

YESHUA - JESUS

Twelve years ago the film "YESHUA" (JESUS), which describes the life of Jesus according to the Gospel of Luke, was produced in Israel, over a period of five years on a budget of six million dollars, with public screening in the U.S. beginning in 1979. On 19th April 1990 the film will be screened in Israel at the "Or" cinema in Jerusalem after the sound was dubbed into Hebrew through the efforts of Philip Moore. A Christian religious group named "Genesis" is behind the production of "Jesus", and world-wide distribution of the film is in over 100 languages. (GLOBUS 13.4.90)

The posters advertising the film on local bulletin boards will include the names of some of Israel's leading actors. The video version of the film creates an image of a documentary, with the script a word-by-word reproduction of the original text from Luke's Gospel. The sound was originally spoken in English; and when one hears familiar Israeli actors dubbed by unfamiliar voices in Hebrew, it has a strange effect, except for the English actor portraying Jesus, whose voice is pleasantly dubbed in a kind of holy whisper by Mottei Barakan. Only the role of Peter is both acted and spoken in Hebrew by the same Hebrew personality, Niko Nitai.

"It was really a strange production," Nitai now recalls. "They really tried hard to be authentic, with the result being almost a documentary." Another actor, Mosko Alkalai was pleased by the steady work and earnings; "but artistically, it was outrageous." (HA'IR 6 Apr 90 - Ronen Tal)

It was all because of the cruel murder of Philip Moore's father that we have the dubious privilege of seeing the film "YESHUA" at the Jerusalem cinema "Or". When he was 30, he was free to use his father's inheritance, which he took to dub this film into Hebrew.

At 32, Moore is a Christian penitent who's really crazy about the Jews. Like Jimmy Carter, he's from Atlanta; only Carter isn't rated by him as a Christian because "he doesn't love Israel, doesn't oppose abortions and is after all a plain left-winger." Moore studied the Bible and wanted to assure himself a place in Paradise. "So I said to Jesus: If you're the Messiah, come into my life." Jesus was delighted to comply and Moore submitted himself to the fact that "Jesus died on the cross in my place and atoned for all my sins... I began to love my Jewish friends more than ever, because the Jews gave Jesus to the world."

What really grabbed him in all this deal was prophecy. "The Bible is 100% accurate. When the Russians and Arabs try to destroy Israel, Jesus will come and save her." This simplistic theology Moore hammers into his listeners with a brutality reminiscent of fattening geese, and no objection will avail.

Moore is a missionary with the skin of an elephant, and uses up the full 60 minutes allotted him, not only with quotations, but compelling me to read from the book by Hal Lindsay, "THE LATE PLANET EARTH," while watching me to see that I don't skip anything. "This book has been read by millions around the world in 30 languages," the jacket declares. Moore claims that Ariel Sharon and David Ben-Gurion have also read it. He saw a well-worn copy for himself in the Ben-Gurion library of Sde Boker.

When Moore learned that the film "JESUS" had not been translated into Hebrew sound, he decided to invest \$30,000 from his father's legacy in the dubbing project, "as a gesture of love for Israel," buying the rights to do so, and returned to Jerusalem (where he has lived on and off for the past decade). Moore claims he didn't know that all the actors, except for the one portraying Jesus, were Israeli, and therefore failed to engage the original actors (except Niko) for the dubbing. Moore, gripped by Messianic fervor, is not bothered at the poor quality of the dubbing, which was done hastily and without proper preparation, according to one Israeli involved, who claims he warned Moore.

In order to perfect his missionary labours, Moore was not satisfied with dubbing, but also inserted written citations from the Tenach in order to prove to the Jewish viewer that the Old Testament was already hinting that Jesus was King of the Jews and their Messiah. He is also very close to those eccentrics who call themselves "Messianic Jews."

He is convinced that the film will be a hit. "I showed the film to 100 Israeli families and they all enjoyed it and said it was a good film. They said to me, "See, the Romans crucified Jesus and not we." Sali Mizrahi, owner of the "Or" cinema, is not yet talking about a hit. "I don't know what the commercial potential of the film is, but Moore and his backers have given a box-office guarantee, as is customary with films of uncertain appeal."

The P.R. woman handling the publicity for the film is sure that the ultra-orthodox "YAD L'AHIM" will make a scandal about the film. A phone call to their office revealed that they had heard of the film, "but it doesn't seem to us to be worth our attention. If we change our minds, we'll let you know." They're probably right. The film will be withdrawn very quickly; not because it's missionary, but it's simply a bad film. ("JERUSALEM - Yail Admoni - 20.4.90)

The movies were never known as Torah-promulgators, but next week they will break a record, with the screening of "J-s-s" at the "Or" cinema. Sali Mizrahi, the owner, has another record to his credit; he was the first movie-owner to open on Sabbath evenings in Jerusalem. It's understandable that viewers with Christian roots would wish to see such a film, but what need is there to import such garbage? Actually, the sect of the Messianic Jews is the patron of the film and are willing to explain to every movie-goer with great zeal what the aim of this model work of art is! But why should a Jewish movie-owner help them spread their faith? (YOM HASHISHI - Rivka Kanrick - 20.4.90)

"THE MISSION"

TIBERIAS: A missionary from Finland in recent weeks has been going about Tiberias and knocking on doors distributing the New Testament. In the Ahva neighbourhood he encountered Orthodox Jewish women who were incensed that on the eve of Sabbath he was promoting Christianity freely in the Holy City. (Tiberias is one of the four holy cities in Judaism.) YEDIOT HAGALIL, 16.2.90, with photo.

BEERSHEVA: Missionary Christians are about to erect a church in the Gimmel neighbourhood centre of Beersheva. This involves a group of Polish Christians which for years has engaged in missionary activity among neighbourhood children. M.K. Rabbi Gafni ("DEGEL HATORAH"), local rabbi and Orthodox Jewish officials in the municipality are working to thwart the plot. Local residents have sent urgent letters to the municipality and Knesset demanding immediate intervention. The location is Rehov Hashalom 51, in a house belonging to the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, and operated by nuns. Neighbourhood children have visited the house and received sweets, and there are regular deposits of missionary literature in neighbourhood letter boxes. The Polish Christians also operate the Bible House for the sale of Christian and missionary literature.

In response to the Orthodox objections, the municipal spokesman stated that a legal request for erecting a new two-story house on the site had been received from the Latin Patriarchate. The plans had been approved on various levels. The spokesman, Amos Hanoach, stated further that the municipality respects all faiths, and in this instance, no permit had been issued for the erection of a church, but only for a private residence. (Y'ATAID NE'EMAN 6 May 90)

"HOLY WAR": Under this heading, MAARIV (GUSH DAN SUPPLEMENT 23.2.90) carried a two-page feature article with photographs about YAD L'AHIM and its "holy war" against "the Mission." After gaining access to its "under cover" agents, Eitan Levin discovered that they dress like any "normal" Israeli, without black coats and hats or side curls, and do not reveal their true names.

Since 1985 Messianic Jews have been unable to rent the Sokolow hall in Tel-Aviv for lectures following anonymous bomb threats; YAD L'AHIM has also pressured hotels to stop renting to the Messianics, or their kosher licenses would be revoked. The largest and most established organization, which gives YAD L'AHIM sleepless nights, is the Messianic Jews, a sect which is considered the most aggressive among the missionary groups. The missionaries are aware of the fact that the anti-mission group is always breathing down their necks. The best system is to "plant" spies in the ranks of the missionaries, who gather information and also slowly work to break up the ranks of the "enemy", "saving people from the fangs of the Mission."

The Messianic Jews, like other missionaries, have realized that "Jesus" and "Christianity" turn off Jews, so they substitute "Yeshua" and other terms. In their 1989 Evangelism campaign they called on their members to take an active part. Vast quantities of literature have been published by missionary printers, with five publishers printing tons of material each year, and 60 postal boxes sending out the material. The Holy Land has top priority in the world-wide missionary movement.

The Messianic Jews, until 15 years ago a fringe movement, have grown to 35 congregations in Israel. Unlike the mystical sects, the Messianics exploit not only economic distress but spiritual needs, people looking for meaning in life, including intellectuals. YAD L'AHIM is proud of a "rescue operation" in Gilo, Jerusalem, where a desperate family had been helped by missionaries and were being readied for emigration to Canada. "Our volunteers stepped in and paid their water and electric bills, provided hot food, and found work for the father. The family, thank God, was rehabilitated and remained in Israel," they claim.

MESSIANIC JEWS

PROPHETS STREETS: Every Shabat at 10 a.m. on Prophets Streets in Jerusalem there is a service at the Messianic Assembly of Israel. "It isn't like a synagogue or a church worship," Menahem Benhayim, an assembly leader explains. "There's lots of singing and praise, free time of prayer, readings from the Tenah (O.T.) and the New Testament, and afterwards, a sermon." About 200 Jerusalemites regard themselves as Messianic Jews. "Yeshua was a Jew, and most of the New Testament was written by Jews. The Messianic movement sprang up against the background of Eretz Yisrael. Is all this meant only for the Gentiles?" he asks. Sometimes they have troubles. Once their centre was torched, and sometimes they are harassed. Commenting on life in the Holy City, he states: "There's still a great difference between the Jerusalem which is below and the Jerusalem above." (YEDIOT AKHRONOT 23.5.90)

RESERVIST PREACHER: The reservist Sorko-ram preached Messianic Christianity to overseas Jewish volunteers at a military base. They reported him, and he was reassigned. When he petitioned the High Court about this, his arguments for freedom of conscience and religion were rejected by the court on the basis of documents presented by the I.D.F., whose accuracy he did not deny. His transfer, the Court ruled, did not infringe on his freedom to believe as he wished, but dealt with his suitability as a liaison with overseas Jewish volunteers. (From a summary of the court decision) YEDIOT AKHRONOT 21.5.90

MESSIANICS & MISSION: In an interview given to the weekly organ of Agudat Habad (ultra-orthodox hassidic movement) KFAR HABAD, Joshua Kahana, formerly of the Interior Ministry, declared that the High Court ruling in the Beresford case "will help curtail the missionary activity of the 'Messianic Jews' in Israel." He described the response of the Ministry when it learned about Messianic Jewish presence in Ramat Hasharon and of plans to bring others from abroad under the Law of Return. The Ministry was convinced that, on the basis of the Rufeisen and Dorflinger cases, Messianic Jews in churches or baptized could be barred from using the Law of Return because they were "members of another religion."

In the Beresford case they consulted with legal experts and Hebrew University specialists in Christianity, which made it clear that, "Whoever believes in That Man (Jesus) does not, from a legal standpoint, belong to Judaism but to another religion." With respect to the second generation of Messianic Jews, Kahana responded: "The status of the second generation is of course the same as that of the parents. The High Court has clearly concluded that Messianic Jews have no portion in Israel, and from now on their activities in Israel will cease." (S.12.89) NOTE: Date apparently incorrect since High Court decision was issued 25.12.89)

U.S. MESSIANICS IN ISRAEL: Orthodox newspapers carried articles about a group of U.S. Messianic Jews allegedly on a mission tour during May 1990, from Beth Yeshua in Philadelphia, and accompanied by a musical group called "Kol Simha". Information about the tour reached YAD L'AHIM, including a "provocative" scheduled visit to the ultra-orthodox quarter Meah Shearim in Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, Holocaust Memorial, Bethlehem, etc. and climaxed by ritual immersion (baptism) in the Jordan. The anti-mission organization suspects that in their free time the Messianics will engage in missionizing. A parliamentary query was submitted by Rabbi Shmuel Halpert to the Minister of Education about the Messianic group. HAMODIYA (17.5.90)

MESSIANIC ADVERTS: Under the heading, "AND THE WOLF SHALL DWELT WITH THE LAMB... AND THE HAWK AND THE DOVE TOGETHER, HA'IR-TELAVIV published an advert with the Messianic Jewish logo, offering free literature to those interested in MESSIAH NOW! (POB 8355 Jaffa) 6 Apr 90. KAWL HA'IR JERUSALEM (11.5.90) offered free of charge the book (in Hebrew): "THE MESSIAH IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES IN THE LIGHT OF THE RABBINICAL WRITINGS", offered by Keren Ahva Meshihit, POB 10382 JERUSALEM.

CHURCHES IN ISRAEL

SCOTTISH CHURCH: A three-page weekend feature article (undated) with photographs about the Scottish Church in Tiberias, bylined Yehuda Koren, was published in the wake of the St. John's Hospice incident in the Old City of Jerusalem. Aside from a description of the Scottish Hospice, its facilities, and its history as a mission enterprise, the writer emphasizes its present change of focus. Walter Dunlop, the present manager, noted: "There are among our volunteers . . . religious enthusiasts with a passion to preach to any non-Christian. We cool their ardor and tell them to keep their faith to themselves. We are not missionaries but managers of a hospice. We have no public prayer and do not distribute missionary literature."

JERUSALEM CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY: In the wake of the St. John's Hospice affair, the Jerusalem weekly KAWL HA'IR (20.4.90) published three pages of stories about Christian reactions revealing a solid front against Israeli rule. The position of the Middle East Council of Churches was also discussed and the controversial prayer composed for Palm Sunday.

On 25.5.90 the same weekly published a feature article about "THE LUTHERAN DILEMMA", reflecting the divisions among Lutherans over the intifada - pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli. Many Lutherans are German students with a strong sense of guilt over Nazi crimes committed by Germans.

JERUSALEM PRAYER: In a letter to the J'LM POST, Ann Johnson writes about the use of the MECC "Prayer from J'lm" on Palm Sunday on the basis of witnesses to English-language worship in Jerusalem. Traditional churches were reluctant to use it, "and this reluctance extended to most expatriate congregations and their pilgrim guests." (19.5.90)

CO-EXISTENCE: In a letter to the POST, Director of BRIDGES FOR PEACE Clarence Wagner reacted to the furore over the St. John's Hospice by appealing for pluralism and co-existence in Jerusalem while avoiding "the use of this incident by those seeking political and religious action against Israel and the Jewish community."

INTERFAITH FOR PEACE: Orthodox rabbis (one from Gush Emunim) and Christian and Muslim clergy will meet in conference for a discussion on peace under

the auspices of "Clergy for Peace". Among the participants are Rabbi Menahem Frumin, and the Anglican cleric Shehada Shehada of Kfar Yasif. A date has not yet been set. (KAWL HA'IR 25.5.90)

SECTS

JEHOVAH WITNESSES: The J.W. sect has bought a large store in central Tel-Aviv to serve as their spiritual centre for worship and mission activity, according to an anti-mission spokesman. At their previous centre they were forced to suspend their activities because of zoning regulations. (YATAID NE'EMAN 16.5.90)

SUNDRIES

"THE NEW COVENANT: Menahem Ben, poetry commentator in the Jerusalem weekly KAWL HA'IR (20.4.90), in a critical article about biblical exegesis and circumcision, cites the Jeremiah prophecy of the new covenant (31:31-) and other biblical passages. He describes a "circumcision of the heart" he performed on his three sons, "without pain, without a knife, without a circumcisor." Making a play on the Hebrew word "millah" (meaning both "word" and "circumcision"), Ben discusses the metaphorical and figurative language of Scripture as well as the need for recognizing developing levels of interpretation within Jewish thinking (e.g. "an eye for an eye" was later interpreted to mean fair monetary compensation). He accuses modern Orthodox rabbis of concentrating only on the physical aspects of Scripture. He concludes: "They do not understand what that circumcised Jew Jesus understood, that not what enters the mouth defiles, but what proceeds from the mouth defiles us... the slander and folly we utter." Quoting Israeli poet David Avidan, he writes: "The language of poetry is the language of the future."

LETTERS TO GOD: According to the Ecumenical Press Service (Geneva), Moshe Ben-Meir, a postal director in Jerusalem, receives letters from all over addressed to God, Jesus, Moses, Solomon, David and Mohammed. Some of them don't bother affixing a stamp on the envelope "as if expecting God to pay the postage," he noted. (idea 7/90 p. 15, 20.4.90)

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