



Caspari Center  
for Biblical and Jewish Studies

# NEWS

March 2018



## *From the CEO*

Elisabeth E. Levy

*Dear Partners and Supporters of the Caspari Center*

After a rainy winter – a blessing in this country! – spring is on its way. The almond trees are flourishing, and the sun is getting warmer and stronger every day. We are looking forward to all that the new season has in store.



We will be hosting a new *Discovering Jesus in His Jewish Context* this spring, in April/May. Research for the new edition of “Facts and Myths” is going forward. By now, we have interviewed the Ethiopian and some of the Russian congregations. In this newsletter, you can also read a short summary of the growth of the Messianic body in the land over the years, and a review of seven years of ministry to Russian-speaking Shabbat School teachers.

Here at the Caspari Center, we have just welcomed two new volunteers, Maria from Finland and Henriette from Denmark. We trust that the experiences they have at the Caspari Center, and in Israel, will positively shape their future.

As always, we appreciate your prayers, and value your ongoing financial support of this ministry.

## *Discovering Jesus in His Jewish Context*

Sanna Erelä  
Project Coordinator



Since the 18th century, the question of the historical Jesus has puzzled theologians. They have actively constructed portraits of Jesus, and depicted him as an apocalyptic prophet, a charismatic healer, a Cynic philosopher, a prophet of social change and so on. Jesus has been a black man, a Marxist revolutionist, a Palestinian and a feminist. Many different contextual theologies have been created in the desire to make the world a better place.

When the readers see the title of our upcoming course, *Discovering Jesus in His Jewish Context*, I wonder if they get the impression that Jewish Jesus is another attempt to harness our Saviour to someone’s ideological wagon. That would be logical reasoning, but it is not the case here.

Everyone knows that Jesus was Jewish. However, we Christians often assume, without thinking, that the Apostle Paul was converted to Christianity. Isn’t that what happened on the road to Damascus? The Christian interpretation of the bible generally evolves from Paul’s writings in the Epistles. We tend to ignore the narrative of the book of Acts, and how Jewish Paul really was. Research shows that “Christianity” remained a Jewish movement for quite some time. Many factors influenced the historical development where Christianity and Judaism parted ways, and were formed into separate religions. In the beginning, the Jewish believer in Jesus was the standard – later the Church was widely gentilized, while the Jewish way of following Jesus disappeared, for the most part.

Many tourists come to Israel to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. They hear about the history, they explore churches and archaeological sites. Lots of interesting stones! But where are the living stones? During our upcoming course, participants will have the opportunity to learn about Jesus by listening to his Jewish brothers and sisters. The present-day Messianic movement, as a general rule, desires to revive the Jewish way of following Jesus. It is true that there is a gap of about 1,700 years between the modern Messianic movement and these first generations of Jewish believers (who

disappeared in the fourth century, as they assimilated in churches). Even so, today's Messianic movement can still give us Christians a glimpse into the bible through a new window, from which we can view our beloved Messiah, and God's plan for this world. Something that – I believe – has been missing from the Church for a long time.



***We still have few open spaces for our  
Discovering Jesus in His Jewish Context course  
April 23 - May 4, 2018***

The course will be held in English and is aimed at pastors, ministry people and other theologically-minded Christians.

For more information, write [caspari@caspari.com](mailto:caspari@caspari.com) or go to our website [www.caspari.com](http://www.caspari.com)



## Messianic Jews - Under the Radar No Longer!

*Elisabeth E. Levy*

One article in the Jerusalem Post recently asked, “Will Israel Ever Accept Messianic Jews?” The article didn’t provide an answer, but the fact that such a question was even considered shows that the Messianic movement in Israel is no longer under the radar. In fact, most Israelis nowadays are aware of the existence of Jews who believe in Yeshua.

In the 1960’s, the number of Messianic Jews was estimated to have been between 300-500 people, who gathered in a few congregations around the country. Of these congregations, only some held services in Hebrew. The reason was that many of the leaders of those small congregations were missionaries or pastors from abroad.

These rare Jewish believers in Yeshua were often met by a very hostile Israeli society. In the army, for instance, they were not allowed to take part in officer training courses. The IDF maintained that these Jewish believers were a risk to the country’s security. The labor market could also be unfriendly, as could the school situation for many pupils – most of them, the lone believer in the entire school. The congregations found it difficult to find premises to rent, and landlords who would rent to them, when they outgrew their home groups. Back in the 60’s, the idea that congregations could own property was unthinkable.

Today, by the grace of God, the situation is very different. The Messianic movement has grown from “small newborn baby” to “teenager” or “young adult”. Today, one third of the congregations own premises, and most of the congregations hold their services in Hebrew (although some still use Russian, Amharic, or another foreign tongue). Jewish believers in Yeshua are getting bolder, and most congregations have their own websites. The modern-day Messianic movement is also characterized by many children and young people, and this gives us hope for the future. Additionally, there are quite a few Messianic officers in the IDF. Messianic Jews are usually considered reliable soldiers and are valued as such.

There have been so many developments in the Messianic body since the 1960’s. What the movement will be in another 50 years, we can only guess. But we can hope and pray that Messianic Jews will be accepted as Jews – at last.

# Seven Years of Teacher's Training in Haifa

Margarita Kantor / Project Coordinator

The Caspari Center began organizing seminars in Haifa for Russian-speaking teachers in 2011. Our primary goal was to offer training to teachers from the north of Israel, and the Russian language was initially chosen due to the abundance of Russian-speaking congregations in the region. What do we see seven years later? First, the number of congregations that send their teachers to be trained has doubled. Second, the number of participants keeps growing. Third, and in my opinion, the most interesting observation, is that for the third consecutive year, the Haifa seminar has been attracting teachers from as far away as the center of Israel. It's safe to say that if we had been able to organize transportation to and from the event, we would have had even more participants.

Our 8th seminar took place on February 16th, and this time we invited not only teachers, but also parents. Part of the planning of a seminar involves taking a short survey of the teachers to help us determine their most urgent needs and how we can meet them. This year, after reviewing the surveys, we decided upon the seminar's theme of working with teenagers. Those of us with teens in our families, or who work with teens, are aware of the particular issues and challenges related to this age group which arise during teaching, or even simply during fellowship with them. It seems there can't be too many seminars on working with teenagers!

We give praise to the Lord for the fact that in Israel's small Messianic community, there is a growing number of professionals from a variety of fields who are willing to share their wisdom and experience. Our main speaker for this year's seminar was both a family counselor and pastor of a local Messianic congregation. He taught about the reasons for a lack of good communication between parents and teenagers, about sources of conflict, and about ways



to avoid and resolve them. Role-playing games were a very good practical way to illustrate the real-life situations we face, and to apply the principles he taught. It was interesting to listen to him – an experienced congregational minister who often encounters believers struggling with life's problems – state the correct way of approaching conflict situations. The Scripture says: "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrines. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." (1 Tim. 4:16). Sort out your own life first, apply Scripture to it, and make this your habit – then you will see good results in ministering to others, too. That was a very useful reminder to us all.

Speaking with participants at the conclusion of the seminar and looking through the written feedback, the response was overwhelmingly positive: "It was a very practical seminar! We really worked through all the topics! That is the way we would like to study other topics as well!"

It is always a great joy for me when our ministry blesses people. And I know that we can't take all the credit for that. Our Haifa seminars would have been impossible without the Shavei Tzion Congregation, the local Messianic congregation which hosts and helps organize the seminars, and provides lunch. We feel very much at home there, and are very grateful to them. Such partnership of congregations and ministries tremendously strengthens the believing Israeli community.

## Prayer Requests

Please pray for...

- the ongoing Facts & Myths interviews, and communication with pastors.
- the Lord to bring more participants to ***Discovering Jesus in His Jewish Context***.
- the filming of interviewees for the Alef discipleship program.
- the Lord's divine leading in choosing volunteers for the coming year.



# How Many Messianic Jews Live in Israel Today?

Jennifer Nataf / Administrator

Depending on whom you ask, you will hear that there are anywhere from 10,000 to 30,000 Messianic followers of Yeshua living in Israel today. And those broad estimates don't attempt to answer other important questions, such as:

- How many of these are native Israelis/immigrants/foreigners?
- How many are Jewish or married to Jews?
- What exactly do they believe?



In 1999, the Caspari Center published a groundbreaking study entitled “Facts & Myths About the Messianic Movement in Israel”. This comprehensive project surveyed the Messianic congregations and home groups in Israel to discover how the congregations were established, what each believed, who attended, and many more fascinating details. This study remains the only study to provide any reliable, comprehensive information on the Messianic movement in Israel.

Twenty years later, it's time for a revision of this book. We know the Messianic movement has grown in the last two decades, but we have no data describing how much, nor what the nature of this growth has been. As a result, we have no way to assess current and future needs of the body of Messiah in Israel.

Gathering new data will help us to identify the needs of the Messianic body. It will help newcomers and new believers find congregations, and help congregations connect with one another, especially those located in more remote areas. It will map out the theological spectrum of the faith in this land. It will help us counter the lies spread by anti-Missionary activists, and inform people around the world who want to pray for the Messianic congregations, especially those undergoing persecution.

This long-anticipated project is finally underway! In the past few months, David Serner has been interviewing the Ethiopian pastors in Israel, and Alec Goldberg has been interviewing pastors of Russian-speaking congregations. As for the first book, we ask a wide variety of questions about the theological nature of the congregation, about Jewish/Christian traditions, about the demographics of the congregants and more.

We've already encountered some challenges. Some pastors were leery of providing such information, destined, as it is, to become public knowledge. This is primarily out of a legitimate fear of anti-missionary organizations which have been known to viciously persecute congregations, as well as individual believers. This fear was also one of the big challenges of the first book; although for many, these twenty years have seen the fear lessen, and boldness increase.

This kind of research project is exceptionally time- and cost-intensive. And so we ask: would you consider partnering with us in this, financially? We would very much appreciate any donation you would be willing to make towards this project. We absolutely value your prayers, too, as we gather and disseminate this essential information about the Messianic movement, in the land where it all began.

 **Caspari Center** • for Biblical and Jewish Studies • ללימודי המקרא והיהדות • תרכז כספרי

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*“Equipping His people for works of service, so that the body of Messiah may be built up” Ephesians 4:12*

If you would like to know more about the Caspari Center and its activities, write to [caspari@caspari.com](mailto:caspari@caspari.com) or visit our website, [www.caspari.com](http://www.caspari.com). You can support our work by prayer, volunteering, or financial gifts to help with individual projects or the general work of the center.