brotman's group and Jews for Jesus to name a few, have developed messianic catalogs which offer a variety of resources including books and music on cassette and compact disc.
- In the years between 1975 and 1979 there were a number of new music groups which performed Jewish gospel music. Rosen noted a recession since 1989 in the number of groups which perform live concerts. To a smaller extent, a few individuals who sing solo concerts have ministries to support their work. Marty Goetz and Sally Klein O'Connor are both talented individuals who exemplify this change from singing groups to solo performances.

Rosen wrote in 1989 “as we face the 1990s, the last decade of this millennium, we are confronted by a number of questions.” Three out of the four he asked still need to be answered:

1. How can we stop the internecine squabbles among the different Jewish missions agencies and congregational bodies, which discredit us and cause grief to our Lord?
2. How can we communicate our message to the Jewish people, many of whom have not only become gospel resistant but whose leaders have also developed the apparatus to greatly influence the public spheres of communication in their attempt to silence our message?
3. How can we face the Jewish community with a particularistic message, stressing unique salvation in the Messiah, when even in the evangelical churches universalism is growing?

There are other challenges which have been raised as well as those above. Sevensen's challenge to be more godly and Gus Elowitz's challenge to be more prayerful may provide the beginnings for answers to Rosen's questions. But our seemingly isolated, individualistic responses to these challenges will nonetheless collectively determine what history will record regarding the messianic movement and the phenomenon of Jews believing in Jesus.

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Jewish Evangelism in Britain Today

— A Personal View

John Ross³

In preparation for this article I read again the 1989 MISHKAN update on the British Jewish evangelism scene.⁴ I was intrigued to notice how little seems to have changed over the intervening years and yet how much more is happening today. For a largely desk bound mission executive to undertake such a review is potentially hazardous; the danger of rosy tinted myopia and the temptation to self-congratulation looms large.

In this review, admittedly a very personal view from the boundary, I want to try to supplement my assessment with the perspective of the British press, not least that representing the Jewish community. Britain's most widely read Jewish newspaper is the Jewish Chronicle. Time was when those working in Jewish ministry feared a mention in the Chronicle; it was considered to be a failure by devotees of the low profile approach to have their presence or work exposed in such a way. How things have changed! Today Jewish missions in Britain positively court publicity and some may feel disappointed, even deprived, if too many issues of the Jewish Chronicle pass without a mention. Undoubtedly Jesus is on the Jewish agenda.

The Decade of Evangelism

In January 1990 the Archbishop of Canterbury, leader of the Anglican church, announced a Decade of Evangelism. Before the ink of the public announcement was dry on the page the Jewish press cried foul! The Jewish Chronicle styled it a Decade of Danger and in an article bearing that title Lee Levitt, who had allegedly “infiltrated” a messianic group led by Stephen Pacht (now with Jews for Jesus, but more about that later) warned that the decade posed a threat for “the Jew in the street” who might become “entangled with this emerging religious force”.⁵ If Levitt sees Christianity as only now “emerging” that doesn't say much about the last 190 decades of evangelism! Incidentally the same page carried an article about Messianic “Rabbi” Chuck Snow who was shortly to renounce the faith in a tragic act of induced apostasy, the responsibility of which is allegedly to be laid at the door of ultra-orthodox zealots.

The assault on the Decade of Evangelism by Jewish leaders was as fierce as it was sustained. Rabbi Arye Forte, a Chabad spokesman, sought to emasculate the Decade by encouraging church leaders to turn their program into a moral crusade aimed at inculcating the values of the Noahide laws: “Would Christian evangelists not be doing God's will if they worked to heighten people's

³ John Ross is Chief Executive of Christian Witness to Israel (CWI). He is also the European Coordinator of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism.

⁴ Elisabeth and Stephen Meyers, “Trends in Jewish Evangelism in Britain, MISHKAN no. 10 1/1989.

⁵ Lee Levitt, “Decade of Danger”, *Jewish Chronicle*. 5 January 1990, p. 25.

moral sensitivity in a spirit of communal harmony?”, Forte urged, with all the subtlety of a tempter.⁶

In the face of the accusation that authentic evangelism is divisive the Anglican leadership visibly wobbled and leaned on their croziers for supports. The Bishop of London, who had been pressured by the new Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' initiative to have a Jewish “Decade of Renewal”, called for a redefinition of the Decade of Evangelism. A London diocesan spokesman sought to correct the idea that, perish the thought, evangelism was about coming to faith in Christ. Not so, Rob Marshall said. It had nothing whatever to do with “targeting” those of other faiths. “Unfortunately recent developments such as the Jews for Jesus campaign have given this impression,” he said. Marshall supposed that what evangelism is really about was an “internal recharging” of the Church's spiritual batteries.

Even The Church of England Newspaper, the main evangelical Anglican newspaper, had to admit that just a year after its launch the Decade of Evangelism was not working; far from galvanizing members into active witness it “set off a yawn in so many churchgoers.” Revamped first as Spearhead and then, because that sounded much too militant (you need “targets” for spears!), revised again to make a big splash as Springboard, today the Decade of Evangelism has sunk almost without trace. I say “almost” because its legacy has been a wholly negative one - misconceived and clumsily launched it has done more harm to Jewish Christian relationships than any other recent initiative.

Targeted — I use the word deliberately — by Jewish community leaders, the Archbishop of Canterbury has been prevailed upon to persist in his unprecedented refusal to undertake the patronage of CMJ (the Church's Ministry to the Jewish People). In the rarefied atmosphere of official Anglican circles there seems to have been a total capitulation to the theology of universalism and relativism. I don't know where he fits, in terms of his status, within Anglicanism, but Michael Latham, director of the Council of Christians and Jews, spoke for the establishment when he wrote in a Times article,

Surely Christians have more than enough to do bringing their Gospel to the unchurched millions without targeting (there is that emotive word again) an already redeemed people, in special covenant with God?⁷

Latham's article attracted significant correspondence. One short but pithy letter I reproduce in full:

Sir,

One wonders why on earth Christ was born a Jew and spent his life preaching to the Jews and exhorting his disciples to do likewise if Jews are to be excluded from twentieth-century proselytising.

Yours faithfully,

Jean McCormick, 17 River Green Hamble, Hampshire.

⁶ Rabbi Arye Forte, “Which direction will it take?”, *The Independent*.

⁷ Michael Latham, “Christians and targeted proselytism”, *The Times*, 20 July 1992, p.14.

June 20.⁸

Just so, Mrs. McCormick; though you use terms like “proselytizing,” that we might consider just a wee bit insensitive, you do hit the nail squarely on the head!

I have already mentioned the refusal by the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, to become the patron of CMJ. The fact is that from its inception CMJ has always enjoyed the endorsement and support of each successive Archbishop of the See of Canterbury. By becoming the formal patron the Archbishop identified himself and the whole Anglican church with the tradition of gospel witness to the Jewish people and in that way positively encouraged it. Carey, the archbishop who was supposed to have impeccable evangelical credentials, has succeeded in doing what no other archbishop whether high church, low church, liberal, catholic or evangelical had ever done before — he has, in the eyes of the Church of England and to the satisfaction of the rabbinic anti-missionary forces, marginalized and undermined the Anglican witness to Jewish people.⁹

Ironically, Carey's predecessor, Lord Runcie, not known to be a special friend of evangelicals — indeed perhaps somewhat uncomfortable in his role as patron of CMJ — nevertheless issued a clear statement to the effect that Jewish missions were an integral part of the Church's missionary calling. “The call to make disciples is clear in the New Testament,” maintained Runcie. But as one commentator wryly observed, “I took this to mean (in today's much-favored, official, General Synod approved climate of multi-faith dialogue) that Christianity and Judaism were, after all, probably different religions; sorry about this — it's just one of those things.”¹⁰

Messianic Jews, alias Jewish Christians or Hebrew Christians.

What's in a name? Much, it seems, if you have participated during the past five years in the largely internal debate that has gripped the minds of many British Jewish people who believe in Jesus. In essence the discussion has revolved around the question of how they should be styled. Discussions within the ranks of the Hebrew Christian Alliance resulted in an interim new name, the Hebrew Christian (Messianic Jewish) Alliance, finally to become The Messianic Jewish Alliance. To further complicate matters another, totally separate, body was set up calling itself The Messianic Jewish Alliance of Great Britain.

Of far more importance than wrangles over nomenclature have been the questions that have been on the agenda of Jewish Christians in the UK. The growing number of such groups, some estimate as many as 30 throughout Britain, represent a number of different approaches to the question of how to express authentic Christian experience within a Jewish cultural framework. For some people Messianic fellowship meetings on Friday evenings are no substitute for their membership in the integrated multi-cultural church where they worship happily on Sundays.

Others have experimented, to varying degrees, with taking the orthodox synagogue as a model for congregational life. Congregations with names like Shema Yisrael Messianic

⁸ Letters to the Editor. *The Times*. 25 July 1992.

⁹ John Ross, “Letter from London: Archbishop Refuses to Endorse Jewish Missions”, *LCJE Bulletin* no. 28, May 1992.

¹⁰ Michael Trend, “Jewry Nobbling”, *The Spectator*, 14 January 1989.

Synagogue have brought down on themselves the wrath of the local Jewish community who have described them as “paradoxes” or “a sick joke.” Fundamental to Jewish opposition is the familiar, tedious and totally unimaginative nonsense that declares loudly (because the argument is weak!) that Messianic Jews are an oxymoron. Typical is the tirade of Helena Green who represents the Bournemouth Jewish perspective, “a Messianic Jew is a contradiction in terms, as one cannot be a committed Jew and a committed Christian at the same time.”¹¹ Says who?

Manny Robinson was a little more objective regarding Messianic Jews in the Redbridge area of North London.¹² “It would be foolish to dismiss these evangelists as cranks,” conceded Robinson. I eagerly read on. “They tend to be the very opposite: highly motivated, tenacious, intelligent, sincere, well educated and the personification of charm.” I waited for the sting in the tail but there wasn't one. There was no explosion of anger, no outpouring of vitriol, just a rather pathetic whimper in the form of a quote from a retired school teacher who said, “Surely we have earned the right to practice our religion in peace.”

What peace? Robinson had already conceded that there was schism and tension, uncertainty and confusion among north London's Jewish community. Liberals and orthodox were at daggers drawn. Interviewing the Jewish Christian Anglican minister Joseph Steinberg, Robinson was told “There is continual in-fighting among the Jewish population. If you have 10 Jews together you get 15 different opinions. The time has come to stop name-calling with rabbis playing Pope in proclaiming who is a Jew and who isn't.” Thank you Eric, sorry, Joseph, that is precisely the point. Let people name themselves; if they don't know who they are, who else does? With one proviso the same holds true for Messianic Jews, alias Hebrew Christians or Jewish Christians, and that proviso is that whatever term is used it must not be used as a smoke-screen, or an expression of disaffiliation.

Missionary Zeal

The last five years have seen a number of significant developments in the activities of the British missionary societies. The older societies include CMJ (now renamed as The Church's Ministry among the Jewish People), Messianic Testimony and Christian Witness to Israel. Recently there have been attempts on the part of a number of North American societies to establish a presence in the United Kingdom. For example, the Christian Jew Foundation is represented by British-born Robert Wiessman.

Perhaps the most significant such development has been the arrival in England of Jews for Jesus. For many years Jews for Jesus have made a contribution towards the evangelization of the British Jewish community. This was first done through cooperation with the older British societies and then, after a memorable declaration by Moishe Rosen at the directors' meeting in 1991 at the fourth international LCJE Conference in Zeist, under their own steam.

JFJ's shop front branch on London's Finchley Road is under the direction of Richard Harvey, formerly of CMJ. Harvey reports that in the short time they have been established in London, Jews for Jesus have seen an encouraging number of people professing faith in Messiah.

¹¹ “Coastal drive by messianic group”, *Jewish Chronicle*. 9 December 1994.

¹² Manny Robinson, “View from the 'bridge'”, *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 June 1995.

The typical JFJ evangelistic methodology has resulted in media criticism, perhaps most notably from Times columnist Bernard Levin. For the non-British reader, Levin is a brilliant but cynical commentator on current events; his acerbic article entitled “Clodhoppers on Crusade”¹³ raised the typical liberal smoke-screen by purporting to attack the methods of evangelism. In fact Levin attacked the legitimacy of evangelism. His article alleged that “the vulgarity and religious ambiguity of Jews for Jesus are a liability to two faiths.” Levin and his kind see evangelism as threatening to Jews because it is essentially an act of hostility aimed at diminishing the Jewish community [the “you can't be a Jew and a Christian” nonsense]; evangelism is deemed to threaten Christianity because through it the Church isolates itself by making exclusivist claims. Levin voices an all too familiar opinion: “In these ecumenical days it is surely reasonable to ask Christianity what its founder meant when he said, 'None shall come to the Father but by me' [sic].” Levin adds “I do not offer those words to give offence, but many a devout Christian is worried by them, and many a bishop, opening his heart to other faiths, must be hard put to provide an answer.”

The outcry against Jewish evangelism in Britain is indeed gathering pace. The representative evangelical umbrella bodies, The British Evangelical Council and the considerably larger Evangelical Alliance, have both come out in support of the general right to witness cross-culturally and specifically, to Jewish people. It might seem like paranoia to say so, but there are sober-minded people who believe that attempts will be made to outlaw as racist all cross-cultural evangelism. The Jewish Chronicle once ran an article about a proposal being put before the House of Commons to this effect, and only last year an open-air evangelist was prosecuted because his activities were deemed racist. British church leaders need to watch with hawk-like eyes if their fundamental democratic rights are not to be undermined by an onslaught of political correctness and liberal intolerance — there is another oxymoron but one that surely exists! And let it not be forgotten that if the legitimacy of Jewish evangelism is denied there can be no logical or biblical case for any cross-cultural missionary activity to those of other faiths. The Jewish authorities ought also reflect that such activities are indicators of the freedoms of our British society. A society that would intolerantly hinder free religious debate would hardly be expected to protect the best interests of religious or racial minorities.

Relationships between the main evangelistic agencies in Britain have perhaps never been better. Gone are the rather naive attempts at cooperation such as used to be made in the past and which disintegrated on the rocks of the disparate identities, methodologies and theologies of the various groups. Meeting from time to time for an informal lunch with all other “Israel ministries” there is the opportunity to discuss and discover what each agency is doing and where can we cooperate. There is also a keen but as yet unfulfilled desire to establish an English-speaking branch of the LCJE European chapter, covering the United Kingdom and Ireland.

One recent opportunity for across the board cooperation came as a result of CWI's initiative to bring together Helen Shapiro, the Jewish Christian jazz singer, and Stan Telchin, the author of the best seller, *Betrayed*. Shapiro had been greatly influenced by reading *Betrayed* when she was struggling with claims of Messiah and corresponded with Telchin. The idea was to bring them

¹³ Bernard Levin, “Clodhoppers on Crusade”, *The Times*, 27 January 1992.

together in a “talk show” format in various hotel conference suites across Britain. Commencing in Bournemouth and going on to Brighton, London, Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle on Tyne, their dialogue drew large numbers of Jewish people and depended on help from members of all the main agencies to act as counsellors, answering the questions of people searching for the truth.

The Jewish Chronicle journalist Hadas Altwarg attended the London meeting and in conversation admitted to being very moved by the frankness of Shapiro and Telchin, as well as their undeniable Jewishness. What she wrote, however, was obviously conditioned by a traditional editorial policy of hostility to all forms of Christian witness. One lady who attended admitted it was “so Jewish. The speakers used familiar Jewish words and humor.” Altwarg commented, “It is this ‘plausibility factor’ which worries those in Anglo-Jewry who are striving to combat missionary activity.”

Of course we know we can't win, whether we are too Jewish or too gentile, it hardly matters where Jesus is despised and rejected. Veteran anti-missionary campaigner, Shmuel Arkush claimed that all such evangelism is “totally emotional and does not stand up to logical reasoning.” He also alleged that missionaries are “smooth salesmen ... with little knowledge of Judaism.” Thankfully we know that Manny Robinson does not agree with him. Green with undisguised envy, Arkush added darkly, “and they have a huge budget.”¹⁴ If only!

The Bottom Line

When Campus Crusade for Christ began work in the UK they had to admit that a “decision for Christ” obtained in minutes in the USA took hours in Britain. The reason is that most British people, the Jewish community included, are generally impervious to highly formulated forms of evangelism such as the Four Spiritual Laws approach. Where superficial methods are applied the results must also be measured in equally superficial terms, as “decisions” rather than as disciples. Where such methods fail a more long-term sympathetic approach, that takes the individual seriously, may make better progress. Missionaries ought not be deluded: despite the seeming impact of vacuous secular advertising, spiritual progress among British Jews depends on a message with intellectual content and biblical integrity, coming from the lips of one whose life is consistent with the message being presented.

Notwithstanding the many campaigns engaged in by all the agencies, it would seem that most Jewish people who come to believe in Jesus do so as the result of the witness of ordinary Christians, or through the reading of the New Testament. Subsequently most Jewish Christians are to be found integrated — but not necessarily assimilated — in the mainstream churches. Surely that is as it should be. I personally believe that the Church has been ordained by God as the primary unit of evangelism; para-church organizations are a poor second best.

To me the two greatest encouragements in the current British church scene are the slowly awakening sensitivity of ordinary Christians to the needs of their Jewish neighbors and the motivation and leadership given by the agencies to stimulate the church to action. This all coincides with an increasing fascination on the part of ordinary Jewish people with Jesus and the

¹⁴ Hadas Altwarg, “Missionary Zeal gives concern as Shapiro draws the crowds”, *Jewish Chronicle*, April 1995.

gospel. As stated at the beginning, the gospel is on the Jewish agenda. However, all things considered, we have to admit that there is relatively little to encourage us in Britain. We too are a valley of dry bones, yet the elements portending better things do seem to be in place. Now may the sovereign Lord send his Spirit and give Israel life.

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Jewish Evangelism in Germany

Jorg Kraft¹⁵

Since the 17th century a considerable effort has been made to reach out to the Jewish People in Germany. By 1900 there were many groups and non-profit organizations promoting the gospel to the Jews, and quite a number of missionaries (up to 40) had been employed. As a result many came to faith. Even a few “messianic congregations” had been planted (I know of two whose buildings still exist); however, most of the Jewish Christians joined mainline churches.

Since World War II almost no Jewish outreach has taken place in Germany. When Hitler took over, some Jewish Christians left the country in time but hundreds and thousands went to the concentration camps along with their fellow Jews. After the war, Jews formed a minority of only 30,000–40,000. I know of only one part-time missionary to the Jews in Germany, a Jewish believer who reached out mainly to the Jewish community in Hamburg during the early sixties. Although his organization eventually took a stand against Jewish evangelism, no one took his place. Those Jewish believers living today have usually come to faith through personal relationship with true believers or they have met messianic Jews from abroad.

Outreach Today

A hundred years ago Jewish outreach was focused on immigrants from Russia — the same is happening today. During the past six years Germany has welcomed some 50,000–80,000 Russian Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union, which has doubled or trebled the number of Jews in Germany. In response, two Russian Jews have been employed as full-time missionaries to their people, two more are in preparation, and six gentile evangelists are working full-time or part-time.

Even though Arbeitsgemeinschaft für das messianische Zeugnis an Israel (AmZI) and Evangeliumsdienst für Israel (EDI) were committed to Jewish evangelism in Israel, nothing was done in Germany until the Russians came. Operation Mobilization’s (OM) refugee department is involved, with two missionaries. Licht im Osten (Light in the East), one of the biggest missions behind the Iron Curtain, gave Russian Jewish evangelism a place within its ministry. Chosen People Ministries and Jews for Jesus have also begun to establish their own ministries in Germany.

Efforts in Various Geographical Areas

In Berlin several individuals (particularly one OM worker), working alone, have been involved in friendship evangelism for about four years; and recently a Russian Jewish immigrant started

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working as a full-time missionary. Some churches have been involved in Jewish evangelism, and a small inter-congregational “Messianic forum” for congregational leaders has been started, but with little impact. Some organized events have also had an impact, but not really measurable. Two or three congregations have made some effort to reach out to Russian Jews, and a very small group of German messianic Jews has started to meet on a monthly basis.

The Stuttgart area is the most developed in terms of Jewish outreach. A full-time Russian Jewish evangelist has been active since December 1994. There are five Russian messianic house groups meeting regularly for bible study and discipleship training; and messianic worship services in the Russian language take place once a month, with about 100 attending, half of them Jewish. There is also a retired German missionary to the Jews from abroad who wrote some evangelistic brochures and sent them to more than 500 Jewish addresses in Stuttgart; he is following up with door-to-door ministry.

In Frankfurt/Main one missionary is visiting Jews, both German and Russian, door-to-door. He is keeping in touch with more than 200 families. In his house one small group of Russian Jews meets every Shabbat.

Local prayer meetings for volunteers involved in Jewish outreach take place regularly in Berlin, Frankfurt/Main, Stuttgart area, Essen area and Bremen. Little has happened in other areas, even in big cities like München, Hannover and the Köln-Dortmund agglomeration, but a small number of German Christians from all parts of the country are pressing on to build a network and to practise friendship evangelism with Russian Jews.

In a number of areas it is possible to meet in immigrant absorption centers for weekly Bible studies, Erev Shabbat and Jewish festivals. Sometimes the Jewish authorities forbid such things, sometimes they are not aware of them. More believers are needed to lead such events.

The Role of the Church

The Russian German church, even though speaking the language, is not supportive. There is no vision, and Russian Jews and Russian Germans have little in common.

The multitude of German believers in general has little interest in sharing the gospel with the Jewish people. Most refrain from any contact with Jews, even witnessing, because of guilt resulting from the *Shoah*. Many are more concerned with bringing Jews to Israel. Others are having to learn that showing “true love” by helping Russian Jews practically, without sharing the gospel, does not lead to friendship or spiritual openness as expected. Rather, the usual response is a lack of gratitude, and the relationship ends.

Events

In July 1994 a three-week training program on Jewish Evangelism was held in Berlin, sponsored by Chosen People Ministries, AmZI and EDI. Almost thirty people took part: twenty from Germany and Switzerland, five from the Ukraine, and two from Israel. As a result, at least two individuals came to faith. This training program has also had quite an impact on local outreach in various areas.

A number of weekend conferences have been held for German Christians (to motivate and to

help them contact Jewish immigrants), for Russian Jewish believers (to fellowship and to strengthen their identity) and, only recently, for Russian Jews who are interested in messianic faith. These weekends have been quite effective and will be continued. Until now these conferences have been held for the whole country and should be regionalized in future. Additional conferences, to promote networking between German messianic believers (who number between 50–100), are in the planning stage.

Means and Tools

German believers, like Christians everywhere, have a hard time understanding this principle. Russian Jews would not visit a Christian congregation unless invited warmly; but if invited they, in contrast to the German Jewish population, would visit. Russian Jews are also much easier to contact than German Jews. But it takes a long time from initial contact until an individual commits his or her life to the Messiah Jesus. And then quite often it takes a long time until fruits, spiritual growth and maturity are seen.

The first step is to go from door to door, especially in immigrant absorption centers. This is the key place — once they have found an apartment it is hard to locate the immigrants. Evangelical believers have been slow in acting; Jehovah's Witnesses, New Apostolic Church, Mormons and some other cults have been much more industrious — and effective. But it is not too late.

It is very hard to say how many have come to faith. In all of Germany there are perhaps fifty at the most, not including those who were already believers when they arrived. Usually there is no opportunity for them to become part of a messianic fellowship or congregation as there are too few. They gather in about ten messianic home Bible study groups, meeting weekly, sometimes on Erev Shabbat. This, the second step, is still the most important tool for evangelism and discipleship.

As there are so few, it is not easy to identify comparable patterns among German messianic Jews. But they do share one problem — their Jewishness is over-emphasized within the church. Here, as well, messianic house groups could help by enabling the believer to maintain his or her Jewish identity without attracting too much attention.

Literature

A variety of Christian literature suitable for Jewish people is available. Complete Russian Bibles with a Jewish outlook, as well as several children's Bibles, are gratefully received. Evangelistic tools in German include titles by Harald Fölsch (who served for 39 years in Jewish outreach in South Africa), Paul Taine and Stan Telchin. A Russian translation of Telchin's *Betrayed* has become a "best seller" — 15,000 copies have been distributed, not only to Jews. Some Russian titles have been reproduced as well, including *Lechayim: Five Jewish Laws*. *Menora*, a high quality messianic newspaper in Russian has been launched by Jewish and non-Jewish believers — 30,000 copies are distributed quarterly in Germany, the Ukraine, North America and Israel. It is evangelistic, interesting and intellectually stimulating, and it is a great tool for door-to-door ministry, especially in immigrant absorption centers. Other evangelistic literature, mainly imported from the USA and Israel, has also been distributed.

Opposition and Obstacles

Opposition to date is relatively low. A few articles in the main Jewish newspaper have been launched against “missionaries”, and the synagogue tries to withdraw Russian Jewish immigrants from any Christian or cultic contact. Some have been threatened that they would lose their status as immigrants if they joined a Christian congregation. A few messianic immigrants have even been told, falsely, that they would be sent back to the CIS if they did not stop witnessing.

However, there is generally more opposition from the Lutheran church than from Jewish authorities. In Germany there are many “county churches” rather than one state church. Some of these have stated officially that Jewish missions are no longer valid. In the motherland of Pietism, Württemberg, forces in the church parliament tried to stop EDI’s ministry, but a major group within the parliament defended the position of EDI.

Coordination or Conflict

Germany is a new and challenging field. Several organizations, both local and foreign, have become involved in evangelism among the Jewish population. The German organizations are grateful for the input of the foreign groups, and yet are concerned that they may be overrun. Cultural differences and competition could cause serious problems unless both sides communicate and appreciate one another. Fortunately, there is a strong vision among these organizations to network and coordinate.

The number of Jews in Germany is low (about 100,000 according to the *Jewish Yearbook*), so there is a potential for competition between the organizations. But the Jewish population is spread out over the whole country, so one could say that though the harvest field is small there are still not enough laborers. More workers are needed, especially well-trained lay people to follow up on individuals and families. And we need full-time evangelists, working within the organizations, who are mature enough to find ways which are effective and do not disaffirm the ministry of their fellow workers.

Anti-Semitism and Jewish Evangelism

A large part of the anti-semitic history of evangelical congregations is still unknown and even withheld from the public. Older people tend to deny the stories, but it is still there, hindering open relationships between Christians and Jews. We do not fully understand how the Lord wants to deal with the problem of anti-semitism in the church during the Nazi period and, though hidden, today.

Those who want to share the gospel need to demonstrate more sensitivity towards Jewish people. German Jews and the mainline church are more sensitive in that area than in Israel or America, for example. It is easy to hurt and frighten German Jews, and feelings of guilt on the part of German Christians make outreach even more difficult. It is hard to build friendships without withholding the gospel.

Perspectives and Needs

Some expect the number of Jewish refugees from the CIS to double or triple yet again within the next few years. Are we prepared? The best time to reach out is during the first six months after their arrival — after that it is much harder to find the immigrants and to make contact. It is already much harder now than it was three years ago.

Here is what we need to do and to pray for:

- The evangelical church must be informed, taught and motivated to understand its role in Jewish evangelism as part of world evangelism.
- Volunteer groups need to be established to pray and to reach out to God's people.
- Motivation and training of volunteers is needed. This should be done in a joint effort by all the organizations mentioned above.
- The various organizations need to coordinate, working hand-in-hand and referring new contacts to whichever worker lives in that individual's area.
- Messianic home Bible studies are necessary for Jewish believers to fellowship and to be disciplined, to support their Jewish identity and to help them witness to their own people.
- Gentile congregations and the new Jewish believers must be prepared to integrate. The congregations need to appreciate, without over-emphasizing, the new believer's Jewish identity. On the other hand the Jewish believer must tolerate the gentile background of his or her congregation.
- In a few cases a messianic congregation may be possible. This is not likely because of the small number of Jews in the country.
- Russian messianic fellowships must not create a Russian ghetto culture. They need to link up with German Jewish believers and learn to speak the language in order to become an important force in the young messianic movement in Germany.
- Pray that the Lord will give a great awakening among His People.

We are grateful for the reprise of the spread of the Gospel among the Jews in our country after 60 years of silence. May the Lord use all of us to bring glory to His name and to fill His heaven with many Jews, and gentiles, alike.

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Jewish Evangelism in the CIS

Can We Know What’s Going on?

Avi Snyder¹⁶

In the Spring of 1990, this writer and four others traveled to five cities throughout Russia and Ukraine in order to gather information about the possibilities of Jewish outreach in what was still the Soviet Union. While visiting Odessa, we received an invitation to address a gathering that met at the Jewish Cultural Center every week. We followed our personal testimonies with the presentation of the Gospel, and then we waited for questions. But by this point, the leader of the meeting understood that he had made — from his point of view — a tactical mistake by inviting us to speak. And so, in a belated attempt at damage control, he said that no questions would be asked. Others immediately objected to the manner in which the leader unilaterally sought to muzzle the proceedings. But the leader was adamant. Not only did he want our silence; he also wanted our absence. “Either they go,” he insisted, with a finger pointed at us, “or I go.”

With barely a pause, a gruff voice bellowed back from the midst of the crowd, “So go.”

For just a moment, the leader looked stunned. Then, with stoic Soviet poise, he gathered his belongings and walked out of the room, leaving us the opportunity to talk freely for the next hour with those who wanted to know more. One of those who lingered the longest was a woman named Tanya.

“This is important,” she said. “We Jews should know about Jesus.”

As we shared the Gospel at length, she listened deeply. She wasn't yet prepared to pray and receive the gift of eternal life, but she was eager to give us her name and address so we could stay in touch with her from the States.

But over a year and a half passed by before three people from that original team of five moved to Odessa and re-established personal contact with Tanya. Even so, her interest hadn't waned. Now, she not only listened to the Gospel; she listened, believed and repented. Soon afterward, she became involved in a Friday night fellowship meeting. And at that same time, she started sharing her faith. Recently, Tanya emigrated to Germany, where she now communicates the claims of Yeshua to other post-Soviet Jewish people who live with her in the refugee “heim” or homes.

Distinctive Features, or “Why Is this Work Different from all other Works?”

In a sense, Tanya's story typifies certain characteristics that distinguish Jewish evangelism in the CIS from that endeavor in other parts of the world. These distinctives may be summarized as: an extended receptivity; an absence of bias; an effective variety of methodology; at present, minimal

¹⁶ Avi Snyder is the leader of the Jews for Jesus branch in Ukraine, Odessa.

Jewish opposition; and a mounting sense of urgency in the hearts of those laboring in this present field.

Extended receptivity

Tanya's sustained interest despite the absence of an on-going personal testimony isn't uncommon. Peter and Ginny Vander Stir, who work among our Jewish people in St. Petersburg, have explained that when a backlog of inquirers prevented them from adequately following up on individuals for some time, they still found those individuals willing to listen and to consider the claims of the Messiah once they re-established contact. What accounts for this protracted interest? At least three "natural" causes may be cited. We may point to the failure of atheism as one factor. The economic and political demise of the Communist bloc discredited the theology of scientific atheism that had served as the theological undergirding of the Soviet State. With the failure of atheism as a system upon which one may build a life, a vacuum of disbelief came into being — a vacuum that needed to be filled. However, the vacuum has been felt by all peoples of the former Soviet Union, so we cannot say that this factor is peculiar to the Jewish experience in the post-Soviet era.

However, two other factors do pertain particularly to our Jewish people. One is the fear of rising anti-semitism. As ugly and ungodly as anti-semitism is, God may even allow such an evil to serve as an agent that motivates people to look for deliverance and help from him.

There is an ironic poignancy in this. For so many years, the presence of anti-semitic sentiment among certain Russians and Ukrainians kept so many of our people away from considering the gospel claims. Old evils are returning at a frightening pace. Recently, index-card sized announcements were pasted in a number of Moscow metro cars. The message on the cards was a specter from the past. "Careful! Soon it will be the Jewish Passover. There is a growing danger of Christian children being kidnapped from Hassids." And yet, with the swelling of nationalism and the concurrent rise of anti-semitism, many of our people are nevertheless able to look beyond the rhetoric of hate and see the Redeemer of love.

One last factor (and the second which pertains particularly to Jewish people) is the flight of our people from the former USSR. Relocation brings with it an automatic sense of being uprooted. And this sense of being uprooted often ushers in a willingness to consider the Gospel claims.

Once again, we need to ask whether the interplay of these factors is indicative of a supernatural event designed by the Lord, or whether these factors are merely "making room" for the Lord to reap uncommon results among our people at this time. It is true that the failure of a belief system, the fear of destruction, and the flight from a native land are causal factors that can lead any individual or group of people to a fresh consideration of the claims of Yeshua. At the same time, the fact that certain circumstances are explicable doesn't automatically make those circumstances any less miraculous in their occurrence.

Absence of bias

The second distinctive that makes Jewish evangelism in the CIS different from the same work in other parts of the world is a smaller degree of bias against the person of Yeshua. Our people are

less committed to a non-consideration of the Gospel message for a very curious reason. The virtual moratorium on matters pertaining to Jewish history, culture, religion and tradition during the Soviet regime also included a blackout on that part of our tradition that preconditions so many of us to assume that Yeshua is not for us Jews.

This fact was impressed upon me in a tender manner not very long ago. As I waited for a trolley-bus, a woman named Anna approached and informed me that she had seen me on earlier occasions, distributing literature about Yeshua. Then she leaned close and confided, "I'm also Jewish. But I have a copy of the New Testament, and I like to read it. Is that all right for us Jews?"

"That's very all right," I assured her.

Variety of methodology

In a moment, a survey of different missions and messianic groups will be offered in order to illustrate the varied forms of ministry that are being performed. On the basis of reported statistics, it becomes clear that all methods produce some measure of success. And so, what makes this "mix of methods" unique is not the actual nature of the methods, for a mix of methodologies may be found among Jewish works in any part of the world. Rather, what makes the mix unique is the fact that all the methods are meeting with encouraging success.

This paper cannot offer a comprehensive overview of all the ministries and styles of works that are presently underway in the former USSR, and so a disclaimer is in order. Omission of worthwhile ministries is inevitable, and because of that inevitability, I offer an apology as a preface. Here then in alphabetical order is a representative sampling of what is being done.

The work of Chosen People Ministries began with a visit by Executive Director Sam Nadler and Albert Israeli in the Spring of 1990. A messianic mission congregation was founded in Kiev from the fruit of that original outreach. At present, the congregation is led by Dmitri Resnick and two other elders, and none of the current leadership is from the West. An average of 70 people regularly attend worship services on Sunday, and approximately 30 of that number are Jewish. A satellite group of 20 people and one missionary has also been established in Kharkov, and a Bible class is underway in Lvov as well.

In the Spring of 1993, Jonathan Bernis, the director of Rochester, N.Y. based Hear O Israel Ministries, planned and presented the first of a series of Messianic Music Festivals that have utilized the talents of an array of international musicians, singers and dancers. As of April, 1995, a total of four festivals have taken place in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev and Minsk. The total number of individuals who have come forward in response to the Gospel message is over 43,000, and Mr. Bernis concludes that approximately half of these responses and professions of faith have come from Jewish people. After the respective festivals, congregations were formed in St. Petersburg, Moscow and Minsk, utilizing follow-up ministry teams and individuals from Israel, Holland and the United States. A messianic Bible school has been established in St. Petersburg as well, with 130 individuals enrolled in a one-year program that focuses upon congregational planting and Jewish evangelism.

Since 1991, teams from the International Board of Jewish Missions have regularly visited such Ukrainian cities as Dnepropetrovsk, Kharkov, Kiev and Zaporozhia. According to the

mission's director, Henry Benach, three approaches characterize the nature of the outreach. Literature is distributed en masse. At the same time, Western team members and local translators use portable amplification systems to draw a crowd and present the gospel in the open air. The street meetings are often a preamble to larger evangelistic meetings that have been scheduled in a rented hall. Finally, ministry teams have also succeeded in bringing the Gospel into grade schools, colleges and universities. Each individual who indicates a profession of faith is required to fill out a decision card, and over 25,000 individuals have indicated a profession of faith since the work began in earnest in 1991.

Jerusalem/Zion Ministries is an entirely indigenous Jewish mission agency, sponsored by The Christian Jew Foundation. A Jewish believer named Nikolai Haskin conducts the ministry from Minsk. Though originally a composer of contemporary Christian music, Mr. Haskin began to distribute literature in Minsk that he received from other ministries. He combined the literature distribution with personal visits and weekly meetings. Recently, his methods have expanded to include the establishment of a mobile evangelistic music team called Pilgrim which has given evangelistic concerts in Magilov. Cell groups and evangelistic services are conducted on a weekly basis. An average of 60 to 70 people attend a Saturday service, and 80 percent of them are Jewish. Assisting Mr. Haskin are two full-time volunteers who also live in Minsk.

In September, 1991, a team from Jews For Jesus consisting of Avi and Ruth Snyder (and children), and Elizabeth Terini moved to Odessa with the twin goals of evangelizing and establishing a Jews For Jesus ministry comprised of Russian and Ukrainian Jewish believers. Mission stations now exist in Odessa and Moscow, staffed by one American worker and thirteen workers from the former USSR. From 1 October, 1991 to 1 April, 1995, staff and volunteers have distributed over 6,000,000 tracts, and have conducted over 8,400 personal visits with Jewish inquirers and Jewish believers. Two witnessing campaigns have been conducted in Moscow, and five full-page evangelistic ads have appeared in secular newspapers in Moscow, Minsk, Kiev and Odessa. More than 1,100 Jewish people and more than 1,700 non-Jewish people have indicated professions of faith since the inception of this work. Original evangelistic and discipleship materials have been written and printed entirely within the C.I.S, consisting of 22 tract titles, six pamphlets, two booklets and one book. Another evangelistic outreach was recently conducted by the Liberated Wailing Wall in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

The goal of the ministry Key of Life is to give a Bible to every Jewish person in the former Soviet Union. Finnish based and financed, it began with the labors of Hannele and Hannu Suorti in Moscow in 1986. An estimated 2,000,000 Bibles, children's Bibles and books have been distributed in the past nine years. Literature continues to find its way to Jewish people through a network of more than 300 churches extending throughout the CIS. Presently, there are two workers in Russia, three in Ukraine, and one each in Belarus, Moldova, Lithuania and Romania. As a result of the weekly meetings in Moscow, a congregation of approximately 80 people (most of whom are Jewish) has taken shape under the auspices of a local Pentecostal church. As of this writing (April, 1995), the Suortis are finalizing plans to return to Finland, and to entrust the Key of Life Ministry entirely into the hands of co-workers from the former Soviet Union.

The Parish of Father Menn is a completely indigenous ministry among Jewish people that is different from all the others in two very significant ways: it is officially connected to the Russian

Orthodox Church; and, it is a church that did not choose, but merely happened to attract increasing numbers of Russian Jewish intelligentsia. Alexander Menn was a Jewish man who served as an orthodox priest in three Moscow-area parishes from 1960 until his death in 1990. Many Jewish people, including a number of artists, writers and intellectuals, were touched and drawn to Yeshua through the ministry of his messages and books. The translated titles of two of his best known works are: *The Son of man*, and *How to be a Christian*. His parish has continued under the leadership of an associate, Father Alexander Borisov, who first served as a deacon and then became a priest in 1991. As the successor of Father Menn's work, Father Borisov oversees a parish of more than 1,000 regular attendees, and nearly half of these are Jewish.

With all of this success, a challenge confronts the groups presently at work: to what degree can complementary ministries find theological and methodological common ground for the sake of co-laboring in the present harvest? This question becomes especially compelling as we consider the next distinctive of the work of Jewish evangelism in the former USSR.

Minimal Jewish opposition

The first and most interesting observation about the opposition is this: most opposition to Jewish evangelism does not presently come from our own Jewish people, but from two other sources; anti-Jewish and/or anti-evangelical segments of post-Soviet society; and Christian endeavors that present a hindrance because of their compromise over the proclamation of the message of the cross.

Opposition from disbelieving Jewish individuals and agencies does exist, but it is presently marginal, primarily because potential opponents are engaged not in anti-missionary work, but in missionary activity of their own. However, where it exists, Jewish opposition is taking more the form of emotional extortion rather than apologetics and debate. As stated above, many of our people are in the process of leaving the CIS. The major source of relocation assistance comes from agencies that are not hospitable to the Gospel and that are not opposed to using their ability to help as a bargaining chip against listening to the message of Messiah. In Odessa, leaders of the Jewish community have made it known that any Jewish person who attends messianic meetings has automatically disqualified himself from receiving material aid or assistance in emigrating to another land.

Additionally, Yad L'Achim and Chabad Lubavitz (the latter in conjunction with the American Joint Committee) have produced anti-missionary tracts and booklets such as, *Jews For Jesus?*, *Stand on Your Own Faith — the Truth about Missionaries*, and *Judaism — Briefly about the Everlasting*.

More prevalent (and potentially more virulent) is the opposition against Jewish missionaries from anti-Jewish and anti-evangelical forces in the former USSR. Anti-Jewish hostility is seen and experienced in the ordinary interplay of witnessing on the streets. These forces stand in opposition to Jewish evangelism in the same way that they stand in opposition to anything of benefit to the Jewish people. Often, this form of opposition either involves or threatens to involve physical violence. For example, the Key of Life ministry was forced to find a new location for its weekly meetings when anti-semitic threats convinced the director of the meeting hall to cancel their contract. Jews For Jesus evangelistic ads were canceled in five newspapers, partly because

of the editors' fears of anti-semitic reprisals against people and property.

Anti-evangelical opposition affects Jewish evangelism in the same way that it affects any form of evangelical witness. Though more about this will be stated below, an interesting, but inaccurate, account appeared in a recent editorial of the Moscow paper, *The Moscow Times*. Speaking of Orthodox Christian concern over western evangelical missionary activity, the editorial stated that the Orthodox Church “has shown complete indifference in relation to such American Protestant organizations as the Messianic Jews or Jews For Jesus. This is because these organizations aim their messages primarily at Jews, for whom the Orthodox Church has little concern” (*Moscow Times*, Saturday, 25 March 1995, “Freedom of Conscience,” p. 8).

Regrettably, a serious concern is what might be called Christian Opposition to Jewish Evangelism in the former USSR. There are brothers and sisters in the Lord who are unwittingly assisting non-believers in their efforts to shield the post-Soviet Jewish people from the message of Yeshua. Christians with a desire to assist our people in their efforts to make aliyah have agreed to cooperate with Jewish repatriation agencies at the expense of a gospel testimony, inasmuch as they have pledged silence on the content of the Gospel.

Urgency

The final distinctive is a sense of urgency on the part of the workers in the field, arising from two sources: demographic patterns of the post-Soviet Jewish people; and the decline of democratic reforms.

One of the most obvious characteristics of the post-Soviet Jewish people is the fact that it is a people on the move. Government sources in Bonn, Germany, reveal that at the present time, the number of post-Soviet Jewish people stands at 568,000 in Israel; 200,000 in the United States; and 51,000 in Germany. An additional 10,000 post-Soviet Jewish people have emigrated to Australia since 1989. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies reports that 1,000 Jewish refugees have come to South Africa from Russia, and an additional 2,000 Russian Jewish refugees have arrived from Israel.

How long our people remain responsive to the Gospel once they repatriate can best be assessed by those who live and work in the lands receiving them. From the perspective of those of us who hope to remain in the former USSR, we know that our people are responsive to the Gospel over here, but we also know that our people are leaving. If migration trends continue, then we must labor quickly while the opportunities last.

The decline of democratic reforms also contributes to our sense of urgency. Anti-western/anti-evangelical sentiment is on the rise. Ukraine may be leaning toward the left and to a return of Communism, while swelling ultra-nationalism is causing Russia to lean more to the right. Advocates of either trend are placing strictures on the proclamation of the Gospel. Western missionaries who hope to minister in Ukraine can no longer enter the country on the basis of an invitation alone. That invitation must be accompanied by an approval by the local governmental agencies that regulate religious activity in each Ukrainian city. In Russia, an amendment before the Duma to the 1990 Law on Freedom of Conscience will permit western-based missionaries to work only within the structure of the officially registered Russian ministry that invited them.

The Pattern Emerges: Some Noticeable Trends

But despite growing hindrances, the Gospel is being proclaimed. Indeed, the labors of the above mentioned groups reveal at least three trends.

First, Jewish people are willing to respond to the Gospel. Despite the history of anti-semitism and the resultant fear of openly identifying as a Jew, there is a remarkable readiness on the part of so many of our people to approach, inquire and listen to the claims of Yeshua once the banner of his name has been lifted up in a noticeable fashion.

Second, Jewish people are responding with public professions of faith. Whereas a large measure of this responsiveness may merely be an initial hunger for any spiritual information after a 70 year black-out, a number of the inquiries result in genuine commitments to the Lord.

Third, Jewish men and women are entering full-time service for the Lord. This last point is possibly the strongest evidence that God is truly at work among the Jewish people of the former Soviet Union, for genuine redemption by the Lord is meant to find its ultimate expression in service for the Lord.

However, the enthusiasm may properly be tempered by the absence to date of two markers that have historically indicated a major moving of the Lord among any group of people. We must acknowledge that a significant original hymnology from post-Soviet Jewish believers has not yet begun to take shape. Secondly, innovative or original leadership forms and mission/congregational structures have not come into being. The music and the forms are predominantly adaptations of an earlier work of God in the sixties and seventies. However, this “absence” extends to the evangelistic works among all the peoples of the former Soviet Union. Four possible explanations exist. Either the evangelistic successes are not a real “move,” but a phase. Or, the originality and innovations are taking place, but word hasn't gotten out yet. Or, perhaps God intends to do things a bit differently this time (He is permitted). One final possibility: maybe the process just requires a little more time.

Standing on Some Very Impressive Shoulders

One final observation may be offered, though it is not really an observation, but a question: Is God's work among the Jewish people of the CIS a *kairos* or a continuation?

I began this paper with the premise that at least five characteristics distinguish Jewish evangelism in the former Soviet Union from efforts among our people in other lands. Such a premise, combined with measurable results and reports from the field can easily create an impression that we are laboring in an exceptional, possibly unique bracket of time; a *kairos*. And perhaps we are. But while the time might be unique, the task is nothing new. Indeed, the work of bringing the Gospel to the Jewish people of what is now the former Soviet Union is not a new enterprise at all. An encounter on the streets of Odessa brought home the reality of that truth not very long ago.

While distributing literature, I was approached by a Jewish woman who extended a weathered copy of an evangelistic pamphlet entitled, in Russian, “Can a Jew Sincerely Believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah?” The pamphlet had been printed in Odessa. The number of pamphlets printed was modest: 3,000. The date of printing was 1918 — one year after the October

Revolution.

The pamphlet was not a copy; it was an original, and it had been in this woman's family for three generations. It was part of the body of literature of — and a testimony to — the ministry of Leon Rosenberg who ministered in Odessa from the end of the 19th century.

The works of individuals like Rosenberg in Odessa and Rabinovitz in Kishinev remind present-day workers among our people that we are standing upon the shoulders of important ministries that have preceded our present efforts. It is fitting to acknowledge this fact, because it places the preceding reflections on current Jewish evangelistic enterprises within the embrace of an important and most encouraging truth: God has been redeeming His chosen people in this part of the world through a variety of ministries for more than a hundred years.

So is the work so unique after all? Is this a *kairos* or a continuation? Perhaps we really don't need to know. Understanding the nature of God's work is good. But giving thanks for the fact of God's work is always better.

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The Messianic Movement in Israel

Bodil F. Skjøtt¹⁷

The following article is based on a survey conducted amongst the messianic congregations in Israel. Of the approximately 40 congregations, 25 responded, providing an adequate sample for drawing trends, patterns, and forms which are currently shaping the messianic movement in Israel. The congregations were contacted by phone and asked a series of questions regarding numbers and changes in numbers over the last five years; the number and kind of regular activities of the congregation; and activities involving other congregations or institutions in the country.

The congregations were also asked to mention the biggest challenge presently facing them, and what they considered to be the biggest challenge for the messianic movement in the country. The following review is designed to give a brief overview of the major areas of preoccupation, both theological and practical, the ways in which the movement perceives current and future potential development, and the main challenges it faces from both internal and external factors.

The congregations contacted for information have an average membership roll between 50 and 200. These figures include children, who often make up more than 25 percent. Apart from the regular Sabbath service, the activities of the congregations consist of weekly Bible study or home groups. These are frequently divided not only geographically but also linguistically. Most congregations also have a weekly prayer meeting. Other activities include women's and men's meeting, youth programs, and, in some congregations, a special weekly session for children. Apart from these regular events, youth groups from individual congregations exchange visits and build ties which no doubt will prove to be helpful in the future, when young members become new leaders.

How many and whom to count?

The actual number of messianic believers in Israel, and the number of congregations, is itself a complex issue. In his article in *MISHKAN* no. 10, 1/1989, James Sibley estimated the number to be somewhere between 1000-2000, compared with an estimated maximum of 300 Jewish believers in 1965. Sibley does not reveal whether the exact number in 1989 is closer to 1000 or 2000, but rather underlines how difficult it is to give an exact estimate. Garry Denlinger set the number of believers at "fewer than 5000" in his report at the Fifth International LCJE Conference.¹⁸ The growth thus appears to be considerable, a fact which should give cause for rejoicing.

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¹⁸ Garry Denlinger, "Challenges Facing Messianic Jews", in Kai Kjtr-Hansen (ed.), *LCJE Jerusalem 95* (Conference papers), pp. 92-98.

Many congregational leaders, however, consider 5000 to be too optimistic a figure; most would feel more comfortable with a figure between 3000-4000. The dispute largely derives from a difference in defining who is or should be included in the census. Should the figures for “messianic believers” include or exclude, for example, gentile believers living permanently in the country, who identify with and worship in the messianic congregations? In a few congregations, such believers make up close to half of the members.

The numbers can also be determined by referring to Hebrew-speaking congregations rather than messianic congregations. This raises the further question concerning the Russian- and Ethiopian-speaking congregations. Where do they fit into the picture? There is no doubt that most people within the messianic movement think of these groups as part of the messianic body, at least when speaking of figures. On the other hand, the different labels given to groups indicate more than a mere linguistic difference.

In one part of the country, congregational leaders meet on a regular level with leaders of Arab-speaking congregations. Although most would want to exclude Arab Christian when talking about the number of messianic believers in Israel, this joint participation does raise questions which the messianic movement in the country will have to relate to in the future. The mere determination of figures thus clearly raises the central issue of identity, an issue to which we shall return below.

Yet the question still remains as to what distinguishes “messianic” believers from other believers in the country? Certain divisions derive from natural causes but habits and routines sometimes prove stronger than the process of acculturation. It seems easier to create a congregation than to close it down and it requires deliberation and determination to assimilate into the local culture. When acculturation and being “messianic” comes at the expense of the unity of the entire body, however, this may also convey an unwelcome witness to the surrounding society. The tension between an outward expression of common faith and the need to integrate into Jewish society may at times call for a balanced response.

Reason for Change in Numbers over the Last Five Years

The significant rise in the number of believers over the last five years can be attributed to several factors. One of the simplest is the natural birth rate. In some of the congregations, children and teenagers constitute between 25 percent and 50 percent of those attending the worship service. We shall look more closely below at the impact of this change on the life of the individual congregations.

Already in 1989, Sibley suggested the apparent rise in religious interest amongst the young as another reason for growth. Some people have compared the young adults and teens of Israeli society to the young people of the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Instead of the Vietnam War, Israel has its war in Lebanon and the Intifada. People have become disillusioned with Zionism and socialism and are increasingly disaffected by government policies. All of this has created a younger generation searching for answers different from those of their parent’s generation. Many young Israelis now find it difficult to agree with the well-known Zionist dictum uttered by Trumpeldor: “It is a good thing to die for your country.”

The new religious interest can also be seen in the number of yeshiva students and the

numerous New Age groups which have sprung up all over the country. Just because a new interest in religion has arise does not mean, however, that all those looking for a different answer become part of the messianic movement. For many Israelis, a Jew who believes in Yeshua is still considered an ex-Jew or even worse, a traitor. Most of the congregations contacted mentioned that only a fraction of those who had joined the fellowship over the last five years were native Israelis.

Another and more significant reason for the increase, especially over the last five-six years, can be located in the vast number of new immigrants, mainly from the former Soviet Union and from Ethiopia. In several congregations, the two languages now being used are not English and Hebrew as before, but rather Hebrew and Russian. Some immigrants have come to faith in the country, while others had made contact with the gospel prior to immigrating.

In some congregations, these immigrants make up more than half of the membership. This good news is the result of hope and prayers over many years. This fulfillment has also brought an element of friction with it, however. While several congregations reported that the difficulties of integrating a large number of new members were outweighed by the positive contribution made by the newcomers, some veteran members of congregations have felt threatened and overrun by the newcomers. As a result, they left the fellowship. In other instances, the immigrants joined a local congregations and later split to form their own. For the time being, they find it more important to be Russian-speaking Jews who live in Israel and believe in Yeshua as savior and Messiah than to become part of the Hebrew-speaking messianic community.

This once again raises the question of identity from a slightly different perspective. To what extent non-identification with the messianic community should be lamented is difficult to say. Time will show, and most likely time will also narrow the gap between the Hebrew- and Russian-speaking congregations. For one thing, the next generation will be Hebrew- rather than Russian-speaking, and will have been brought up in a Jewish and Israeli cultural and religious environment. A similar pattern can be found among the Ethiopian-speaking congregations. What unites them at the moment is their faith in Yeshua, their cultural and linguistic background, and the fact that they are living in Israel. Although many of the present divisions can be explained and justified for the time being, it will surely be unfortunate if such Russian and Ethiopian congregations remain unintegrated and isolated from the mainstream messianic movement.

The Place of Evangelism in the Life of the Congregations

One of the indicators of what role evangelism plays in congregational life is the work of the National Evangelism Committee. Founded in 1984, since then the National Evangelism Committee has been active in different ways across the country, although the Jerusalem area, with its religiously charged atmosphere, is still seen as particularly challenging. Over the past year or so, a group of Israelis have begun meet this challenge and have conducted regular evangelism in the streets of Jerusalem, inviting people to Bible studies in their downtown office. The National Evangelism Committee regularly sponsors street campaigns in major cities around the country. The Committee enjoys the support of most of the local congregations, who either send a group to participate in the actual campaign or announce the events in their services and encourage their members to participate. The Committee has discovered the increased effectiveness of teams

consisting of multi-national and multi-ethnic members as opposed to only Israelis. Among those participating are Israelis, Arab Christians, Russian- and Ethiopian-speaking immigrants, and gentile believers.

Apart from the activities of the National Evangelism Committee, some congregations also engage in regular outreach in their own area, using both music and drama to communicate their message. A coffeehouse ministry has opened up in order to provide a place where people are invited to come and continue a conversation begun on the street.

All these activities testify to the fact that the messianic movement is much more open and up-front in reaching out with the gospel to the surrounding society today than it was in the 1970s and early 1980s. This does not mean, of course, that resistance and opposition towards the gospel and the activities of the messianic movement have become a thing of the past. Anyone with access to the orthodox Israeli press can confirm that the anti-missionary organizations have not ceased combating the evangelistic efforts of the messianic community. Although the Evangelism Committee has not been discouraged by this opposition, it has been influenced by the anti-missionary activities in the way it operates and functions.

According to the response yielded by the survey, the success of the outreach campaigns should not be evaluated in the number of new believers. Few congregations gave this as a reason for why new people had joined their fellowship, and even when they did the number was low. The results need to be measured in another way. In some cases, the first interest in the gospel was made through a tract or a conversation on the street. The interest created here enabled the person to accept a friend's invitation to come to the fellowship, so that the actual work which led to faith happened through friendship-evangelism.

The main result of the campaigns, however, has been their part in the rise of public awareness of the messianic movement. This is reflected in increased media exposure on television and radio, as well as in articles in newspaper and magazines. Although the exposure has not always been positive or objective, it has had tangible ripple effects. One of these is the defence of messianic Jews by groups allying themselves against other segments of society. This phenomenon can be seen, for example, when secular Jews espouse the claims of the messianic community in the face of Orthodox pressure — on issues such as the right to immigrate or other aspects of the “who is a Jew?” debate; or Reform and Conservative Rabbis look for support for legal-religious recognition of non-orthodox forms of Judaism.

Challenges Facing the Messianic Body in Israel

For purposes of this article, congregational leaders were asked to identify what issues they considered to be of major importance for their own congregation and for the movement as a whole, both in the present and in the near future. In the following we shall take a closer look at some of the areas mentioned.

(a) The next generation

The increase of young congregational members facing most groups brings an increased need for Sabbath school programs, teachers, material, and special youth programs. Most congregations have special sessions for children during their Sabbath meetings, and those who have a good

children's program are finding that this is one of the reasons why new members choose to make the particular congregation their home. Children's education thus seems to be as important for many members as the congregation's theological or doctrinal perspective. Here, a great need exists for relevant teaching material in Hebrew, together with committed and equipped teachers. Most congregations do not feel that they are meeting this challenge in the way they would like. Instead, they are dealing with the issue ad hoc. The result is that some families are discouraged from participating regularly.

For several years, weekends and retreats for the youth have been arranged nationally on a regular basis. These activities have played a very important role in keeping the next generation within the body. The initiative and teaching have largely been provided by a single organization which has enjoyed the support and participation of a larger group of congregations. As much as this work is appreciated it is also recognized that more cooperation could be achieved in this area.

Another area of concern is the fact that a number of young believers have become weekend- and conference-believers. Although they are active in the special youth events, they rarely participate in the Sabbath worship of the congregation. This situation is clearly undesirable, and presents a major challenge for the local congregations. The question of how to keep the next generation is crucial, and goes hand in hand with the need for training older youth to take up leadership positions. This takes us to another area of concern.

(b) Committed believers and leadership responsibilities

Several leaders expressed the urgent need for more members to adopt leadership roles in different areas of the congregational life. It has been encouraging to see that many congregations offer a variety of activities throughout the week. This situation is even more promising in light of the fact that most congregations are served by people engaged in secular professions. Seldom do congregations have more than one full-time worker, and it is not uncommon for them to have none at all; very few congregations can afford to pay their pastor a salary.

Given the difficulty of finding committed and capable co-workers, many congregational leaders themselves do not take the time and effort needed to raise up new leaders. More of those asked admitted that even when stressed for time and patience they still did the job themselves rather than letting others work alongside with them. Many leaders find it difficult to invest time and energy in training up new leaders. Little opportunity is thereby given for the younger generation to gather experience and to learn from their own mistakes while still under pastoral authority. This raises the question of whether such leadership-style hinders the maturation of potential leadership material. It certainly leaves more of the responsibility with just a few leaders.

(c) Identity and indigenization

The issue of identity is clearly one of the most central aspects of messianic Judaism. Given the movement's stated conviction that the early church was Jewish and that believing in Yeshua in the Messiah does not turn one into a "ex-Jew", the community puts identity and integration into mainstream Jewish and Israeli life at the top of its agenda. Nevertheless, there remains room for heated disagreement about the extent, form, and style of identification and integration. Although congregations have often been classified according to confessional links or charismatic/non-

charismatic groups, another possible way to group them is by looking at the emphasis laid on the mid-week meeting, if a congregation assembles then. This meeting may be devoted to Bible teaching, to fellowship, or to prayer and worship. This situation with the different choices made reflects both the theology of the congregations and the congregation's actual needs.

Looking at the style, place, and time of congregational worship can be a further indication of identity. A growing awareness exists among veteran believers in the Land that it is not enough to be just another evangelical congregation which speaks Hebrew in order for the messianic movement to be perceived as an authentic part of Jewish and Israeli religious and cultural life. People are continuing to ask what identification with the continued role of the Jewish people means for the messianic movement, not only with regard to choice of worship-style but also concerning the individual believer's choice of life-style. Celebrating the biblical Jewish holidays is the first obvious way of identifying which plays a major role in the life of the congregations. In addition, however, many of these groups maintain, integration into present religious Jewish tradition is also a vital part of identifying with the Jewish people and their continued role in God's election.

In reaction to this tendency, others emphasize that being messianic and Jewish is an inward rather than an outward issue. What matters is a relationship to the God of Israel and a desire to be part of His future plan for His people. Although those who stress the importance of continued identification with Jewish tradition would mostly agree with this view, disagreement arises when the different segments endeavor to define what God's future plan for His people is and what the expression "prophetic role" means.

The messianic movement in Israel is still far from presenting a unified expression of its identity and role internally and towards general Israeli society. In assuming that integration into Jewish life and tradition automatically means to adopt a synagogue service for worship and a "religious" life-style, the messianic community may be guilty of perpetrating the prevalent myth that if one is not orthodox one is not religious at all. Room also exists for reaching the "non-religious" where they stand. The reasons for the wide diversity in style of worship and the rationales given for which style is chosen are therefore complex.

(d) Unity and/or lack of unity

When asked about the challenge facing the messianic movement today, many congregational leaders mentioned the lack of unity in the body and the relative isolation of the individual congregations from one another. Other leaders identified the main challenge as doctrinal, including the charismatic/non-charismatic issue. Still others suggested that a strong personality-oriented mentality hinders an expression of unity. This latter issue perhaps represents another aspect of the problem of certain leadership-styles mentioned earlier.

When the National Conference of Congregational Leadership re-evaluated its purpose and contribution in 1994, no changes were made in the authority placed in its hands. It remains a loosely-structured forum for fellowship only. Some, especially among the younger, leaders, feel that this authority is inadequate for giving direction to the whole body country-wide. It fragments the potential strength of the movement, which would otherwise be able to grow and mature more quickly. However, those who are dissatisfied with the present structure also acknowledge that it

would be premature at this point to press for the creation of another organization, recognizing that it would break the loosely- structured fellowship that does exist. Nevertheless, one of the discussion topics of the National Conference of Congregational Leadership's meetings in the fall of '95 was cooperation between the individual congregations, indicating a discontent with the present situation and a wish for more commitment to unity within the body.

The desire for unity does find ways to express itself. Two of the obvious areas are the work of the National Evangelistic Committee and the common musical tradition. Many of the Hebrew worship songs and the music composed for them over the last 10-15 years by messianic believers and others from within the movement, serve as one unifying element. A further vehicle for building unity is the National Conference of Congregational Leadership, with all its strengths and weaknesses. The Committee, established 14 years ago, is presently being run by a group of four representing different congregations/groups in the country. A majority of the congregational leaders from the Hebrew-speaking congregations regularly attend the meetings, at which the issues discussed focus on inter-congregational concerns, whether they be practical or theological. A considerable segment of the body has no real connection with this fellowship at all, however.

Some congregational leaders meet regularly on a regional level, most frequently for prayer, but also to discuss common concerns. These include leaders from some of the Arab-speaking congregations in the region. Another encouraging development is the regular meetings of Hebrew- and Arab-speaking women in the North.

Over the last two or three years messianic believers serving in the army have begun to gather for prayer and fellowship. Starting out as a small very informal group, over the last years these meetings have become a regular activity amongst the young generation. Now people who have finished their army service also participate. The weekend meetings are organized by the participants themselves rather than by any one particular congregation. The group meets in different parts of the country, with an average attendance of 30-40 people.

(e) The different views of the political scene and God's plan for Israel

One of the challenges identified by congregational leaders directly relates to the political arena. Not surprisingly, believers in Israeli congregations are divided along parallel political lines to those of the wider public. Some strongly feel that the peace process is leading the nation along a dangerous path contrary to God's stated program for the Land and people. Others no less fervently support the government's attempt to settle decades of enmity with the country's Arab neighbors. A third group, perhaps smaller than the other two, asserts that the gospel is not political. This group is convinced that members of the body of the Messiah should not take any public political stand.

To our knowledge, no congregation has yet split over the issue of the peace process. However, pastors are finding it increasingly difficult to keep political opinions out of their meetings. As the rapid developments are constantly conveyed through the media, it is hardly surprising that congregants' thoughts are preoccupied with land being returned, increased terrorism by Islamic opponents to the process, and loud demonstrations by settlers whose homes are threatened. The political situation affects the way congregational members request prayer and how they pray. It affects the way they read their Bibles and how they relate to one another in

fellowship. And, of course, it affects the way the pastors themselves prepare and present their messages. This problem is not unique to Israel, nor is it new, but it does seem to be more intense than in past years.

How to Find a Home

In his report to the international LCJE conference in June '95, Garry Denlinger mentioned the problem of finding a suitable place to meet as a challenge shared by more and more congregations in the country. Few congregations meet in their own premises, not having the means to buy and maintain their own property, nor even to pay a salary to their pastor. For some groups, this means having to move more often than is healthy for the life of the congregations. For others, it means setting up the meeting-room each time and not being able to conduct all their activities in the same place. This has a directly adverse affect on children's programs, since it is difficult to give special attention to the younger members without adequate space. Some congregations are also facing a more positive aspect of this problem: They have outgrown their meeting place. Consequently, one congregation has begun having two services on the same day in order to make room for all. In other cases, the lack of space has led to the establishment of a sister congregation. On the more negative side, some members feel put off from attending the meetings because they won't find a place to sit.

The issue of finding a meeting place and having access to facilities raises the question of the relationship between the indigenous congregations and mission organizations. Several congregations meet in places that are owned and cared for by mission organizations. In most cases, the only connection between the mission and the local congregation is that the property belongs to the mission. The mission board has had little or no responsibility in the formation of the congregation and has no say in its running other than possessing the key and thus the power to decide when the door should be locked. Although most mission organizations bought and developed their present property with the aim of establishing local, independent congregations most of them also admit that the situation on the ground at present differs from what the original planning.

If tension between the two bodies does not in fact run high at present, the issue of independence still lies high on the agenda of the messianic community for several reasons. Any visible sign of association with Christian denominations and organizations immediately detracts from the movement's aim to demonstrate that one can be Jewish and believe in Yeshua. Meeting in church-owned property is easily perceived by the general public — and not just in orthodox circles — as tantamount to being part of the Church, with all its history of anti-semitism and anti-Judaism. Moreover, the messianic movement rightly considers financial and material independence as a sign of healthy maturity within the body. The messianic community is still struggling to create and maintain a right relationship with the mission organizations, an aspiration which it will most likely be striving to fulfil for some years ahead. The same might be said of the missionary organizations as well, of course.

Theological Training and Education

In his report, Garry Denlinger mentioned three local institutions involved in theological education: the Caspari Center, the King of Kings College and the messianic Midrasha. The number of student participating in courses arranged by the Caspari Center in the fall semester of '95 is between 20-30. The number of full- and part-time student at the King of Kings College in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv combined is between 80-90 for the same period. The number of student involved in messianic Midrasha program is approximately 10.

These three institutions interact both cooperatively and competitively. The messianic community is still small to carry three academic institutions. This makes mutual competition, which in itself can be a very healthy factor in promoting high standards, a delicate issue. Each institution must ask itself how important maintaining its distinctive identity is in light of the limited market; how far can it compromise without losing its own profile, or how can it maintain its distinctiveness while at the same time justify its existence? The goal of all the teaching institutions is to equip the local body in the various areas of ministry and help it to utilize its own resources.

In his assessment, Denlinger suggests that more efforts need to be invested in exploring how the three institutions can effectively integrate and coordinate in order to better serve the body. Although a degree of cooperation already exists between the institutions, the question of whether this will be further developed to include the designing, organizing, and administering of courses will only be determined in time. It is certainly true that closer cooperation between the institutions would maximize the gifts within the messianic Jewish community and advance the desire for greater unity.

Visibility in Israeli Society

During a recent outreach campaign in the North, people on the street were asked if they were acquainted with the term "Yehudim Meshichim". Perhaps surprisingly, most people answered yes. Although this may reveal very little about their own attitude or even correct understanding of the movement, it does indicate that messianic believers are becoming increasingly recognized as part of Israeli society today. This visibility on the social map is the result of a very encouraging development over the last ten years or so. However, the movement cannot yet claim to have moved beyond the fringes of mainstream society. The local congregations and the movement as a whole still do not interface with the community to the degree which many would like. Many hope to see the believers and the congregational fellowship develop a more outward vision. Several of the obstacles which hinder this trend, have already been mentioned, e.g., the fact that many congregations only have access to their meeting place for a couple of hours during the week, which conveys an image whether they like it or not. The main obstacle, however, is still in the way the messianic movement perceive itself and its attitude to society.

The lack of unity is a further impediment. Without an inner unity which reflects a clear identity and image, it is difficult for the messianic movement to take a public stand on issues which have an impact on the general society in which they live. Frequently the so-called prophetic calling does not seem to demand any involvement in social and ethical issues related to

the society at large. The movement thus faces the dual challenge both of being a witness to the Messiah and of contributing in social and ethical areas, thus taking responsibility as part of the mainstream Israeli community. A stronger expression of unity would enhance both.

Conclusion

This survey highlights how the issue of identity — who is a Jewish believer — is central to the messianic community in ways closely resembling the mainstream debate over who is a Jew in the Israeli public arena. Defining messianic Judaism involves both identifying with the Jewish people and differentiating, in some form and degree, from Jewish tradition. It also calls for a broader definition which includes non-Jewish believers, specifically Arab Christians and gentiles. Consequently, it tends to come into conflict with the desire for unity both within the movement and in its relationship to the wider Christian tradition. This unity also brings with it friction in the relationship between the local indigenous congregations and the missionary organizations active in the Land. The need to integrate the demands for unity and indigenization thus appears likely to lie high on the agenda of future generations. It also seems evident that the movement has sufficiently established an identity for itself according to which these future generations will be expected to mold themselves. No doubt changes will occur in the process of development, but the lines already set out seem firm enough to support internal adjustments rather than a breaking of the mold itself. It is in this context that present leaders are considering how to train up new candidates, create solid educational youth programs, and integrate new immigrants. This is a positive sign, so that the challenges facing the movement can be considered opportunities towards growth and maturation.

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Jewish and Palestinian Believers in the Land of Israel/Palestine

Lisa Loden¹⁹

Israel/Palestine is a land of contrasts and contradictions. It is the old new land and is host to a multitude of conflicts and joys. The body of believers in Jesus reflects the complex nature of the country, both in the way it functions and in the way it understands itself. This article will examine the composition of that body in Israel/Palestine and the nature and extent of their relationships.

Terminology is a topic of much discussion and dispute among both Arab and Jewish believers in Jesus. Concerning Jews who believe in Jesus, the issue of terminology has been treated in a wide variety of both messianic and Christian sources. Terminology regarding Arab believers has also been a matter of consideration, especially as political realities have impacted the interface between the national and spiritual identity of those Arab Christians living in Israel/Palestine.²⁰

From the time of the promise to Abraham, a Jewish presence has always been a part of the demographic landscape of Israel/Palestine. Up to the fourth century CE there was, living in Israel/Palestine, a body of Jews who believed in the Messiah Jesus and who retained their ethno-religious identity as Jews. From then until the middle of the nineteenth century,²¹ one would have been hard pressed to find that group represented among the multitudes of peoples who migrated through, conquered and inhabited the land. The reasons for this are beyond the scope of this article, but it should be said that the appellation of messianic Jews, referring to Jews who believe in Jesus and continue to identify themselves as a part of the Jewish people is, historically speaking, a relatively new phenomenon dating from the early part of this century.

When one speaks of Palestinian Christians living in Israel/Palestine the situation is markedly different than that of the messianic Jewish believers. Palestinian Christians consider their presence in the land of Israel/Palestine to be in a direct, continuous line from the times of the apostles till the present day.²² Some commentators however would prefer to date the presence of Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land from after the Crusades. There are those who maintain that the Samaritan woman at the well was one of the ancestors of the Palestinian Christians. The understanding is that she was part of an indigenous people of the land who were not Jews but came to faith in God's Messiah. The historical facts concerning the identity of the Palestinian

¹⁹ Lisa Loden has lived in Israel since 1974 and has been involved in work among Messianic believers for the whole time. She has previously written for MISHKAN and is a member of the Caspari Center Local Board.

²⁰ See Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989), pp. 4-5 for a discussion of the subject.

²¹ Gershon Nerel, "Messianic Jews and the Modern Zionist Movement" in Torleif Elgvin (ed.), *Israel and Yeshua*, (Jerusalem: Caspari Center, 1993), p. 77.

²² Elias Chacour, *Blood Brothers* (Eastbourne, U.K.: Kingsway Publications Ltd., 1984) pp. 31-33; Gary M. Burge, *Who Are God's People in the Middle East?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan 1993), p. 149.

people remain a matter of much debate.²³

Today in Israel/Palestine there are approximately 3-4,000 persons who are either long term residents or citizens of Israel and would identify themselves as messianic Jews. This group includes those born in Israel and immigrants from around the world. Living side by side in Israel/Palestine are some 150,000 persons who identify themselves as Palestinian Christians.²⁴ These Christians live within the borders of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. The vast majority of that number belong to the historic Orthodox and Catholic churches,²⁵ while approximately 10,000 are Protestants, both Evangelical and otherwise.²⁶

Historical Overview of Relationships

Information regarding this aspect of the subject has been difficult to obtain due to the paucity of written materials. Individuals from both the messianic Jewish and the Palestinian Christian sectors have been interviewed with an aim to examining the history and parameters of relationships between the two groups.²⁷ The overwhelming majority of literature that deals in any way with either messianic Jews or Palestinian Christians is noticeably silent concerning matters as basic as the existence of the other group within the land of Israel/Palestine. This is true whether the material is written by those within the two communities or by interested parties from the outside.

This is a time in history when in spite of rampant nationalism and ethnic conflict, bridges of reconciliation and peace are being built between peoples. Materials written from within the community of faith in Messiah should recognize the existence, concerns and struggles of their spiritual brethren in the same geographical location. Unfortunately this is not the case in Israel/Palestine. The fact that the two groups have for so long perceived each other as enemies on the political level has infected the mentality of both groups to the extent that it is often difficult for each to recognize the other's viability.

Although the term Palestinian Christian includes those Christian Arabs living within the borders of Israel as well as in the West Bank and Gaza, there are deep differences between the

²³ See Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict over Palestine* (Chicago: JKAP Publications, 1984) for a fascinating, in depth study of the subject. See also Daphne Tsimhoni, *Christian Communities and the West Bank since 1948* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995).

²⁴ Maroun Laham, "The Spiritual Meaning and Experience of the Roman Catholic Church in Jerusalem" in Michael Prior and William Taylor (eds.), *Christians in the Holy Land*, (London: The World of Islam Festival Trust, 1994), p. 110. The matter of statistics in the regards to the Palestinian peoples is not straightforward. There is very little agreement among the various sources regarding numbers. I have chosen to use what appeared to be a high average of the numbers I found in various sources. The Statistical Abstract of Israel 1994 gives slightly higher numbers of Palestinian Christians living in Israel.

²⁵ Ateek, p. 54.

²⁶ William Janzen, "Churches in the Holy Land", 30 November 1994, unpublished paper.

²⁷ Personal interviews: Fida Ramadan (wife of Palestinian Christian Baptist Pastor), Turan, Galilee, 20 Sept. 1995; Salim Munayer (Dean of Bethlehem Bible College and Director of Musalaha), Jerusalem, 2 Oct. 1995; Bishara Awad (President of Bethlehem Bible College), Bethlehem, 2 Oct. 1995; Joseph Shulam (Director of Netivya Center for Biblical Research), Jerusalem, 10 Oct. 1995; Evan Thomas (Elder in Beit Asaph Messianic Congregation), Netanya, 10 Oct. 1995.

two groups. This fact affects the relationships that exist between messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians. The parameters of relationship that exist between messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians living in Israel are quite different and considerably better developed than the relationships between messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians living in the West Bank and Gaza.

Relationships between Palestinian Christians Living in Israel and Messianic Jews

The history of relationship between Palestinian evangelical Christians of Israel and Messianic Jews/Hebrew Christians predates the foundation of the modern state of Israel.²⁸ Since the body of messianic believers changed radically during the war of 1948, real possibility for relationship was not an option until the early '60s when the messianic body of Jews believing in Jesus was again functional. Joseph Shulam relates that in the early 1960s he frequently traveled and taught in Arab congregations in the Galilee. This relationship continued in various forms until the beginning of the Intifada (1987) when, due to political reasons, it was terminated.²⁹

In the mid 1970s, a small group of Palestinian Christian and messianic Jewish women began to gather together monthly to meet for prayer. This started with a messianic Jewish woman who was attending an Arab Baptist church in Nazareth. That initiative has continued to the present. Today the meetings average 40 women and often include as many as 60 with a few more Arab than Jewish women attending. The area involved stretches from Haifa, north to Naharyia, across to Nazareth, Tiberias and Afula, and includes a number of small Arab villages which have evangelical churches. There is always a special speaker with a biblical focus and time set aside for prayer and sharing. These meetings move monthly and occur in both Arab and Jewish venues according to the invitation given at the close of each meeting.³⁰

One result of the women's meetings was that their husbands were encouraged to do the same. The men took up the challenge and began to gather monthly for prayer and fellowship in mixed Jewish and Arab meetings. After several years of meeting in this way, the families of those involved began to get together for an annual picnic. These contacts have led to pulpit exchanges, joint attendance at conferences both in Israel and abroad, cooperation in evangelism, shared ministry tours of leaders,³¹ and growing development of personal relationships and trust between the Jewish and Palestinian Evangelical Christians in the north of Israel.

From the mid '70s, the United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI, established 1958) held conferences in Israel at which both Palestinian Christians and messianic Jews participated. In 1981 they published a book entitled *Let Jews and Arabs Hear His Voice* which was a compilation of ten papers presented at UCCI conferences during the years 1976–79.

²⁸ Kevin Crombie, "A Real Son of Zion: Ben Zion and the Jewish Mission at Safed" in MISHKAN no. 15, 2/1991, p. 27; Gershon Nerel, "Messianic Jews and the Modern Zionist Movement" in Torleif Elgvin (ed.), *Israel and Yeshua* (Jerusalem: Caspari Center, 1993).

²⁹ Shulam.

³⁰ Fida Ramadan.

³¹ Yusif Odeh (Pastor of Kfar Yasif Local Church), David Loden, (Elder of Beit Asaph Messianic Congregation, Netanya) and Lisa Loden traveled together in a joint speaking tour in churches in major German cities in 1984.

Through this book the UCCI wants to share with a wider circle of readers papers that reflect the ongoing search within the Council for a genuine Christian life and ministry in today's Israel in the encounter with Jews and Arabs of this land.³²

The papers were presented by Palestinian Christians, messianic Jews and expatriate missionaries.

Contacts between the Palestinian Evangelical Christians of Israel and messianic Jews have taken place in a variety of frameworks over the past twenty years. Some of these include the work of the Student Movement (IVF) in Israeli universities, evangelism campaigns sponsored by the National Evangelism Committee,³³ House of Victory drug rehabilitation center in Haifa,³⁴ and numerous personal contacts between members of various local congregations, both Jewish and Arab. For the past three years the King's Kids ministry arm of Youth with a Mission (YWAM) has sponsored joint summer camp/outreaches that have involved both messianic Jewish and Palestinian Christian youth in programs of music and dance. These teams of young people traveled to various congregations and churches in Israel/Palestine. On a number of occasions Arab Christian churches in the Galilee have hosted Jewish congregations from as far away as Beersheva and Rehovot.

The character of the contacts between messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians living within Israel is that of fellowship between believers and cooperation in ministry and is based in the commonality of their faith in Jesus. Divisive issues are generally avoided. When, as in the case of Joseph Shulam, politicization did occur,³⁵ the result was to cut off the relationships and not to deal with the issues.

For some time a gradual process of Palestinianization has been occurring within the Arab community of Israel/Palestine.

The fact is that since 1976 there has been an awakened consciousness among the Arabs in Israel. This can be called their 'Palestinianization.' They have rediscovered and revived their root. This new conscientization of the Israeli Arabs steadily increased in the 1980s.³⁶

The Intifada intensified this process and contributed to a conflict with and reversal of the previous Israelization³⁷ of the Arabs living in Israel. The Intifada strained the tenuous fabric of the relationship between Palestinian Christians and messianic Jews. Often the fabric was not

³² Ole Chr. M. Kvarme (ed.), introduction to *Let Jews and Arabs Hear His Voice* (Jerusalem: UCCI, 1981), p. 9.

³³ It is significant to note that in the evangelism campaigns of the past ten years Jews and Arabs have taken part together and have frequently had the joy of leading members of each others communities to faith in Jesus.

³⁴ According to David Davis (Director of House of Victory), drugs do not make a distinction between peoples and are a great leveler for Jews and Arabs to together find their commonality in a need of a savior (private conversation).

³⁵ The politicization occurred in both communities with many Palestinians being drawn to the communist party in the Galilee and the Jewish believers being drawn to the right wing parties within Israel.

³⁶ Ateek, p. 43.

³⁷ The Arabs living in Israel spoke Hebrew (as well as Arabic), were influenced by the secular society of Israel with its emphasis on modernization, and wanted to be a part of the democratic society. This in effect caused personal identity conflicts as well as conflicts within their more traditional societal patterns.

strong enough and simply tore apart. Accusations began from both sides; Arabs don't read the Bible, Jews don't have enough love. Suddenly there was an atmosphere of conflict and violence that required a response. Should Jewish believers serve in the military in the West Bank and Gaza? How does the Palestinian Christian relate to an occupying presence? These and other related questions had to be faced. In the main these questions were not answered in the context of true spiritual brotherhood that exists between those who embrace the same saving faith in Jesus. The relationships were not well enough developed to support such discussions. Both sides experienced rejection and were wounded by the severed relationships. This led to a legacy of hurt that is only now beginning to be healed.

At the same time as Israeli Arabs (including the Christians) began feeling solidarity with their Arab brothers in the West Bank, messianic Jews were being drawn to the political right. The dominant understanding of messianic Jews in regards to eschatology and the divine promise of Israel's place in the land of Israel had encouraged them to embrace the territorial claims of the right. It is an unfortunate fact that nationalistic aspirations of both parties in the Arab Israeli conflict have been allowed to sabotage God's grand design of a reconciled community of believers living in harmonious relationship.

Those Jewish and Palestinian believers who did remain involved with each other unanimously testify to the mutual benefit that their contacts have brought, both to them personally and to the relationships between the two communities. A telling comment made by a Jewish believer after one of the women's meetings in the North was, "You made me love Arabs."³⁸ On the other side, many Arab Christian women had been unaware of the existence of Jewish believers in Jesus who sometimes lived only a few kilometers away. Desire has been expressed by members of both communities for a continuation and expansion of the relationships.

Relationships between Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and Gaza and Messianic Jews

As has been previously noted, relationships between messianic Jews and Arab believers from the West Bank are very unlike the relationships that exist between the communities of believers who live within Israel. The openness and freedom of contact and fellowship enjoyed by the believers in Israel are not the experience of those Palestinian Christians who live in the West Bank and Gaza.

Bishara Awad of the Bethlehem Bible College recalls that for years there were contacts between Palestinian Christians from Jerusalem and the West Bank that took place on a more intimate level, with visits in one another's homes and an occasional joint meeting. The outbreak of the Intifada in December 1987 changed the situation dramatically. Joint meetings were no longer possible as people polarized into their respective ethnic communities and it became increasingly difficult for Palestinian Christians who were frequently under curfew to come out to meetings.³⁹ For a time contacts continued on the leadership level, but these too stopped as the

³⁸ Related by Fida Ramadan.

³⁹ Palestinians living in the West Bank are not free to travel if they are under curfew and they are barred from spending the night outside of the West Bank without obtaining special permits. These permits are often very difficult to acquire.

Intifada gained momentum. A further polarization occurred and questions of security occupied the concerns of both parties.

What had been possible in times of peace became impossible under the stress of the Intifada uprising. Long-undealt-with issues surfaced between Jewish and Palestinian believers. As the Intifada enhanced the national identity of the Palestinian Christian, it had the tendency to call into question the identity of the messianic Jew who often saw himself in terms of his place in the land. Salim Munayer, founder of Musalaha ministries for reconciliation, feels that the messianic Jew's identity is challenged by the existence of Palestinian Christians. It is his observation that very often for the messianic Jew, the land, Messiah and prophecy function as a kind of trinity in his thinking and sense of self.⁴⁰

Musalaha (Arabic for reconciliation) was founded in 1990 as a vehicle to bring about reconciliation between Arabs and Jews. One of Musalaha's objectives is to provide a non-threatening atmosphere in which the issues that divide can be talked about and relationships of trust can begin to form. Since its inception, Musalaha has focused on bringing together mixed groups of messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, with an emphasis on the inclusion of West Bank Palestinian Christians. These groups are taken out of their normal environments for desert trips lasting a number of days. Musalaha also sponsors teaching seminars on subjects such as peace, conflict resolution and aspects of Palestinian and Jewish culture and mentality. A women's conference will be held in December 1995 and youth conferences are in the planning stage.⁴¹

While Musalaha is the most active agent in the arena of reconciliation between messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, there are efforts being made by other groups and individuals to bridge the gaps that so easily separate and divide the believers from within these two communities. The House of Prayer, located on the Mount of Olives, focuses on intercession and brings Arab and Jewish leaders together in a framework devoted to the sharing of prayer information and intercession. Most of the work of the House of Prayer has been in a broader framework which includes Arab Christians from throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Palestinian Christians and messianic Jews are included as participants in these larger frameworks for reconciliation between Jews and Arabs.

The Bethlehem Bible College has had a messianic Jewish believer on the teaching staff for four years. David Loden travels weekly from Netanya in the center of Israel to Bethlehem to teach music. He was originally employed to resurrect the Bethlehem Bible College Choir which had languished during the hottest days of the Intifada, but he has since trained a local Palestinian believer to conduct the choir. This contact between the Bible College and Loden has led to opportunities for the Bible College Choir to sing in the Jewish sector both within the messianic community and in the Israeli secular community. Music is a wonderful bridge builder.

In July of this year, 1995, the Arab Evangelical Alliance sponsored a conference that drew together Arab pastors and leaders from Israel, Jordan, Egypt and the West Bank. Two families of messianic Jews who have connections with the West Bank Palestinian Christian community were invited and attended the conference. A messianic Jew was a speaker at one of the meetings and a

⁴⁰ Munayer, interview.

⁴¹ Jeanne Kimmel, "Musalaha, A Family Reunion" in Salim J. Munayer (ed.), *In the Footsteps of our Father Abraham*, (Jerusalem: Musalaha, 1993), p. 9-11; Munayer.

messianic Jew together with Arab Christians served communion to the conference guests. Although the numbers involved were not large, it was a significant, if not historic event.

Some of the things which have been achieved by the contacts between the two communities are: an accelerated willingness to build relationships; a growing acceptance of differences and the tension that is involved; a commitment to mutual pain bearing; knowledge of one another's concerns which is translated into prayer; a recognition of the spiritual viability of the other's community; and the possibility of impacting the secular community with a demonstration of the real peace that is possible in the Messiah.

Still lacking in the relationships between messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians is the ability to discuss difficult issues and to be freely challenged in their respective theological positions.⁴² Questions of eschatology, land and promise, justice and peace need to be addressed in a non-threatening atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. Bishara Awad longs for the time when messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians can not only have fellowship and discuss differences but can worship together.

Much remains to be done in the realm of relationship and reconciliation between messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, particularly between Jews and Palestinians from the West Bank. The overtures are still in the beginning stages and the difficulties are many. There are issues that have the potential to perpetuate the long divide between the two peoples, but the steps that are being taken are encouraging. Areas of cultural, theological, and political differences stand as obstacles to real relationship. Commonalities between the two groups are also sources of problem and pain. These can be briefly identified as their shared minority role identification, the results of war and survivor mentality, marginalization from their respective societies on account of their faith, and the common tendency to dehumanize and demonize the other side.⁴³

Conclusion

messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians living in Israel/Palestine need each other. They are blood brothers in a double sense, having come from the loins of Abraham and having been bought by the blood of the Messiah. There is a need to recognize that the Messiah has only one body and that messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians are equal and integral parts of that body. Salim Munayer phrased it in this way, "We need each other to be like a mirror to tell us where we are going and sometimes it's painful."⁴⁴

Oslo Two has seen those who were at enmity begin to reach out for rapprochement. There is now a fragile opportunity for peace in the region. In this context, the question remains as to whether the messianic Jews and the Palestinian Christians will rise to the spiritual challenge of right relationship and begin to live out the reality of the reconciliation for which our Lord gave His life.

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⁴² Personal interview: Evan Thomas, 10 October 1995.

⁴³ Lisa Loden, "When Jewish and Palestinian Believers Don't Agree: The Problems and the Pain" in Kai Kjir-Hansen (ed.), *LCJE Jerusalem 95* (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 167-168.

⁴⁴ Munayer, interview.

An Update on Israeli Russian Ministry

Raymond Gannon⁴⁵

The relatively sudden appearance of 650,000 Russian-speaking immigrants to Israel over the past six years compelled the messianic Jewish community of Israel to serious action as early as late 1989. The history of the outreach efforts has included both victories and disappointments. At the end of 1995 some of the confusing issues in Russian ministry in Israel were at least becoming easier to understand as the waves of immigrants have successfully settled and the believers assumed their place in the Body of Messiah.

In the Beginning

Expectations were running high in December 1989 when about 50 ministry leaders gathered in Jerusalem to discuss the entire question of the massive immigration of Russian-speaking Jews into Israel. Projections were that half a million would arrive over the next five years. What were we to do as the Body of Messiah in response to this new wave of immigrants?

Discussions centered around Russian Bible Distribution, obtaining sources of Russian evangelistic materials, connecting with the believers among the immigrants to facilitate assimilation into the Israeli believing community, etc.

From the outset it was clear that the major Christian humanitarian organizations would be helpful in responding to the material needs of immigrants. Pastors and Elders of Hebrew-speaking congregations expressed both their determination to incorporate newly arrived believers immediately into their own Hebrew-speaking congregations and their strongly held nationalistic conviction that the Russian language not be used as a means of immigrants' perpetuating a separate culturally Russian world in the Land.

The humanitarians, the nationalists, and all others present recognized three important features:

1. There would be hundreds of believers among the teeming multitudes ready to ascend to Israel;
2. All the immigrants would have phenomenal needs both material and spiritual;
3. The new wave in the 1990s offered the messianic Jewish community unprecedented opportunities for involvement in the expansion of the Kingdom of God in Israel.

Responding to “Felt Needs”

The major Christian humanitarian organizations operating in Israel were eager to cooperate with the Israeli believing community in providing clothing, food, heaters, some minimal furniture, etc.

⁴⁵Dr. Raymond Gannon (M.A., M.Div., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary; Th. M., Princeton Theological Seminary; Ph.D., California Graduate School of Theology) is a member of the Faculty of King of Kings College in Yafo, Israel.

These organizations, however, made very clear their stipulations that absolutely no Gospel literature was to accompany their humanitarian aid and that no help was to be offered in conjunction with evangelism. Even aid provided to immigrant Jewish believers was to be kept quiet lest the Israeli government legally (or illegally) sanction these Christian humanitarian organizations for assisting messianic Jews.

A second area of “felt need” would be a spiritual one for the immigrant believers and unbelievers alike. All the immigrants would take approximately two years to finally “make their peace with Israel.” These two years of psychological and cultural adjustment to the new world of Israel they had entered would be the very time answers to the real questions of life would be sought. More than at any other time in their lives these people in cultural transition would be responsive to God’s revelation of the Truth. It would be imperative for us to give them God’s Word before they would comfortably snuggle into the idolatrous comforts of materialism and come to prefer the security of the “status quo” to the dangers of Truth.

Attempts at Communicating the Good News

Sources for Russian Bibles, Gospel portions, and evangelistic literature were petitioned to provide the Israeli believers quality materials for massive distribution. Soon containers arrived full of Russian Bibles, New Testaments, harmonized Gospels, booklets, videos, correspondence courses, etc.

Distribution on the major walk-fares led to numerous contacts with new Jewish believers among the Russian immigrants and the new fellowships they were already establishing among themselves throughout the country. Initially the Russian-speaking immigrants were fearful to openly express their faith commitment due to the potential loss of immigrant subsidies, public schooling for their children, prevention of job opportunity or even the threat of expulsion. Reports were circulating that such official but illegal activities had already been occurring to immigrant believers. No foreign governments would protest such treatment of legally received immigrants. The United Nations expressed Israel’s international legal obligations to all immigrants of any stripe but could not really expect compliance. The immigrant felt their complete vulnerability and, in their fear, worshipped “underground,” an art they had perfected years before.

By means of sponsored national conferences for the Russian-speaking messianic immigrants which literally hundreds attended, Russian believers began to feel strength and security in numbers. New boldness enabled them to take the mountains of literature made available to them for national distribution within a ten day limited period. Over time these messianic Jewish Russian-speakers have become firmly entrenched in the national evangelism campaigns and actively preach throughout the nation alongside other Israeli believers.

Congregational Life

The Russian Jewish immigrants would naturally expect to gather in Russian-speaking fellowships. Such congregations had been the focus of their spiritual and social lives for many years. Moving to a harsh new world, where social reaction to their messianic faith was as unwelcomed as it had been in the Soviet Union, would only persuade the Russians believers of their need of comfort

from those who genuinely understood their plight, i.e., those who had had the same Russian immigrant experiences.

The Israeli national conviction of the overriding need of “melting” into the social milieu of Israel characterized the Israeli believers as much as most Israeli citizens. Opposition to Russian services, home groups, or anything that may support the perpetuation of Russian identity was viewed as detrimental all round. Russian was bad for the national “melting-pot” objective, bad for unity in the Body with the Israeli believers, and bad for the Russians themselves who needed to abandon their former selves in favor of the nationalistic “New Man” of Israel corporate identity. While the Russians fully understood the Israeli dictate to blend, they had had many years’ experience resisting such cultural impositions in Russia itself. Many quietly offered passive resistance and simply ignored the dogmatism of the Israeli messianic leaders. The immigrants set out to meet their own social and cultural needs as they perceived them in a myriad of ways.

At the Close of 1995

The economic crisis associated with the Russian wave of migration has relaxed. The Russians immigrants are prospering along with the balance of the nation generally. Most congregations in the Land offer Russian translation during services to accommodate the older generation of Russian immigrants or newer arrivals. Most Russians have developed a utilitarian Hebrew and have very little problem communicating with others.

Russian congregations do continue to exist in many places throughout the country. Good will and good fellowship are enjoyed between believers and leaders alike in the Russian and Hebrew-speaking congregations. Many of the Russian-speaking congregations are singing Hebrew songs in worship along with Russian songs and welcome opportunities for participation in national Hebrew-speaking events. It seems most of the Hebrew dogmatists have relaxed themselves in the knowledge it will be only a matter of time before the Russian congregations become Hebrew-speaking and filled with New Israelis, children of the immigrants.

Developing Congregational Leadership

Most of the congregational leaders and especially the younger ones had had no opportunity for theological training in the former Soviet Union. This gave rise to sometimes very bizarre teachings in Russia which followed immigrant believers to Israel. Besides having Russian immigrants enrolled in the full-time all Hebrew-speaking study programs of King of Kings College in Jaffa, the College has now opened a Russian Department for those not yet linguistically equipped to study in Hebrew. The hope is that serious students in the Russian [as well as in the new Ethiopian (Amharic)] Department, will develop to the point where they can enter the Hebrew programs and likewise receive fully accredited Bachelor degrees. The hope remains that theologically and experientially equipped pastors will be prepared to effectively disciple the still largely untouched hundreds of thousands of Russian immigrants.

Continuing Efforts

Evangelism teams north to south and east to west continue to impact thousands of new Israelis every year. Campaigns in Eilat, Arad, Tiberias, Haifa, Tel Aviv and even Jerusalem, find the Russian new Israelis working alongside Israeli believers of every stripe seeking to bring the Good News of the Kingdom of God to this spiritually impoverished and hungry generation of Israel.

The myriad of believers in Russian home groups and scattered fellowships expect to be used of God along with those in the larger Russian and Hebrew-speaking congregations to witness the full redemption of Israel in our own generation.

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For Further Reading

Rich Robinson⁴⁶

The articles in this issue answer some specific questions and provide information about current situations in Jewish evangelism. But they do not provide a comprehensive look at the background, and application of Jewish evangelism. Toward that end, the MISHKAN editors have asked me to compile a bibliography.

Listing twenty-five books important for Jewish evangelism means that many worthy books cannot be mentioned. The absence of a book from the list below does not imply a lack of value. Out of many possibilities, the following listing is one suggestion for a good core library for a missionary to the Jewish people. It includes both recent and older, classic works, arranged by category and annotated. Note that some valuable books are out of print but are still readily obtainable either through one's own Jewish mission board or through public and seminary libraries.

In the final analysis, it is important that a missionary to the Jewish people read something in each of the following categories. The specific titles may not always be as important as having a breadth of exposure in these areas.

General Books and Overviews

Jakob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: A Study in the Controversy*

Between Church and Synagogue, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979). Unfortunately out of print, this classic book by a Jewish believer deals with the history and theology of Jewish belief in Jesus, as well as a variety of issues of relevance to modern Jewish missions.

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Hebrew Christianity: Its Theology, History, and*

Philosophy (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1974). A popular presentation of the movement of Jews who have come to Jesus, discussed in the three categories noted in the title. Not about missionary work per se but about the framework that underlies missions to the Jews.

Jewish Mission History

Kai Kjør-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement: The Herzl of*

Jewish Christianity (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press Ltd.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995). This new book is not only fascinating in its detailed description of this 19th-century Eastern European movement, the story also contains lessons for today because

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many of the problems and concerns parallel today's Jewish missions movement.

Moishe Rosen and William Proctor, *Jews for Jesus* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H.

Revell, 1974). Out of print. Though purporting to tell the story of the early days of the Jews for Jesus organization, this book is at heart a story of the revival in the late '60s and '70s among Jewish young people that set the scene for much that is happening today throughout Jewish missions.

Personal Witnessing Methodology

Of the many books available on witnessing to Jews, the most helpful give insights into Jewish customs and ways of thinking along with help in opening up and continuing a conversation. Two such books are:

Moishe and Ceil Rosen, *Share the New Life With a Jew* (Chicago: Moody Press,

1976). Though out of print, it remains a well-written manual on understanding Jewish people, sensitivities, and opening a gospel conversation.

Louis Goldberg, *Our Jewish Friends* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1983).

This helpful book teaches a believer about the Jewish people as well as gives practical help in witnessing.

Pluralism

Pluralism and inclusivism are contemporary challenges to the uniqueness of the gospel message. In Jewish evangelism, pluralism takes the special form of the two-covenant theory (see next section). But the two-covenant theory is part of a broader movement that can undermine our evangelism. A number of good volumes are in print responding to these challenges from an evangelical viewpoint. Two readable and stimulating books are:

Ramesh P. Richard, *The Population of Heaven* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994).

Richard teaches at Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas.

Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

Nash is professor of philosophy at Reformed Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

Two Covenant Theory

It is indispensable for a missionary to the Jews to know not only about pluralism in general, but about the two-covenant theory in particular.

MISHKAN (no. 11, 1/1989). The entire issue deals with the two-covenant

theory and shows why it is wrong and what our response ought to be.

In a later issue of *MISHKAN* (no. 21, 2/1994) there is a single article dealing with the same issue.

Resource Listings

Here's where to go for resources beyond a basic listing of twenty-five books!

Friends of Soviet Jewry, *Third Catalogue of Literature and Resources for Russian*

Jewish Evangelism (Springfield, VA: Friends of Soviet Jewry, Inc., 1992). Unique resource catalogue for those engaged in outreach among Russian Jews wherever they are found throughout the world.

Louis Goldberg, *A Selected Bibliography on Judaism and Jewish-Christian Issues*

(Herts, England: Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism, 1986). Arranged by a wide variety of subjects, and frequently annotated with comments.

Periodicals

Books are necessary, but how to keep up with current developments?

LCJE Bulletin. This is the quarterly publication of the Lausanne Consultation on

Jewish Evangelism, which includes news, conference papers and updates from around the world. There is no other periodical devoted to the work of mission agencies to the Jewish people. All missionaries to the Jews ought to have access to this *Bulletin*.

Testimony Books

Any missionary to the Jewish people should have some knowledge of the struggles, problems, and perceptions of Jewish believers on their way to faith. Of the many testimony books available, two of the best are:

Louis Meyer, *Eminent Hebrew Christians of the Nineteenth Century: Brief*

Biographical Sketches, D.A. Rausch (ed.) (New York; Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983). This collection gives us glimpses into the spiritual lives of Jewish believers of another day and age. Because they are written in the third person, we don't hear from the people themselves and the "eminent" believer could be quite different from the average "man in the street" — but a valuable collection nonetheless. The testimonies are largely those of European Jews.

Stan Telchin, *Betrayed!* (Baker Books, 1981). A first-hand account of a

contemporary American Jewish family and their reactions, objections and struggles vis-a-vis the gospel.

The Jewishness of Jesus and the New Testament

A missionary to the Jews needs to know about the Jewishness of Jesus and about the Jewish background of the New Testament. He or she also needs to know what the Jewish community is saying about Jesus.

Donald Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus: An Analysis and Critique of*

Modern Jewish Study of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984). An important scholarly but readable book whose message is that an “astonishing” change in Jewish assessment of Jesus has taken place in the modern period, especially among liberal Jewish scholars — though it has yet to trickle down to the Jewish population in general.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Jesus Was a Jew* (Texas: Ariel Ministries, 1981). In a more popular vein, this apologetic is written by a Jewish believer for Jews.

Walter Riggans, *Jesus ben Joseph: An Introduction to Jesus the Jew* (MARC; Olive Press; Monarch Publications, 1993). Similarly, a more popular apologetic, this one written by a gentile believer.

David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Salem, NH: Ayer Company, Publishers, Inc., 1992). A series of scholarly essays by a Jewish law professor showing points of contact between the New Testament and Judaism. This book treats the New Testament as a Jewish document and is important as an example of a positive assessment of Jesus on the part of a contemporary Jewish scholar.

Counter-Missionaries and Responses

A missionary to the Jewish people needs to be aware of the counter-missionary arguments and be ready to respond (1 Peter 3:15) — not to the counter-missionaries as much as to those influenced by their arguments.

Isaac ben Troki, *Faith Strengthened* (New York: Ktav, 1970). The great-grandfather of all modern counter-missionary works. Written in the 16th century, Troki’s arguments have been repeated over and over again.

Gerald Sigal, *The Jew and the Christian Missionary: A Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity* (New York: Ktav, 1981). A modern counter-missionary work, using Troki’s arguments and adding some others.

A. Lukyn Williams, *A Manual of Christian Evidences for Jewish People* (vols. I and II) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919). Written as a point-by-point response to Troki.

At this point we would do well to ask why there are not more recent books that respond to the counter-missionary arguments.

Messianic Prophecy and the Relationship of the Old and New Testaments

A missionary to the Jewish people has no doubt received exposure to the use of messianic prophecy in his or her training. These books will enhance their knowledge in this area:

W.C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Zondervan, 1995). An instructive and readable exposition of the messianic prophecies by a leading Old Testament scholar. One of only two such books in print (to my knowledge).

David L. Cooper, 7-volume series (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, various

dates): *The God of Israel* (rev. & enlarged; 1945); *Messiah: His Nature and Person* (1933); *Messiah: His Redemptive Career* (1935); *Messiah: His First Coming Scheduled* (1939); *Messiah: His Historical Appearance* (1958); *Messiah: His Final Call to Israel* (1962); *Messiah: His Glorious Appearance Imminent* (1969). This series remains one of the most valuable series on messianic prophecy. It deals with the text of the Bible, from the original Hebrew, as well as the rabbinic sources. Since the discussion often involves the Hebrew text, it is helpful but not necessary to know Hebrew in order to make the best use of these volumes.

Rachmiel Frydland, *What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah: A Study of Genealogy*

and *Prophecy* (Cincinnati: Messianic Literature Outreach, 1993). Frydland was a Jewish believer knowledgeable in the rabbinic writings. This book comprises an unfinished manuscript edited after his death. As a result, the book has a sketchy feel, but the wealth of rabbinic material is valuable.

G.K. Beale, *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the*

Old Testament in the New (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994). For the advanced student. This is a new collection of classic scholarly essays on such subjects as Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, the nature of messianic prophecy, and biblical hermeneutics — all relevant to understanding how messianic prophecy is fulfilled.

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News From Qumran — On Scrolls and Messiahs

Torleif Elgvin⁴⁷

Many books on the Dead Sea Scrolls have been published. Too many. Some of them are not worth the paper they are printed upon, but have nevertheless given authors and publishers nice profits.

The best-seller *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* was published four years ago. According to the authors, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, a Catholic intrigue was suppressing 80% of the scrolls because publication would compromise central elements of Christian doctrine. Why bother to check the facts: only half of the original research team from the '50s were Catholics, in the '80s even Jewish scholars had joined the team (and the Catholic intrigue ...?). The team was slow in publication, true! But by 1991 approximately 80% of the scroll material had been published in some form. Delay in publication was due to poor organization, lack of funds and scholarly pride — but certainly not to any Catholic intrigue!

By autumn 1991 pressure on the Israeli authorities led them to end the so-called “scroll cartel”. All the scrolls would now be available to any serious scholar. An Israeli professor, Emanuel Tov was appointed chief editor and the official team of scholars was more than doubled to speed up publication. Since then we have seen a new impetus in Qumran research. But even with all the scrolls accessible, no bombs which compromise New Testament doctrine have exploded. The hypothesis of Baigent and Leigh has fallen dead to the ground.

“NT figures are mentioned under alias in the Qumran scrolls in a way that requires a radical reinterpretation of the history of the Jesus movement.” This opinion is voiced by maverick scholars Robert Eisenman and Barbara Thiering. According to Eisenman the founder of the Qumran movement, the “Righteous Teacher”, is identical with James the brother of the Lord. His opponent, “The Liar” is Paul. According to Thiering, however, it is John the Baptist who hides himself behind the title “Righteous Teacher”, while “The Liar” is Jesus. Further, when the Gospels are read through “Qumran glasses” Thiering finds that Jesus married twice, begat children, and survived the crucifixion, which happened at Qumran and not in Jerusalem!

These hypotheses presuppose that the main writings of the Qumranites were authored in the days of Paul. In 1991 and 1994 a number of scrolls were subjected to Carbon-14 dating. These tests confirmed the dating of the scrolls proposed by experts on the development of the Hebrew script — the foundational documents of the Qumran movement were written between 150 and 50BC. According to the 1994 test the famous Habakuk Commentary which refers to the figures mentioned above was written on leather between 140 and 43BC! The possibility of the scrolls referring to John the Baptist, Jesus, James or Paul is remote.

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According to Jewish researchers, the first generation of Qumran scholarship stressed the importance of the scrolls for the understanding of early Christianity at the expense of their Jewishness. Orthodox Jewish scholars Schiffman and Chazon emphasize that the scrolls demonstrate the antiquity of rabbinic halakhah and the prayer tradition later codified in the Siddur. It must be countered, however, that the scrolls show us a pluriform Judaism in the days of the Second Temple: Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes (the party which produced the scrolls) were competing for the religious hegemony in Israel from the time of the Maccabees onwards. These pluriform Jewish traditions also cast light on New Testament passages.

An Aramaic poem from Qumran hails a coming figure who will be called “son of the great God”, “son of the Most High”, and will receive “an everlasting kingdom”. Words known from Gabriel’s greeting to Mary recur with striking similarity in this passage from the early 1st century BC! We are dealing with either a court poem which shows that messianic hopes were attributed to the Jewish Maccabean rulers, or with a song filled with longings for the heavenly redeemer promised in Daniel 7. Many theologians have held that the “Son of God” title attributed to Jesus had its background in the Hellenistic world, in Greek myths and the cult around the Emperor. Renewed research in early Jewish traditions, however, demonstrates that the roots of this title must be sought in the Hebrew Bible and the messianic hopes of Israel.

While the Qumranites centered their hopes around “the Messiah of Israel” of the tribe of Judah, they also had in their library an Aramaic composition which describes a future priestly figure who will atone for his generation, but will be condemned by many. Allusions to Isaiah 53 are clear. According to another apocalypse “heaven and earth will listen to the Lord’s Anointed” and the Holy One of Israel will “free the prisoners, give sight to the blind, heal the wounded and proclaim good news to the meek”. Luke 4 and Matthew 11 are not strangers in this environment.

The Qumran material can neither prove nor disprove Jesus’ claim to be the ultimate representative of the God of Israel. But through the Scrolls the Nazarene and his disciples appear in profile as full-blooded Israelites, sons of their people, who shared the hopes of Israel. The Nazarene is clothed in Jewish garb! And the early “Jesus people” appear as a Jewish renewal movement who, different from the solemn penitents in Qumran, wanted to reach out to all Israel with the good news about the one they claimed to be the Messiah.

Joseph Rabinowitz **and the Messianic Movement**

The Herzl of Jewish Christianity

Kai Kjær-Hansen

Eerdmans/Handsel, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1995, 262 pp., paperback.

Reviewed by Gershon NereI⁴⁸

The rise and decline of a unique Messianic Jewish congregation in Kishinev, Bessarabia, mainly between the years 1885-1937, called "Israelites of the New Covenant," is the central theme of this historical research. Around the personality, activities and memory of Joseph Rabinowitz (1837-1899), the founder of this congregation, Kai Kjær-Hansen vividly narrates and analyzes this phenomenon.

Although it started as a local congregation, the Kishinev group of modern Jewish disciples of Yeshua (Jesus) rapidly stimulated wide international interest and impact. Close personal connections were developed between its prominent leader, Rabinowitz, and the leadership of evangelical missionary organizations to the Jews, particularly in Germany, England, France, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. These relations, either by correspondence or personal visits, reached even the USA.

Following the death of Rabinowitz in 1899, his congregation dissolved for a period of about two decades, but was restarted by Lev Averbuch for a time between the years 1922-1937.

The narrative of this movement is depicted through the medium of the following five "circles" of activity, which reveal a large innovative network developing out of the Kishinev Messianic Jewish congregation:

1. The constant aspirations of Rabinowitz and Averbuch to maintain their national Jewish identity, avoiding their assimilation into gentile churches. Besides using Hebrew and Yiddish in their liturgy, for example, they insisted on keeping Jewish holy days like the Sabbath and Passover, as well as circumcising their sons;
2. Their attempts to remain independent, as much as possible, in theological and organizational areas. For example, they made repeated efforts to redefine their doctrinal positions through Hebrew Biblical terms, without automatically adopting traditional church creeds;

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3. Their need to balance heavy financial dependence upon support from abroad with their desire for theological and organizational independence;
4. Their strong awareness of and ambivalent attitudes (theological and practical) towards Eretz-Israel and the secular Zionist movement.
5. Their need to cope with the secular and ecclesiastical authorities in Kishinev, be it under the Russian-imperial regime, their Rumanian successors after 1918, or the representatives of the Greek Orthodox church.

From the first to the last page of the book the reader can sense the vitality and relevance of the Kishinev movement for the worldwide Messianic Jewish movement, which has significantly spread simultaneously in Europe, America and Israel in our generation.

Contribution to Modern Research

No one before Kai Kjær-Hansen has collected and scrutinized such a vast amount of diverse primary sources dealing with Rabinowitz and the Kishinev movement. This new body of primary documents which appears in almost a dozen languages is significant by itself. By raising numerous critical questions Kjær-Hansen also succeeds in providing many precise explanations for the movement, which he deduces from original sources. Thus, for example, he is able to correct — sometimes quite critically — the conclusions of historians like D. Rausch (p. 83), S. L. Tsitron (pp. 37; 91) and especially S.J. Zipperstein (pp. 50; 141; 159; 166; 193).

Through his skilled methodology, Kjær-Hansen allows the primary sources to speak for themselves, and thus his arguments and conclusions are more convincing — at least until such time as they may be refuted by other as yet unresearched sources. This critical approach, giving necessary place to the primary sources and presented in a panoramic framework, no doubt contributes to the narrative's credibility.

Another significant side to this research is the synthesis the author has made out of the diverse documents, thus presenting an updated picture of the Kishinev movement. For example, by relating to material recently published in the memoirs of Eric Gabe (pp. 71; 218), Kjær-Hansen also furnishes us with additional dimensions to the subject.

The “Herzl” of Jewish Christianity?

Following Hugh Schonfield (p. ix), Kjær-Hansen calls Rabinowitz the “Herzl” of Jewish Christianity. But would Rabinowitz himself have accepted without hesitation such a connection between himself and the leader par-excellence of secular Zionism? Reading about the attitude of Rabinowitz towards Herzl, to which Kjær-Hansen also refers (pp. 124-125), one may well question such a “titular” analogy between these two striking personalities. The very fact that they became spokesmen and leaders of two ideological streams need not place them in the same category. Thus, for example, although in 1896 Rabinowitz expressed vague ideas about moving his work to Jerusalem (pp. 195-196), he stated that Herzlian Zionism was “possessed by the spirit of Antichrist” (see: *Things to Come*, vol. iv, no.12, June 1898, p.141). For him, practically, earthly Zion was found in Kishinev — at least until the second advent of Yeshua (pp. 48; 182; 191; 194).

Perhaps, therefore, it would be better to describe Rabinowitz as the “Lawyer Apostle,” a title already given to him in his own lifetime (p. 67), rather than linking him too closely with Theodore Herzl. Another possibility would be to refer to Rabinowitz simply as “The Herald of Modern Messianic Judaism.” Further research on the attitudes of Rabinowitz towards Herzl and his own concept of Zionism — heavenly and earthly — would clarify this topic.

Similarities in Eretz-Israel

We may benefit and learn new lessons from drawing a comparison between the developments within the Kishinev congregation(s) and the developments in the Messianic movement in Eretz-Israel. The following points are significant:

a) Reading Kjær-Hansen's narrative, one cannot ignore or over-estimate the significance he gives to the use of the Hebrew language by Rabinowitz. Indeed, the “Kishinev Apostle” completely understood the importance of Hebrew being used in sermons, in composition of articles of faith and in liturgy (pp. 46-47; 107; 152). This language factor no doubt played an important role in shaping the theology of Rabinowitz, as it did later in the land of Israel, especially since the 1930's. The renaissance of the Hebrew language among Messianic Jewish circles still deserves further investigation in order to discover the unique Messianic Jewish contribution to the revival of modern Hebrew.

b) Kjær-Hansen carefully indicates the uncovered theological expectations of individual missionaries involved in the Kishinev movement (pp. 79; 84; 133-135; 165). We find a parallel phenomenon in the land of Israel in the last 70 years. On the one hand, Rabinowitz sought financial help abroad within the circles of the missionary societies, yet on the other he wanted full independence from them. This became more complicated when exemplified through the saying that “more than the new-born calf wanted to suck the milk, the mother-cow wished to nurse and provide the milk.” This ambivalence of financial “give and take” existed in Kishinev no less than in the Land of Israel. Another problem which existed in Kishinev, which Kjær-Hansen correctly observes, was the rivalries and opposing approaches between the expatriate missionaries and the indigenous congregation (pp. 136-137; 140). Again this can also be traced in Eretz-Israel.

c) The administrative restrictions by the authorities raised similar difficulties in Eretz-Israel. The permission requested by Rabinowitz to baptize and administer the Lord's Supper or to officially conduct marriage ceremonies resembles the limitations of the Turkish “Millet” system imposed in Eretz-Israel. This system denied legal recognition to religious groups functioning outside the framework of the established churches and denominations. Yet, while in Kishinev this refusal to grant such permission to the congregation leadership contributed to the decline of the movement (p. 233), in Israel it gradually “lost its sting,” inasmuch as in the Israeli reality such regulations were bypassed.

Too Much Expected Too Soon

From 1882, when Rabinowitz accepted Yeshua as personal Savior and Lord, until his death in 1899 only 17 years had passed. In such a short period Rabinowitz had accomplished what others would only accomplish in a significantly longer period of time. During these 17 years it seems that Joseph Rabinowitz had too high expectations of himself. Others abroad, like John Wilkinson

and Franz Delitzsch, also had expected him to work unceasingly. Sometimes he felt he was under pressure to instantly adjust his doctrinal concepts to the dogmas of others (p. 108). In addition, the intensity of his writing and preaching activity, besides frequent travels abroad, and other obligations in Kishinev must have affected his spiritual discretion and decision-making process, as well as his physical health. Thus, for example, his attempts to crystallize his articles of faith in a very short period of time (1884-85) resulted in no less than four different texts, (pp. 92-103), which probably did not confuse only his friends.

Would it not, we may ask, have been wiser to get more experience by doing things more slowly step by step and thus ripening in theological reflection and organizational capacity? It seems to this reviewer that fewer high-pressure activities and demanding efforts put upon his shoulders would have produced a greater spiritual and practical maturity. Nevertheless, Rabinowitz was still criticized for doing his work too “slowly” (p. 184)! In retrospect, we may draw a lesson from the Rabinowitz “no time to lose” overhasty experience. Adequate time is needed to gradually lay foundations which in a reasonable time will be able to bear the full weight of congregational life. To train leadership to share responsibility does need extensive time. Building institutional resources, besides spiritual personnel, is imperative in laying grounds for a cohesive and substantial infrastructure of any new congregation.

A Messianic Jewish “Microcosmic Model”

The Kishinev movement started by Joseph Rabinowitz still stands as a modern prototype of a new Messianic Jewish congregation. It needs to face the historical heritage of Church and Synagogue of the past 1900 years. In this book Kai Kjær-Hansen used his genuine sensitivity and scholarly capacities to present the problems that affect the growing Messianic Jewish movement, especially in the last century. Therefore, this book should not, and in fact it cannot, be read as if it were a historical novel. Adequate time is needed, not only for reading but also for fully digesting the contents of this serious book.

It should be noted that further unknown information about the Kishinev movement is still hidden among the pages of the organ of the Kishinev “second” congregation “Hamevaser Tov,” published in the 1930's in Yiddish, Hebrew and Rumanian. Furthermore, it is recommended that in the next edition of the book a detailed subject-index be included.

The Kishinev congregation disintegrated, but the precedent it set still presents a special challenge to anyone who looks for historical perspective. Anyone who wishes to learn from the past — both from its positive and negative aspects — may find in this research a mine of thoughtful and illuminating material.

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