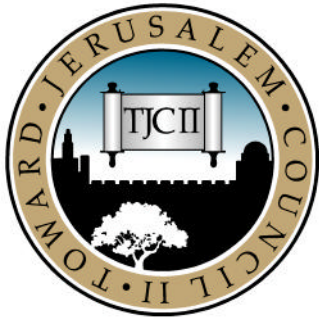


News From
Toward Jerusalem
Council II

July 2002



Marty Waldman, Executive General Secretary

John Dawson, Chairman

Evan Thomas, Chairman

April Committee Meetings

The Executive Committee of TJC II met in Ventura, California from April 23-26, 2002. All members were present except the Rudolphs, unable to attend due to illness. With the resignation of Reuven Doron, the Committee welcomed Jonathan Bernis as a new Messianic member.

Jonathan lives in Phoenix, Arizona and is president of Jewish Voice Ministries. They are well-known for Hear O Israel Music Festivals which have drawn thousands of Jewish people all over the world to faith in Yeshua.

The members spent time praying for each other before moving into discussion of other issues. In a Spirit-led decision, the October meeting was moved to Paris. Besides confirming dates for the Consultations in 2003, they planned Consultations in Africa and South America, planned a diplomatic trip to Moscow, and proposed names of European contacts for the October meetings in Paris. They also talked about the progress on the printing of basic booklets as information about TJC II. Peter Hocken directed a discussion on implementation of the original vision. The group prayed and expressed their hopes for the future participation of an Orthodox Christian member.

Wayne Wilks stated, "The meeting in Ventura was one of the most profitable yet. Jonathan Bernis' addition was very special. Jonathan adds much wisdom and a keen perspective on finding practical and helpful solutions to issues related to the Messianic community. Jonathan has been a pioneer in the former USSR and has a great impact on leading many Jews there to faith in Jesus. I also feel that the Lord is putting a faith in our hearts that a connection is coming soon with this initiative in the Orthodox church world."

Taking the TJC II Vision to IRC

Just before TJC II meetings in Ventura, John Dawson convened a Consultation of leaders in the International Reconciliation Coalition, mostly from North America. Three other committee members - Marty Waldman, Peter Hocken, and Johannes Fichtenbauer, attended and spoke on TJC II to the 80 participants. After a time of protocol conducted by the First Nations representatives who were present, many of the participants began to more deeply realized the value of protocol – giving honor to whom honor is due. We are sharing some of their comments with you.

Hocken: “Some things ought to be revered – tradition, honoring elders, and God’s values placed in people groups.”

Waldman: “Replacement theology and rejection of the Jewish roots brought an orphan spirit to the Gentile Church.”

In the midst of a discussion concerning both the physical and spiritual legacies and jurisdictions of peoples who have come before us, Peter Hocken made the following comments:

Hocken: “We [Gentiles] need a new perception of engrafting. Engrafting implies an invitation. The Jews invite the Gentiles to be grafted in. We Gentiles are too accustomed to seizing the inheritance without reference to the original heirs.”

After the indigenous people had pled for a cessation of the desecration of their sacred sites, Marty Waldman was asked to introduce TJCII to the entire assembly. Having been affected by the pleas of the First Nations people, Marty commented,

Waldman: “There is a jurisdiction in the Spirit that has been ignored. That jurisdiction is represented by the indigenous Jewish people of Israel. Our land was taken, and our sacred sites were desecrated. The sacred elements of our faith were stolen. The church has not communicated with the indigenous people of the Book, i.e., the saved remnant of Israel. Messianic Jews were denied access to both the Jewish Community at Yavneh [site of Rabbinical councils dating from 75 AD] and to the Christian Community by church councils. We became an isolated people.

These issues need to be addressed with the people of the Book who have inherent spiritual jurisdiction. Salvation is of the Jews. A stronghold has been hovering over the Gentile church for centuries because of their denial and lack of recognition of the people of the Book.

We [Messianic Jews] have been brought back to life to be a kingdom of priests for nations and people groups. God wants to bring forth the blessing of the Jews to the Gentile church. No one loses in this. We are mutually encouraged and affirmed.”

“The Messianic Community of Israel – An Overview”

Article by Evan Thomas

Israel is often referred to as God’s timepiece for the world. Certainly, hardly a day goes by without some focus in the world news media. Unfortunately, it is our conflicts that draw the attention of the international community. The politics of the Middle East overflow, affecting even western nations. The Christian world too is not exempt from this influence and all too often, politics and theology are sadly confused. Christian pilgrims have poured through the Holy Land in great numbers every year and have contributed tremendously to the tourism industry, one of Israel’s most important sources of income. Traditionally though, it has been Israel’ “stones” – her historic sites that have been of most interest while an awareness of her “living stones” – the indigenous body of Messiah has, until quite recently, gone unnoticed.

Perhaps one of the most significant signs of God for these times is the “resurrection” of the indigenous Church, the Messianic community of Israel. For decades, segments of the international evangelical community have emphasized the prophetic scriptures regarding the “ingathering” of the Jewish people to their own nation as being almost exclusively important in setting the stage for the return of the Messiah. The passage in Ezekiel 36:24-29a speaks not just of God’s promise of regathering but also of purification, sanctification, and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. These elements are recognizable in today’s New Covenant Community.

In 1948 as Israel gained international recognition and statehood, a tiny Messianic community in the Land of the Fathers struggled also to survive. Right through to the 1980’s the Israeli Messianic community remained small and the congregations were characteristically introspective and fearful, isolated and fragmented from each other.

By the mid-1980’s, significant change began to take place as the Israeli body began to grow and new congregations were established. Affected by the “Jesus Movement” of the ‘70s, many young Jewish Believers in the Messiah began to make *aliyah* (immigrate to eretz Israel) from the West, and many young Israelis travelling abroad experienced a revelation of Messiah and returned home.

At this time too, the newly developed and Hebrew-speaking national elders’ fraternal established the National Evangelism Committee [NEC] from a group of young zealous leaders and local evangelists. The NEC’s high-profile outreach in the Land may have been the first since the time of the Early Church. With the help the expatriate Church, the national elders also founded institutions for theological training. Today for example, the Israel College of the Bible, based in Jerusalem, is an indigenous institution for theological education, catering for both local and foreign students.

Initially the public outreach of the NEC bore little fruit in leading Jewish people to faith in Messiah. However, Israeli evangelists were trained and discipleship programs were established. The Israeli media took notice, and the Orthodox Jewish community turned proactive against congregations and evangelistic activities. When harassment did not prevent the growth in Messianic congregations, Orthodox leaders began to use political influence in the 90’s to promote legislation that would outlaw activity of the Messianic community. So far, the national elders, with the support of the international Christian community, have blocked all attempts at repressive legislation. While this “window” of relative religious freedom exists, the indigenous body is “seizing the moment” as

Paul writes and has begun to see significant change and growth in the Israeli Messianic community.

Two major social factors can be identified as having brought about this change. The first is the massive wave of immigration from the Russian-speaking nations since the mid-90's and the second is the horrific pressure caused by the Palestinian uprising, known as the "Intifada Al Aqsa" that began in October 2000.

Following Perestroika, Russian Jews poured into Israel and the national population nearly doubled. Among them were many Messianic believers who evangelized and formed new congregations. Beit Immanuel of Jaffo/Tel Aviv, Beit Asaph of Netanya and Ohalei Rachamim of the Haifa Bay area are examples among many.

Now the Israeli Messianic community consists of more than 70 Hebrew-speaking, approximately 25 Russian-speaking and 5 Amharic-speaking congregations. This constitutes an almost ten-fold increase in the national body in just two decades. The desire for fellowship coupled with the enormous needs has resulted in important new relationships and strategies over the past ten years. Theological education programs and institutions, large citywide evangelism programs, prayer networks, reconciliation ministries, humanitarian aid programs, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers have been established. These in turn have enabled the Messianic congregations to better affect their cities encumbered with rapidly rising social problems.

The second factor that has had great affect on the Israeli believing community has been the Palestinian uprising. Both the Israeli and Palestinian societies are filled with fear and racial hatred. Escalating violence, hopelessness, and economic hardship from a restriction of tourism have effected both societies. However, within this context of uncertainty the Messianic movement in Israel is flourishing. People are searching for answers. Congregations are finding more interest in eschatology and deeper expression in worship as intercessory prayer. They are being challenged by teachings of the apostles in such scriptures as Ephesians 2 on the one new man and reconciliation and I John 4 on loving our brothers.

An important reconciliation movement known by its Arabic name, "Musalaha", (meaning forgiveness and reconciliation) is influencing the Messianic community throughout the Land. The movement encourages Jewish Believers to seek fellowship with Arab Christians. Since 1991, leaders of this movement, Salim Munayer and Evan Thomas, have used initiatives such as desert encounters, seminars, prayer conferences, and literature to break the cycles of dehumanization and distrust from which the respective communities suffer.

True peace can only be found through faith in Jesus the Messiah. Compassion for the plight of our "brothers and sisters" has led many Messianic congregations to set up relief funds and provide humanitarian aid to Palestinian Christians caught in unbearable circumstances caused by the conflict. Fellowship is difficult at best as very often, military checkpoints divide our societies and an atmosphere of distrust pervades every encounter.

Palestinian Christians are naturally influenced by political rhetoric, the indignity of occupation and the horror caused by military operations. They are also influenced by the longstanding doctrines of the Church and her inherent replacement theology. In similar ways Israeli Messianic Believers are

influenced by the political rhetoric of their society, the effects of terrorism and the obligation of mandatory military service. Both groups are re-examining interpretations of scripture concerning Messiah and the issues of their own spiritual identities.

Among the nearly 100 Messianic congregations throughout the Land is found a great variety of Messianic Jewish expression. A small minority identify themselves as "Christian" and their congregations as Churches. Others choose a more "Messianic identity" yet in expression and form, are barely distinguishable from Evangelical or Pentecostal Churches. But a growing number of Messianic communities are incorporating a greater degree of definable Jewish expression and form into their worship and congregational life. These forms include Jewish liturgy, ancient prayers, Torah readings, and the observance of traditions in weddings, bar mitzvahs, Sabbath, and feasts. Above all, the teachings of the apostles on the deity of Jesus and his victory on the cross, celebrated through the Table of the Lord, remain central.

Slowly but surely, the "Church of the Circumcision" in Israel is being resurrected by Almighty God to take its place once again among the councils of the elect, and Jewish voices are being heard. Christendom can no longer ignore the reality of an indigenous Church that is Jewish in the land of the Bible. It must face the painful history of Christian anti-Semitism, sectarianism and theologies that have led to division. The reality of the Messianic movement in Israel today signifies perhaps more than anything else that the return of the Lord is indeed near.

Updates and Prayer Requests

*Congratulations to Peter Hocken for his 70th birthday on June 22. He is currently writing two books.

*Wayne, Bonnie, and Julia Wilks are in the U.S. for the summer while Wayne takes care of MJB responsibilities in the Americas. They are considering the establishment of an office in the Dallas area.

*John, Julie, and Rachel Dawson are ministering and visiting family in Asia until July 5 when they return to California. They are praying about the purchase of property in New Zealand for a ministry base.

*Marty and Marleen Waldman led Baruch Ha Shem congregation in a groundbreaking ceremony June 9 to begin construction on a long-awaited and larger building.

*After a sabbatical in New Zealand, Evan Thomas returned to Israel at the end of June, with Maala and Sara to follow in three weeks.

*Leaders of Promise Keepers have decided to distribute copies of Don Finto's book, Your People Shall be My People, to 55,000 pastors at a rally in Phoenix Arizona, February 2003.

Reminders

February 17-20, 2003 Europe Consultation for Associates

May 12-13, 2003 North America Consultation in Dallas, Texas, for leadership of the Messianic Community and leaders of the Christian Community

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