

Christian Business Digs for Oil in Israel

✖ Israel has been viewed for years as a dead end when it comes to oil or natural gas exploration. This is largely due to the fact that the 420-odd wells dug there since 1948 failed to produce commercially.

But Christian businessman John Brown believes the naysayers are wrong. For 17 years, the founder of Zion Oil & Gas has been telling the world that there is scriptural basis and support for finding oil and gas in the land of Israel. Not many have listened. But a recent discovery has given some credence to his claims that there may be vast energy reserves hidden beneath this relatively unexplored region.

On Jan. 17, Noble Energy Inc. announced it discovered natural gas at its Tamar No. 1 well, located off the coast of Haifa. The well may contain more than 5 million cubic feet of gas, which would be more than enough to supply Israel's energy needs for the next 20 years. The nation currently imports 85 percent of its energy resources.

With two fields located just 55 miles from the Tamar well, Zion Oil & Gas may be poised to make a similar discovery. "It has certainly woken everyone up to the possibilities of what oil and gas exploration is about," said Richard Rinberg, CEO of Zion Oil & Gas, of the find at the Tamar well. "It is a very high-risk business. But in the event you get it right, the rewards can be dramatic, which is what we see in this case."

The company's goals are simple: to bless Israel by lessening the country's dependence on outside sources of energy. Based in Dallas and Caesarea, Israel, Zion Oil & Gas currently holds two petroleum exploration licenses, the Joseph and Asher-

Menashe Licenses, located between Netanya on the south and Haifa on the north, covering roughly 162,000 acres.

In the event that Zion does make a sizable find, Israel will have not only an onshore source of energy, but the nation will also receive 12.5 percent in royalties from Zion's energy sales.

"It has been our pleasure to be associated with Zion Oil & Gas," said Texas pastor John Hagee, founder of Christians United for Israel.

He noted that the organization has helped fund his group's annual summit in Washington, D.C., each July. "Zion Oil & Gas has been one of our major sponsors in the past and we appreciate their support of Israel," Hagee said.

Zion's first well, Ma'anit-Rehoboth No. 1, revealed the presence of hydrocarbons, which are oil and gas in their raw forms. However, because of equipment difficulties, the well had to be abandoned.

A new site nearby was selected for the Ma'anit-Rehoboth No. 2 well, and the company began to search for an oil rig capable of digging to the necessary depths. Zion found one in Ankara, Turkey, owned by Aladdin Middle East Ltd. (AME).

In late March, Zion Oil announced that AME will proceed with mobilizing the 2,000 horsepower drilling rig that Zion plans to use to drill its Ma'anit-Rehoboth No. 2 well. AME will ship the drill and the 70 workers needed to operate it. Zion officials projected that drilling could begin in April.

Yaakov Mimran, Israeli Petroleum and Mining Commissioner in the Natural Licensing Administration, said he is watching Zion Oil & Gas' progress. "Obviously, the amount they discover, if and when that happens, will be extremely important," he said. "The Tamar reserve, discovered by Noble Energy Inc., is going to supply us for about 20 years."

Zion leaders are confident the oil or gas is down there. They say they've just needed the right equipment to reach the proper depths. "I feel that the time is very near indeed when Zion will discover (and recover) the oil and gas that I believe that the Bible says is on the head of Joseph and lies deep under the land of Israel," Brown said in a statement. "On that day, my prayer will have been answered."**—John Swails in Caesarea, Israel**