

Mission and Evangelization in Israel 1948-1998

Editorial

When this issue reaches the readers, the festivities surrounding the golden jubilee, or 50-year anniversary, of the establishment of the state of Israel will be in full swing. *Mishkan* celebrates this jubilee by focusing on the mission of the Christian Church and on the conditions of Messianic Jews in Israel from 1948 to the present.

On April 1 of this year, less than one month before the starting signal was given for the official celebration of Israel's jubilee, Knesset Member (MK) Nissim Zvilli withdrew his support of the so-called antimission bill that he and MK Rabbi Moshe Gafni had framed more than a year ago. This occurred in exchange for a statement made by approximately 50 Christian groups in Israel "to eschew evangelism," according to local and international media.

It is not quite clear how the Christian groups with whom the deal was made themselves construe this agreement. But this need not concern us here. The important thing is that Messianic Jews, along with foreign organizations whose ministry is to reach the Jewish people with the gospel, have made no such pact.

In Anti Freedom Legislation — Report No. 46, April 1998, the Messianic Action Committee (MAC), which has been battling on the front line against this legislation, writes this about the end of the affair for MK Zvilli:

This statement affirmed the state of Israel and disavowed unethical evangelism in any form, but because it did not include a clear reference to the legitimacy of evangelism as such, nor to the importance of freedom of speech — the very issue at stake — the whole Messianic community and most of the Evangelical Protestant churches (which are organizations represented by the United Christian Council in Israel [UCCI] declined to support the statement. Among these are the Evangelical Lutherans, the Southern Baptists, the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel, the Church of England, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

... The Messianic Action Committee (MAC) initially agreed to the idea of a statement, but withdrew its support once it became clear that the statement would not include a clear avowal to "proclaim" its faith. The UCCI withdrew for the same reason and at the request of the MAC. No Messianic congregation or organization in the land endorsed the statement, and no Protestant Evangelical church in Israel did so.

Nevertheless, MK Zvilli, who had been under substantial pressure from overseas and within Israel, withdrew support of his own bill and promised to oppose any further efforts to restrict freedom of religious expression in Israel. He also promised to actively oppose his own bill.

It is important to understand that MK Zvilli's withdrawal does not mean the demise of the bill itself. MK Rabbi Moshe Gafni continues to contend for it.

Moshe Gafni is not alone in doing so. That there are others became clear when MK Raphael Pinhasi on May 20 submitted to the Knesset a private member's bill which would outlaw all forms of "preaching with a view to changing another's religion." The bill calls for a penalty of three years imprisonment or a fine of 50,000 shekels (about \$14,000). Prime Minister Benyamin

Netanyahu, in spite of many former obligations to the contrary, voted in favor of the bill, along with his coalition government.

It is perhaps difficult to imagine that the Knesset will indeed pass the bill. But the Messianic Action Committee nevertheless regards this new development very seriously and encourages Christians all over the world to send letters of protest to the Israeli embassy in their country.

Considering the protest already submitted and Netanyahu's previous promises, it is indeed surprising that he voted for the bill.

We at *Mishkan* are eager to see the defeat of this bill and anxious to congratulate the state of Israel for 50 years of democracy and religious freedom. We are now reticent to do so, but in the hope we may soon extend our congratulations, *Mishkan* has called for several articles recounting the story of the gospel's impact in the years leading up to and since the founding of the state. In this issue we have asked Menachem Benhayim, former Israel Secretary for the International Hebrew Christian Alliance (IHCA) to give his personal perspective on developments in Israel among Messianic Jews. His story begins in the early 1960s when he and his wife, Haya, came to Israel.

We have also asked Gershon Nerel, the present Israel secretary for the International Messianic Jewish (Hebrew Christian) Alliance (IMJ[HC]A) to deal with different attempts to establish a Messianic Jewish Church. This issue features part one of that effort as Nerel describes church-planting undertakings beginning at the turn of this century. In a future *Mishkan* Nerel will take us to contemporary times. Note the change of the initials of the International Alliance (from IHCA to IMJ[HC]A). This is indicative not only of the development inside this movement, but also of the Messianic movement worldwide in the past century.

In this issue we go back in time and even venture to print three contributions written back in time in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. If the three authors of those articles, Per "sterbye, Ole Chr. M. Kvarme and Baruch Maoz, had been given the opportunity to express their views in retrospect, they would probably have made changes here and there in their texts. But they have not had this opportunity. Consequently their contributions appear as primary sources to the thinking in the latter years of each of those decades. The only changes made here are the annotation of their manuscripts and corrections of obvious misprints.

Perfection belongs to *ha'olam haba* and imperfection to this world. And in the world to come — in *ha'olam haba* — there will be no need of extra proofreaders, no need for mission or and no need for evangelization. Mission and evangelization belong to this world. Indeed, they do not merely "belong" to this world. And we — Messianic Jews as well as Christians — have an obligation to see them done.

For the gospel came from the Jewish people and was intended for the Jews first. Fifty years of Jewish statehood has provided opportunities to share the gospel, the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes! The crucified and risen Jesus is alive and works among the people of Israel today as his word goes out — and no anti-missionary law can arrest it.

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