

Kol HaYeshua and Other Voices

Editorial

In this issue of *Mishkan* we continue our focus on the Messianic movement in Israel in the years 1948-1998 in order to commemorate the state of Israel's 50 year jubilee. As the story is being told it does indeed give reasons to celebrate.

But there is another event worthy of note. Since the last issue of *Mishkan* the Hebrew Messianic Jewish radio program Kol HaYeshua has been launched in Israel. We want to welcome this initiative to reach even farther with the gospel to Jewish Israelis. In an article published in LCJE Bulletin (November 1998) Joan Cooper from Trans World Radio, which is behind the project, says about the new radio program:

The piercing sound of the shofar introduces a unique radio program with a fascinating history. Kol HaYeshua-Voice of Salvation- launched on 1 August 1998, is a joint effort of Messianic Jews in Israel and European and North American Gentile Christians. Produced in Israel, the daily 30-minute Hebrew program is aired by missionary broadcaster Trans World Radio from a powerful medium wave (AM) transmitter in Central Asia. The signal from this transmitter covers the entire nation of Israel, as well as surrounding areas.

It is the responsibility of Messianic Jewish leaders in Israel to find speakers and others who can follow up on the work in Israel and be advisers and councilors for the listeners who respond to the programs aired. Trans World Radio is responsible for the technical part of the transmissions and will also find sponsors for this new project.

Regarding the history of the project, Cooper explains:

TWR has a rich history of broadcasting to the complex, volatile, yet intriguing, Middle East. The first Hebrew broadcasts went on the air in 1966. There were other efforts on and off through the years, most of them broadcast by shortwave and with little or no response from Israel itself. The last Hebrew shortwave transmissions to Israel were discontinued in March 1996 because independent research had shown a sharply declining use of shortwave receivers, except by Russian — and English-speaking immigrants. Additional research, on the other hand, had revealed that a significant number of Israelis tune in daily to medium wave (AM) radio.

Thus, a year before the shortwave broadcasts would end, Trans World Radio and Messianic groups began exploring ways to work together to produce and air a nightly program on an AM band that would cover the whole country of Israel with a strong signal.

While the Messianic Jews in Israel looked for speakers and follow-up personnel, TWR began modifying the transmitter in Central Asia to reach and cover Israel, and sought sponsorship for the new Hebrew ministry. Three years later — on August 1, 1998 — the result of this joint effort, Kol HaYeshua, broadcasted onto the airwaves. It can be heard across Israel nightly at 10 p.m. (Israeli time) on the frequency 1350 kHz.

Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry, a Messianic organization in Jerusalem directed by Joseph Shulam, oversees the production of Kol HaYeshua. Speakers for this unique initiative are Messianic Jewish leaders who display a passion to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to fellow Israelis in

a culturally relevant and engaging manner. Various Israeli Messianic Jewish leaders and artists contribute messages and music. Scripts radiate Israeli Jewish culture.

Since the last issue of *Mishkan*, several articles have been printed in Israeli newspapers and magazines both about and against the Messianic believers in the country. Much has changed in Israel in the last 25 years, but the rhetoric of the antimission organizations remains static. Jesus-believing Jews are still being described as “desecrators of the covenant” who “stop at nothing in order to trap innocent Jews in the missions net.” “The method they use to missionize is the distribution of missionary books, journals and articles that are clearly anti-Semitic in content, and that slander religious and Orthodox Jews unceasingly.”¹

One wishes that these voices would prove their accusations. Presently, these accusations are made — especially in parts of the orthodox press — but the accused have no means to defend themselves. However, readers who wish to stay informed but do not have easy access to the Israeli Hebrew press can do so by subscribing to Caspari Center Media Review. It is mailed out regularly and contains — in English translation — the important news clippings from the Israeli press about the Messianic movement and how it is perceived by others, especially in orthodox Israeli society. This media coverage is part of the history of the Jesus-believing community in Israel and has (for better or worse) helped shape its identity and influence its activities.

And here we return to this issue of *Mishkan* and our desire to tell the story of the ups and downs of the Messianic movement in Israel over the last 50 years. “Hope is best made real when the facts are considered fairly and squarely,” Baruch Maoz concludes in his introductory article on “Jewish Christian Paradigms in Israel.” In an open and honest article Baruch Moaz considers the scene of the Messianic (or the Jewish-Christian as he prefers) movement in Israel under different headings, such as paradigms of Christ and the Trinity, doctrine of salvation, the local church and the Church, Israel and eschatology. Sound theological and biblical foundations are required to find a balance between negativism on the one side and unrealistic idealism on the other regarding the young movement in Israel. Maoz’ article aids in the search for that balance.

The two articles by Torleif Elgvin and Torkild Masvie both take a look at worship within the Hebrew-speaking congregations. Masvie addresses the question of the place of liturgy whereas Elgvin’s article analyzes more closely the theology of worship and the songs used by the congregations. Elgvin challenges the Messianic movement by saying: “Messianic worship as well as Messianic theology in general must navigate between the dangers of the Scylla and Charybdis of respectively Jewish and Christian tradition.” In another article Lisa Loden brings an overview of “the new song” intoned by believers in Israel — a song that both she and her husband have vocalized and been instrumental in creating.

Bible translation and distribution are essential parts of mission and congregation building. This has been true also for the work in Israel and this story is told in an article by Ray Pritz. Gershon Nerel concludes his contribution from last issue on “Attempts to Establish a ‘Messianic Jewish Church’ in Israel.” As the article shows, several attempts have been made in our century. The future will record if mere attempts continue or if these come to fruition with leaders and groups forming a Messianic Jewish Church in Israel — with the accompanying advantages and

¹ Ha’Modia, 26 August 1998.

disadvantages.

Lisa Loden has also contributed an article on “The Catholic Jewish Community in Israel.” The story of Jewish believers in the country would be incomplete without this group. Much more could be said about this sizable movement in Israel but if nothing more the article gives an introductory look at Jews who have become Catholics and who continue to value their Jewish heritage and identify themselves as Jews. David Smith, linguistic editor at *Mishkan*, wrote an article outlining 50 years of missionary-national relations. Through a series of quotes from both missionaries and nationals he details the trials and resolutions of that 50-year history and concludes by suggesting several areas in which cooperation needs to increase.

We hope that these articles will clarify our understanding of where the Messianic movement is at right now. Hopefully, they can also initiate critical reflection. Self-contentment does not often create anything new. But self-reflection can help the Messianic movement develop and progress. We are convinced that healthy dialogue and expression of differing opinions within and about the Messianic movement will only increase this reflection.

On 16 August 1998, *Rosh Ecah*, printed a extensive article on “The Jesus cult” — whatever that is. The author of the article, S. Shakhak says, “We are not talking about a passing fad. The first congregations of the Jesus cult in Israel began about 15 years ago and today they are found throughout the country, about 60 congregations of Jesus Believers with approximately 25,000 followers.”

Shakhak is incorrect when he says that the first congregation began about 15 years ago. But he is accurate when proclaiming that it is not a passing fad. And it would be great if he were also right when he postulates that the movement has about 25,000 followers.

In the upcoming issue of *Mishkan* we hope to publish a survey based on interviews with leaders of all the Messianic congregations and house groups known to us. Based on that we will also be in a position to address more precisely the question of numbers. But even now, when more than 25 percent of the groups have been interviewed, it can be said with certainty that it is a myth that the Messianic community includes “approximately 25,000 followers.” Another figure often seen quoted is 6000-7000. Another myth? The survey and the adjoining article on “Facts and Myths about Congregations in Israel” to be published in the last of these three issues of *Mishkan* dedicated to Israel will answer that and related questions.

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