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## Believers in Israel: The Problem with Numbers (A draft, February 1999 – not for publication)

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Bodil F. Skjøtt from Caspari Center, Jerusalem, and myself are working on a survey of all congregations and groups in Israel, and this includes counting the Jewish believers in Israel. To our knowledge, this has not been done earlier, which is somewhat surprising. The result of our findings will not be above criticism. We are actually looking forward to *constructive* criticism of our attempt to paint a realistic picture of the Messianic Movement in Israel and its *Jewish believers in Jesus* (JBJ). We have listed the congregations and groups we know. If critics of our survey think we have left any out, we welcome information about this.

The survey is being carried out for *Mishkan*. In connection with the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the State of Israel the editorial board decided to dedicate three issues to the history of the Messianic Movement in Israel. The first two issues have carried valuable and engaging but also challenging articles by, among others, Menahem Benhayim, Baruch Maoz, Gershon Nerel, Lisa Loden - in order to mention the Messianic Jewish authors. And ahead of us is the third issue with a survey of all the Messianic congregations, fellowships and groups in Israel that we know of. The survey and the conclusions to be drawn from it will be published in *Mishkan*, according to schedule this summer - a long summer perhaps!

We - Bodil and I - have met close to 60 leaders in person and interviewed them. Apart from that Bodil has had telephone contact with approximately 15 more. We have been positively surprised by the fact that not very many have wanted to be anonymous and that many have wanted to speak freely to us although quite a few - not least among the Russian congregations - do not know us. We have been negatively surprised in that among the few that have not wanted to speak to us there are leaders of some of the "old" congregations, the so-called Assemblies in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa - and a few others. These "old" Assemblies are of course also included in our survey, and we mention the names of their leaders. The existence of the congregations is a well-known fact, as are the names of their leaders. The congregations and their leaders have been mentioned several times in the Israeli press. And they are known by *Yad L'Achim*. I can give you an example of this: We interviewed the Messianic Congregation in Beersheva in October 1998. On 28 November 1998 there was a big demonstration, independent of our survey - of course!

We believe in openness. We assume that the Israeli Antimission will also study our survey. A few new congregations have, for various and understandable reasons, wished to be anonymous, which we shall respect.

Well, tonight Bodil will have more to say about the survey and also, on the basis of some case studies, show how different the Messianic Movement is. If prior to 1990 - before the marked immigration of Russians to Israel from the former Soviet Union - it was difficult to speak about *the* Messianic Movement in Israel, it has not become any easier in 1999. I shall be concentrating on figures.

By way of concluding our interviews in Israel we often asked, "By the way: How many Jewish believers are there in Israel? What is your answer when people from abroad ask you?"

Before I give you *their* answers I would like to hear *your* answers to the same

question.

When I have meetings in Denmark about Israel and mission and evangelisation and Jesus-believing Jews, one of the most frequent questions is: How many are there in Israel today? I assume that you have also met that question. So, when people ask you about the number of Jewish believers in Israel, what is your answer?

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When leaders of the Messianic Movement in Israel have been asked about the number of Messianic *Jewish* believers in Israel many have first said, "I don't know!" or "I have no idea about it." Pressed to give an answer some have given one.

The 33 estimates of the number of JBJ in Israel are divided like this:

500(1); under 1,000 (1);

less than 2,000 (1);

2,000 (4); 2,000-3,000 (3); 2,000-4,000 (1);

over 3,000 (1); 3,000 (1); 3,000-4,000 (3); 3,000-5,000 (1),

4,000-5,000 (1); 4,000-6,000 (1);

5,000 (1); 5,000-6,000 (2); 5,000-7,000 (5); 5,000-10,000(1);

6,000 (1); 6,000-7000 (1); 6,000-10,000 (1);

7,000 (1);

50,000 (1).

In other words: the impression of the number of JBJ varies considerably among the leaders of the movement. Considering that there has not been a statistical analysis before, this is perhaps not so very surprising. The big figures do not necessarily mean that one has consciously attempted to inflate the movement. Some of those who said between 5,000 and 7,000 referred to information from the Messianic Action Committee (MAC). Let this be very clear: *We are not* saying that MAC claims that there should be 5,000-7,000 *Jewish* believers in Jesus in Israel. MAC claims that there are 5,000-7,000 *Messianic* believers in Israel. This is a little tricky. Explanation follows.

### **Some very human factors in connection with figures**

It would be very tempting to speak generally about what factors - what very human factors - make themselves felt when people count and inform about figures. In order to be able to endure the hardships of the ministry a person needs "nice" figures. It is also important to be able to submit "nice" figures in order to secure financial support from one's supporters. A person may also give the number of the people who come to faith in Jesus - without asking those who came forward if they also did so the day before in the course of the campaign - or at last year's campaign - or at the campaign the year before last. It is possible to give the correct figures for baptisms - for of course no-one means to lie - and yet avoid asking if this is the second time the person was baptized or the third ... Not all are as precise as an anonymous JBJ who in 1986 said the following to some Swedish students in Immanuel House, Yaffo: "Yes, I have been baptized - even twice!" (*Swedish students' extended essay* 1986:74). Or in a context where JBJ are being discussed one may fail to make it clear that several - perhaps the majority - of those baptized were actually non-Jews. Which is great, namely that JBJ baptize non-Jews, but for some non-Jewish believers in Jesus it is not quite so great if those baptized have already been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit! But apart from this theological reservation, such information does not give a truthful picture of the number of baptized *Jews*!

Many other factors could be mentioned. But this is beyond the scope of this paper. Our general assessment is that when it comes to figures in a movement, a congregation, a

group etc. JBJ are no worse than Christians, and JBJ in Israel are no worse than JBJ elsewhere. Here we have a problem common to all believers in Jesus.

And:

*Overestimating* the number of a group is very rare when we are talking about the past. The human nature is particularly geared to deal with success in our own time! And as a logical consequence of this:

*Underestimating* the number of a group is very rare when we are talking about our own time or our own group. Underestimating does occur but then when one is dealing with the past and when one feels part of something “big” and finds oneself in a “sphere of enthusiasm” because of immediate success. The best - or worst - example of this can be found in *Hayahad* (no. 32, 1983:1), the Baptists’ English-language organ in Israel at the time and also the last issue of *Hayahad*. Referring to a conference which gathered 135 “Hebrew believers” at the Baptist Village the editor says, “It was not too many years ago when the number of Jewish Christians or Hebrew Believers could have literally been counted on two hands.” This is an understatement with a vengeance. It creates in the reader the impression of an enormous growth. The growth of the 80’s is compared to “not too many years ago”. It would have taken extremely large hands in the 60’s or the 70’s - and unnaturally many fingers - to count the JBJ of the 60’s or the 70’s in Israel “on two hands” ... “literally”!

And another not unimportant factor which is connected with communication and language:

*Terminology can be deceitful.* A terminology is sometimes used which, objectively, can be defended but which can nevertheless very easily be misunderstood by the reader. There is an example of this in MAC’s *Freedom Report* (No. 53, October 1998). A section is called *Demographic profile of Messianic believers in Israel*. Looking at that headline your first thought is probably that this is about Messianic *Jewish* believers in Israel. But those who read the section carefully realize that the term *Messianic believers in Israel* is used about Jews *and* Gentiles (= “born-again Christians of non-Jewish descent...”). It is also not quite clear if Arabs (Evangelicals) are included in MAC’s profile, which is quite possible. When JBJ are specifically meant, these are referred to as “Messianic Jews” or “New Testament believers of Jewish lineage”. In other words: the figures stated in MAC’s demographic profile of Messianic believers in Israel include non-Jewish believers. It needs to be said that in some of the statements of the number of believers within the Messianic Movement in Israel it is often said that the congregation consists of Jews and non-Jews.

Well, *everybody* speaks about the growth of the Messianic *Jewish* Movement in Israel today. Also the antimission organisations! And let it be quite clear: growth has taken place - and a considerable growth in terms of percentage. The question is whether this can be stated more precisely. We think - to some degree - it is possible. But to do that we must make a detour and first take a view of the development from 1948 and until today.

Now that we are ready to compare figures from the past with our figures, we are however facing a further problem: figures from the past often relate to the number of Messianic Jews in Israel, whereas we are talking about the number of Messianic Jews who have a *permanent* affiliation to a Messianic congregation, are “members” or belong to “the core group”. Consequently, our figures must be smaller. *If* our figures relating to JBJ who have a *permanent* affiliation to a congregation are correct, and *if* it may be shown that the number of JBJ is somewhat higher than the one we have reached - then the Messianic Community in Israel has a problem. Or perhaps one should call it a *challenge*.

For we believe that it is a mistake to be a believer without a permanent affiliation to a congregation. *Normal* believers are believers in a fellowship with other believers.

### **The Mishkan survey 1998-1999**

In our survey of the *Messianic Movement in Israel* we are also trying to estimate its numerical size. Naturally, the Messianic Movement has also believing non-Jews. We do *not* call them Messianic Believers because this term can easily be misunderstood (cf. the remarks above on MAC's demographic profile). We endeavour to use words about these believers which cannot be misunderstood, such as Gentiles or non-Jews. And we call *Messianic Jews* Jewish believers in Jesus (JBJ).

We have encountered some astonishment - and criticism - simply for having divided the congregation into categories of people. Some have maintained that in doing this we create an unbiblical and theologically unsound division. The congregation made up of Jews and non-Jews/Gentiles is *one*. We fully agree about this. The division is not made for theological but for statistical and missiological reasons. This makes it possible, on the basis of information supplied by the leadership of the congregations, to ascertain how many JBJ's there are in the *congregations* in Israel. These figures can perhaps also be used externally and apologetically, for example in connection with the antimission legislation which some religious parties in Israel are campaigning for.

If the overall number of JBJ in the Messianic congregations is larger than assumed there is every reason to rejoice and to continue working along the same lines as before. If the figure is smaller - even considerably smaller - it may be used in an internal analysis of the situation. It is a sad thing if your joy rests on numerical myths. It is equally sad if you cannot rejoice in realistic figures - however small they might be.

We are also trying to form a general view of the share of the Russian Jews in the Messianic Movement. In that way it becomes possible to get an idea of the size of the increase of local Israeli Jews within the latest decade.

Well, the conclusions drawn from the figures are *ours*, but the figures are *theirs*! We have got them from the *leadership* in the congregations. There are seven or eight congregations which have not wanted to be interviewed. In these cases the figures are *our* estimate. And when it comes to the *Jewish* persons in these congregations, I am sure we have overestimated rather underestimated the number.

It is our opinion that the figures supplied by the leaderships are generally realistic. Some have been sitting with their membership lists or telephone directory lists in front of them. It is not our impression that the leaderships have underestimated the number of *Jewish* believers. A few Russian congregations give numbers of *Jewish* believers which are surprisingly high compared to other Russian congregations with a non-Jewish percentage of 40-50. In such cases we have nevertheless taken these leaders' figures.

Please note that we are not pronouncing on how many Jews in Israel believe in Jesus but on how many are affiliated to at church, a congregation, a fellowship, a housegroup or a homegroup.

These designations are rather vague and are used differently. We cannot give a definition of a congregation which covers everybody's understanding in the Messianic *Jewish* Movement. When a group used the self-designation *congregation*, we accepted that implicitly. The majority - perhaps even 85% - of the approximately 80 "groups" we cover in our survey defined themselves as a congregation.

The designation *homegroup* is in *our* terminology identical with a cell-group. These people are counted as members of their congregation or fellowship. A homegroup may also call itself a housegroup or a fellowship.

A *housegroup* is in *our* terminology an independent group or a fellowship which

does not define itself as a congregation/church but which often works at becoming one.

A group which describes itself as a *fellowship* may either be a housegroup or a congregation or a homegroup.

A congregation may refer to itself as a church or an assembly etc.

It is not the *place* which determines the self-designation of the “group”. A homegroup may come together on the premises of a church! Nor is it necessarily the number of persons which makes the difference. In our survey we have examples of homegroups and housegroups which are numerically larger than the smallest congregation. Some of the new “groups” do not seem to be motivated by theological reflection when they begin to call themselves a congregation. Often they do so when they grow - and are able to find a leader!

Of course homegroups are often situated in the geographical vicinity of their congregation, but not always. A congregation in the Haifa area may have homegroups in the Tel Aviv area.

If the Messianic Jewish Movement should run out of subjects for theological reflection, the question of what constitutes a congregation/church would be an obvious topic!

Back to figures and people.

In terms of figures this survey is trying to give a general idea of what persons are regarded as members or part of the congregation’s “core group”.

1. The number of persons - adults and children.
2. Definition of *adult*: the following four categories are applied:
  - a. Jewish
  - b. Non-Jewish but married to a Jew
  - c. Non-Jewish but with Israeli citizenship (Arabs/Palestinians included)
  - d. Non-Jews and without Israeli citizenship
3. Attendance: adults and children.

A few specifications and uncertain factors need to be mentioned. The count would have been easier if membership had been defined on the basis of whether or not a person was baptized. This is also the way they count in some congregations. But in other congregations it is different. In some congregations they refuse to speak about membership at all. And in others baptism is not a requirement for membership. In those congregations they speak about a core-group. Regular attendance, faith, faithfulness, involvement, a common vision and the like are criteria for being included in the core-group. In other words: if the congregations which link together membership and baptism - or even membership and agreement to a statement of faith - had used the same criteria as the congregations which operate with a core-group, the total number of Jewish believers might be increased by ... well, a few hundred.

The division in the four categories has caused some leaders trouble - and not only because some feel that we are creating an unbiblical division of the congregation. Some have claimed that they are not in possession of sufficient personal knowledge of the “members” of the congregation to be able to make this division. Only a few have flatly refused to respond. Sometimes we have been given an approximate figure, e.g. 15 or 20. In such cases we have taken an average, 18. So when the survey gives very precise figures, these may sometimes be more precise than those given by the leaderships. However, we do not think this has a marked influence of the result of the survey.

A few more comments on the division in the four categories:

Re 1: The survey gives no answer as to how many of the children are Jewish.

However, we operate with a category called a *Jewish/Israeli household*. The definition of

this is a family with at least one Jewish parent. This gives a general idea of how many *persons* - adults and children - live in what they themselves see as an Israeli/Jewish cultural context. It is our impression that 80 or 90% of the total number of children have a least one Jewish parent. On that premise we offer two estimates of the number of persons in the Jewish/Israeli household or “family”.

Re 2a: The definition of who is considered a Jew is broader than that of the Halacha: born of a Jewish mother. In this survey we also regard as Jewish those who have come to Eretz Israel under The Law of Return, which only requires that one grandparent is Jewish. That does not mean that they are Jewish according to the Halachah. So the survey does not specify how many of the JBJ are Jews in the halachic sense. If that were the case, we should probably have to deduct, well ... hundreds.

Re 2b: The category “non-Jew but married to a Jew makes” makes it possible to determine the intermarriage rate among JBJ in Israel. The survey does not specify the number of men and women in this category. Therefore we do not pronounce on the children’s identity as Jewish or non-Jewish - in the halachic sense (cf. re 1 above).

Re 2c: In this group we find Gentiles who have achieved Israeli citizenship and Arab/Palestinians who are worshipping in the congregations.

Re 2d: This group includes expatriates some of whom may have lived in the country for a considerable period of time, e.g. staff in expatriate organisations, missions, churches etc. Also students and others briefly staying in the country - and guest workers - appear in this group.

Re 3: The attendance number is given as an average for the weekly main service and under *normal* circumstances. If a congregation a few times a year is visited by a busload of foreign tourists these are not included. In some of the major congregations - particularly in the big cities and especially in Jerusalem - it is a *normal* thing to have visits from tourists or from people who are staying briefly in Israel. These are included in the total of attendance.

So, with all these reservations in mind: how many “members” or how big is the core-group of JBJ in Messianic congregations in Israel? And how many of the adults are Jews? And how big is the intermarriage rate? And ...

Before we get as far as that, let us take a glance at the development from 1948 to 1999 and see what was said earlier and what is said today.

### **From half a dozen to 6000-7000 Messianic *Jewish* believers in Israel?**

#### *Points of departure in 1948*

On the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 it is safe to say that there were few *Jewish* believers in Jesus in Israel. But it is difficult to ascertain how many those few were. In connection with Operation Mercy/Grace in May 1948 approximately 80 “Hebrew Christians” were, for security reasons, evacuated to Liverpool, England (*Gershon Nerel*, Dissertation: ‘Messianic Jews’ in Eretz-Israel (1917-1967). Trends and Changes in Shaping Self-Identity, 1996, English summary, 1996: xi).

In the period 1993-1996 there are slight differences in the information Gershon Nerel gives for the numbers of JBJ in Mandatory Palestine and the number of those who remained in Israel:

1. In 1993 he says that the number of JBJ in Mandatory Palestine about 1948: “... approximately a group of no more than one hundred persons” (*The Messianic Jew (and Hebrew Christians)* 1993/3:77).<sup>1</sup> About JBJ who remained after the foundation of the State

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<sup>1</sup> *Note:* Gershon Nerel claims that the number of JBJ in Mandatory Palestine numbered

of Israel Nerel says: “ Yet, less than half-a-dozen of these Messianic Jewish families - out of strong Biblical Zionist consciousness - decided to remain in the Land” (*idem*).

2. In his dissertation Nerel says: “However, not all JBJ left the country then. About half a dozen remained. He goes on to mention the names of 5 *leaders*. - Here the number has been reduced compared to the mentioned half-a-dozen *families* (cf. above).

3. “About a dozen remained ... “ and again the 5 *leaders* are mentioned by name (*Mishkan* 1998/28:44)

4. “... about three dozen, who did remain in the Land ...” (*Mishkan* 1998/29:52)

So there are some differences in Gershon Nerel’s information about the number of *persons* who remained in Israel after May 1948, and he may have underestimated the number of JBJ. Kelvin Crombie seems to believe that rather more JBJ remained in Israel (*Mishkan* 1994/20: 24-25). About CMJ’s Hebrew Christian staff Crombie says that they remained. Magne Solheim, who served as minister in the Lutheran church in Haifa from 1950, says that there were “a few dozens” (*Magne Solheim*: Nybrott 1986: xxx).

Our point of departure is that the number of JBJ at the foundation of the State of Israel in May 1948 was less than 100 *persons* (adults and children). However, we would not be surprised if minute research should arrive at a larger number. The question of these JBJ and their possible affiliation to congregations will not be dealt with here. Just as we are not going to deal with how many Jews who came to Israel as *believers* and were subsequently assimilated (sic) and lost all contact with other JBJ - or to put it bluntly: lost the faith. It is our impression that this may be a considerable number and larger than one would like to believe. Something similar can probably be said about the 1990’s in Israel.

At any rate, it seems to have been a tiny group of JBJ who remained in Israel after May 1948. But it soon increased, as we shall now see.

### **From 1948 to the end of the 60’s**

#### *Figures of Jewish Believers in Jesus (JBJ)*

As early as December 1950 the number of JBJ has increased considerably compared to May 1948. The increase is mainly due to the immigration of Hebrew Christians from Central and Eastern Europe (H. Samuel: *Misjonsblad for Israel* no. 123, 1952: 33-34. P. Østerbye, *The Church in Israel*, 1970:169. O.C.M. Kvarme: *The Development of Hebrew Christianity...* in D.-M. A. Jaeger (ed.), *Papers Read at the 1979 Tantur Conference on Christianity in the Holy Land*, Jerusalem 1981, pp. 318-319); partly reprinted in *Mishkan*, 1998/28:55-70. G. Nerel in *Mishkan* 1998/29:53-53).

Still it is difficult to count although - or perhaps because - one is contemporary. A few examples of this:

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approximate 250 *persons* (Dissertation, English Summary: p. i). It is not clear how 250 minus approximately 80 *persons* can result in the mentioned “dozens”. We have not checked if there are some calculations which explain this.

1. The first general conference for Messianic Jews in the State of Israel, December 8-9, 1950 gathered ... well, how many? Moishe Immanuel Ben-Meir, a well-known JBJ, mentions 200 Jewish Jesus-believers. Ze'ev Kofsman, one of the founders of the Messianic Assembly in Jerusalem in 1969, says that there were about 60 participants only, and the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Chadashot* (21 December 1950) states there were 90 persons, among them 10 non-Jews (source: Østerbye p. 169; Nerel in *Mishkan* 29/1998:57-58).

These figures do not include children. Of course not, children do not participate in conferences. It is also safe to assume that some spouses of the participants did not attend either. And it may also be assumed that not all JBJ in Israel participated. In other words, if we presume that approximately 70 *adults* attended this conference, a fair estimate would be that in 1950 there were more than 100 *adults* and perhaps 70-100 *children*, consequently approximately 200 *persons*. If this conjecture is correct, it seems to show a considerable growth compared to May 1948. As already mentioned, the growth is primarily due to immigration, not evangelisation.

2. At the end of January 1954 there was a meeting in Jerusalem called by Max Enker, who was then a representative of IHCA. The meeting was an attempt to organize Hebrew Christians in Israel (Østerbye, *The Church ...* 1970:169). How many participated? *Der Zeuge*, IHCA's German-language publication, writes 200 Jews (*Der Zeuge*, no. 12, June 1954:3). *News Sheet* (XXIV, 1 April 1954:19) says 140 (cf. Østerbye 1970:169). Gershon Nerel with support in Ben-Meir's notes says there were about 100 JBJ (*Mishkan* 1998/29:59).

Again: Children did not participate and not all JBJ in Israel participated. The number of JBJ in Israel has increased compared to December 1950. A conservative guess is not quite 200 *adults* plus approximately 100 *children*. The number may have been larger.

A Jewish source, Chaim Wardi (affiliated to the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs) claims in 1960 that there is "a tiny group of 'Hebrew Christians' ... some 300 strong, who try to create a Hebrew form of Christian worship and thus revert to the condition of the ancient Judaeo-Christian Community, which had been condemned and eliminated by the ancient Church Universal more than fifteen centuries ago." (*Judaica*, 1960:228). It is not clear whether he speaks about Catholic *and* Protestant "Hebrew Christians", even if it is likely that he is referring to the latter group. It is also not clear whether he includes children. By and large it is not clear what criteria Wardi used to arrive at this figure.

Menahem Benhayim says about the number of Messianic believers in 1963, the year when he and Haya made *aliyah* to Israel: "In 1963 we were about 100 Messianic Jews - perhaps 200 - in all Israel. Most were Holocaust survivors ... (*The Messianic Jew (and Hebrew Christian)*, 1993/2, vol. LXVI:51). Benhayim is probably talking about *adults*.

In 1989 Jim Sibley writes about the number of Jewish believers in 1965 - although he does not quote any source: "... no more than 300 Jewish believers in 1965" (*Mishkan* 10, 1/1989:24). It is not clear whether children are included. Gershon Nerel says about the number of JBJ for the year 1967: "... roughly 500 around 1967" (Dissertation, English summary, p. i). Children are probably included.

*Number of congregations and groups in the 1950-1969.*

Appendix 1

### **Figures in the 1970's**

*Figures of Jewish Believers in Jesus (JBJ)*

In 1976 Baruch Maoz writes: "The total number of Hebrew Christians in Israel does not exceed the figure 1,000 and even that number seems to be somewhat exaggerated" (*The*

*Banner of Trust, Issue 150, March 1976:25*). It does not appear whether children are included in this figure. About the number of indigenous local churches among the Jews in Israel he says that it “does not exceed the total of seven ...” (*idem*).

About figures and congregations in Israel in 1978 Ole Chr. M. Kvarme, who was then minister of the Lutheran church in Haifa, says the following: (Kai Kjær-Hansen & Ole Chr. Kvarme: *Messianske jøder*, Danish edition 1979: 27-28) Some say 400, others maybe 2,000 (p.28). It is said that the figure does not exceed 1,000 (p.27). These 1000 are divided between 700-800 Protestant and 200-300 Catholic Christian Jews. Both figures include *baptized* members and their children.

A hand-written note (dated 15 July 1977) relating to Kvarme’s estimate lists 21 groups with a total of 610 *persons* (Shlomo Hizak’s group in the centre on the Mount of Olives is included, but no figure is stated). Retrospectively a number of these figures may be called in question; the correct figure might as well be 500-600 *persons*, 150 of them possibly *children*, which would mean 350-450 *adults*. .

An even lower figure is given by the organisation Jews for Jesus, USA, based on a survey which we have not (yet) had an opportunity to see (cf. *Evangelical Press Service*, quoted by L.G. Terray in *Misjonsblad for Israel* 1977/3:3). This survey mentions 200 “Christian Jews in Israel”. (It is not known by us whether children are included). The figure is challenged by L.G. Terray, then secretary general of Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel, who claims that this is what may be found in the two towns of Haifa and Tel Aviv.

*The number of congregations and groups in the 1970’s*  
Appendix 1

### **Figures in the 1980's**

*Figures of Jewish Believers in Jesus (JBJ)*

In a revised estimate for May 1980 Kvarme states the figure to be approximately 1,100 “Protestants” (plus 300 Catholics and 50 Orthodox) (*The Development*, 1981: 340 n. 13 = *Mishkan* 1998/28: 55). It is not said how many of these are *adults* and how many are *children*, but the method of calculation is presumably the same as in 1978.

In the course of the 1980’s the number of JBJ increases considerably - at least in the information about this. Baruch Maoz suggests in 1986 that “there are some 3,000 Jewish Christians who are not registered as such in any public registry” (*The Gospel Scene in Israel* [1986]:3). Maoz fixes the most conservative figures at 2000-2500. It is not said explicitly whether *children* are included but they probably are.

This estimate is by some seen as too high.

In 1986 Anne Dexter writes: “Estimates range from four-hundred to five thousand. Some recent calculations that may well be more accurate than most settled on one-thousand-five-hundred. This figure will be quickly out of date ...” and refers to the many baptisms (*View the Land*, 1986:66).

In a survey which we only know from a reference to it in 1988 (cf. Jim Sibley in *Mishkan* 1988/10:38, n. 4), Hannan Weisman fixes the number of Jewish believers at 1900.

Torleif Elgvin comes, in 1988, to an even smaller figure of *Jewish* believers with a *permanent* affiliation to a Messianic congregation (*Torleif Elgvin, Den messianske bevegelse i Israel*, in: *Israel 40 år* (ed. Niels Jacob Tønnesen), 1988, pp. 109-110). He says that it is usual to talk about 2000 or 3000 Messianic Jews. The core of the 29 congregations which he knows of consists of 1100 or 1200 people. If - says he - half of these are Gentile Christians, then there are 600 Jewish believers with a *permanent* affiliation to a Messianic congregation.

Add to this 100 who attend Gentile Christian congregations. He nevertheless thinks that there are many without this permanent affiliation and speaks about 1500 to 2000 plus anonymous believers.

Joseph Shulam says in an interview to Swedish students in 1986 that the number of Messianic Jews in Israel hardly exceeds 1,000 (*Swedish students' extended essay* 1986:48), while Menahem Benhayim in the same survey says "between 1,000 and 2,000".

In 1989, May 30, Baruch Maoz and Avner Boskey touch on the question in an *LCJE News Release* - signed by Maoz. The figure 3000 is maintained but with an important modification. Of the approximately 3000 persons who belong to the some 30 congregations, churches and house groups some 60% are both Jewish and Israeli. In other words, the number of *Jewish believers* is closer to 1800 than 3000.

At LCWE's Meeting in Manila, July 1989, Boskey says,

"Christians outside of Israel are often thrilled to hear of the large numbers of 'secret believers' in Israel (one report speaks of 100.000!). Most insiders agree that their number is too small to be significant. We have no accurate statistics even concerning the number of Israelis attending regular Christian meetings in Israel. I estimate it around 1000, Baruch [Maoz] thinks 2000! There are of course many short-term expatriate Gentile believers also" (*LCJE Bulletin* 18/1989:16). It is not explicitly whether *children* are included in the figure.

#### *Antallet af Congregations and groups in 1970's* Appendix 1

#### **Figures in the 1990's**

In 1990 Avner Boskey elaborates on his figures in an interview (*The Messianic Times*, June 1990:1-2): "Between 700 and 1000 Jewish believers in Yeshua ha Mashiach meet weekly with another 1000 attending occasionally ... There are another 1000 to 2000 Hebrew speaking Gentiles."

Menahem Benhayim (in Ben Hoekendijk, *Twelve Jews discover Messiah*, 1992:100): "We have grown in number. It is difficult to state how many Messianic Jews there are in the country, because most congregations are mixed. In some groups only half, or less, of the members are real Jews. At a careful guess, there are 1,500 spread across some 30 to 33 congregations. But God never looks at numbers ..."

I 1995 Gary Denlinger writes (*LCJE Jerusalem* 95: 92): "Despite that great increase the total number of Messianic Jews probably still stands at fewer than 5000. No formal census has ever been taken, so estimates vary greatly."

Bodil F. Skjøtt (*Mishkan* 23:35-38) also knows the figure 5,000 for 1995, but mentions that many regard it as too optimistic. She estimates that children often make up more than 25 percent of this figure and says about the members of the approximately 40 congregations: "Most would feel more comfortable with a figure between 3000 and 4000."

Joe Shulam writes in 1996 (*Teaching from Zion, Vol 7, 1996:6*): "There are in Israel, a few thousand Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah of whom the prophets spoke."

Baruch Maoz estimates in 1998 (*Mishkan* 29:6) that there are 5000-6000 (Jewish Christians, their spouses and children) (plus Jewish Catholics). Approximately 50 Hebrew-speaking congregations + 50 house groups, 23 Russian-speaking congregations and 7 Amharic-speaking congregations.

Stan Telchin (*Abandoned* 1997, p. 255) who bases his figures on information from Baruch Maoz says "that the approximate number of messianic believers with their families is more than six thousand."

Menahem Benhayim (*Mishkan 1998/ 28:29*) says in 1998: “Some 80 congregations and house fellowship are scattered throughout the land of Israel. Estimates vary between 3000 and 5000 believers in number, including gentiles who identify with the Messianic Jewish movement.”

MAC (*Freedom Report* No. 51, August 17, 1998): “The Messianic Community in Israel consists of only an estimated 6,000.”

MAC (*Freedom Report* No. 53, October 1998): “Numerical estimates of the number of Messianic believers in Israel range from 5,000 to 7,000 individuals. A mid-range figure of 6,000 would be the most agreed-upon.”

*Number of congregations and groups in the 1990's*  
Appendix 1.

Well. It is not quite easy to make out how many JBJ there are in Israel. It takes a good deal of concentration to work out what figure is used about *whom*.

But here are our findings. Although they are tentative, the tendency is nevertheless clear. Allow for a 10 percent margin. We are not giving you the result in written form, and we count on your understanding when we say that *we* would like to publish this in due time.

## **Appendix 1: A tentative estimate of the number of congregations and groups 1948-1999**

### ***Number of congregations and groups 1950-1969***

In the 1950's there were fellowships and groups led by a number of JBJ. Besides those there were expatriate works for Jews. It would not be surprising if further investigation should show that in Israel at the end of the 1950's there were at least 20 churches, congregations and groups where JBJ would worship.

In the 1960's the number of congregations and groups hardly changes.

The following congregations have all shown a certain degree of continuity from the 1950's and 1960's and till the present - although most of them now have a different status.

|                                                                         |   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Haimhoff/Bar-David, Ramat Gan (Tel Aviv)                                | 1 |
| Kofsman, Goren, Smadja The Messianic Assembly, Jerusalem                | 1 |
| Out of the group around Ben-Meir grew Netivyah (Roeh Israel, Jerusalem) | 1 |
| Solomon Ostrovsky: Brethren, Yaffo                                      | 1 |
| <br>                                                                    |   |
| The three Lutheran congregations in Jerusalem, Haifa and Yaffo          | 3 |
| Beersheva                                                               | 1 |
| Bethesda, Haifa                                                         | 1 |
| Baptists???                                                             | 1 |

### ***Number of congregations and groups in the 1970's***

*Baruch Maoz (1975)*

|                                                                     |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| ...seven indigenous local churches                                  | 7 |
| denominational and mission-based churches (number is not disclosed) | ? |

*Kvarme (1979):*

Among the Protestant denominational Churches:

|                                                         |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Anglicans (1), Lutherans (3) and Baptists (4)           | 7          |
| Messianic Assemblies                                    | 4          |
| Private and "semi-official" groups                      | (about) 25 |
| <i>Kvarme: Total number of congregations and groups</i> | 38         |

### ***Number of congregations and groups in the 1980's***

*Ole Chr. M. Kvarme (list; May 1980)*

|                                                   |    |
|---------------------------------------------------|----|
| [Kvarme lists by name 34 congregations and groups | 34 |
|---------------------------------------------------|----|

*Torleif Elgvin (1989)*

|                                                                                        |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| We estimate that there are 29 mainly Hebrew-language Messianic congregations in Israel | 29 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|

*Baruch Maoz (LCJE Israel News Release No. 1, May 30 1989)*

|                                                                                                                                      |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| .. In Israel there are some 30 congregations, churches and house groups<br>[sic] Jewish Christians, scattered around the country ... | 30 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|

### ***Number of congregations and groups in the 1990's***

*Avner Boskey (Interview: 1990)*

... 30 growing Messianic Jewish congregations are alive and well in Israel ...

*Caspari Center (list September 1992)*

[Some 30 congregations and home groups are listed by name]

*Menahem Benhayim (1992)*

...some 30 to 33 congregations...

*Bodil F. Skjøtt (1995)*

.... approximately 40 congregations ...

*Menahem Benhayim (1997)*

... some 80 congregations and house fellowship are scattered throughout the land of Israel...

*Messianic Action Committee, MAC (October 1998)*

... There are 53 congregations and approximately 70 independent home groups.

*Baruch Maoz (Interview December 1998):*

51 Hebrew speaking congregations

53 Hebrew speaking house groups

23 Russian speaking congregations

7 Amharic speaking congregations