

Faces of Zion

Today in Israel, a growing number of Christians are sharing the love of Jesus with a war-torn nation. These brave believers are part of your faith family.

Most news we hear from Israel involves suicide bombings, military skirmishes and ethnic tensions. In the time since the Jewish state was created 60 years ago, it seems its history has been written in blood as Israeli leaders have fought to defend the land that was given to them by God thousands of years ago.

Yet this place we call the Holy Land cannot be defined by religious conflicts and territorial disputes. Pilgrims who have traveled there from around the world have discovered that Israel defies the stereotypes and the political clichés: They have discovered a land rich with history and a diverse people who want peace more than war.

Although most international journalists focus their attention on clashes between Israeli Jews and Muslims, Charisma has found a growing surge of interest in Christianity in all sectors of society—from the growing urban centers of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to the hillsides of Galilee to the Arab-dominated territories. Below the surface, Israel is experiencing a significant visitation of the Holy Spirit that is spreading into every ethnic community.

In this tribute to Israel's 60th anniversary as a nation, we offer a look at the Christian peacemakers who are taking the gospel of Jesus Christ not only to Jews and Muslims but also to Russian and Ethiopian immigrants, prisoners, unwed mothers, drug addicts and tourists who visit this unique land. We hope that when you visit Israel you will look beyond the stone

monuments, churches and biblical sites to discover the people of faith who are transforming the land.

Arie Bar David

The roots of modern-day Messianic Judaism in Israel go back to Switzerland in the 1920s when a Jewish Bulgarian aristocrat named Chaim Bar David was handed a booklet containing the Sermon on the Mount. With that, the man believed Yeshua was the Messiah and moved to Palestine in 1928 during the British Mandate.

Today Bar David's legacy of faith has influenced five generations of Messianic Jews in Israel, including son Arie Yehuda Bar David, whose name means, "lion of Judah, son of David." Born a year before Israel became a state in 1948, Arie was an infant during the Arab riots, the War of Independence and the siege of Jerusalem. As a young man, he fought in the army's paratrooper unit in all but one of Israel's wars since 1967 and battled once alongside former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Growing up in Jerusalem, Arie participated in family worship services, Bible studies and prayer groups with his parents, siblings and grandparents. Arie remembers other children assaulting him, his family being called "Nazis" and having a constant barrage of rocks thrown at their home because of their faith.

As a result of a disciplined and lonely upbringing, Arie's spiritual roots grew deep. During the Yom Kippur War, passages of Scripture he learned as a child sustained him. "Hundreds of Egyptians were shooting at me, most of my unit was at my side,

seriously wounded,” he recalls. “But my story comes back to this: As a little child you hear the stories, you see the verses, and I believed—100 percent—that thousands would fall, and it would not touch me.”

After his army service, Bar David, a distinguished classically trained musician, played double bass in the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra for seven years. Twenty-six years ago, he laid down his flourishing music career to live on a moshav, or a collective community.

Founded by Finnish Christians and located on the outskirts of Jerusalem, Yad HaShmona—the only Judeo-Christian moshav in Israel—hosts Messianic conferences while other facilities have shut out the believing community.

Bar David fulfilled a longtime dream last year when he conducted the first-ever performance of Handel’s Messiah in Hebrew. He oversaw translation of the oratorio and recruited a choir and live orchestra for the historic performances.

Avi and Chaya Mizrachi

In a nation where preaching the gospel is taboo, Avi Mizrachi is audaciously evangelistic, enduring persecution from religious Jews and scorn from the secular.

“I’m radical, I’m bold, I’m not afraid of anyone except the Lord,” Mizrachi says.

He was saved and met and married his wife, Chaya, while traveling in the United States in 1984. Then he headed back to Israel on a mission. “I wanted to come back to my city, to Tel Aviv-Jaffa, and I wanted to make disciples,” he says.

As one of the trailblazers among born-again sabras, or native-born Israelis, Mizrachi opened Dugit as an evangelistic outreach in Tel Aviv, Israel's most cosmopolitan and worldly city. "Tel Aviv-Jaffa is very secular, very lost, full of darkness, prostitution, drugs, alcohol, abortion, mafia—we have all of it," Mizrachi says. "They come to Tel Aviv to party."

From Dugit, which means "small fishing boat," teams go "fishing" on the city streets. When Mizrachi began the outreach in 1993, an anti-missionary group harassed and stalked him and his family, loudly cursing and insulting him. Mizrachi had to hire bodyguards for a time.

The persecution has let up since then, and the outreach has expanded. Now Mizrachi also runs healing and distribution centers to meet practical needs in the community, work that has found favor with the municipality. Chaya leads seminars and counsels women who have had abortions. At their congregation, Adonai Roi ("The Lord Is My Shepherd"), they disciple the newly saved and impart a fervor for evangelism.

Mizrachi's parents, both from Bulgaria, met in Israel in the 1940s, his father after enduring the Holocaust. His mother was saved under a born-again rabbi in Jaffa at a time when there was a handful of believers in the land and only five congregations. Intent on seeing unity among believers in Israel, Mizrachi was part of a group of pastors who established Sitting at Yeshua's Feet (SAYF), where Messianic and Arab pastors gather together for spiritual recharging.

"It's a very stressful country. The spiritual warfare here is triple that of anywhere in the world," he says. "That's

because Yeshua is coming back here—not Washington, D.C., or Rome.”

Calev Myers

Understanding legal documents is a challenge when they are written in one’s mother tongue. So it comes as no surprise that Calev Myers considers it miraculous that he rose to the top of his class at Hebrew University law school, where his texts were written in Hebrew. Today he is the “go-to” attorney for Messianic Jewish and Christian minorities whose rights have been violated in Israel.

Myers never intended to become an advocate for Messianic rights. He was 18 when his family immigrated to Israel from Pennsylvania and was instantly drafted into the army. When he later entered law school, he specialized in business law and quickly became a partner at a prestigious Jerusalem firm, Yehuda Raveh & Co.

However, in 2004 when Israel’s Ministry of Interior moved to revoke the citizenship of a Messianic Jew who had served in an elite military unit, Myers stepped in. “This case brought [civil rights abuses] to light,” says Myers, 33. “I called up every Judeo-Christian congregation [in Israel], and I investigated whether others were suffering. I found 40 cases of blatant illegal treatment of Judeo-Christian believers.”

He won the case, but Myers’ legal campaign was far from over. He found that the Interior Ministry, which is responsible for granting visas and citizenship, systematically discriminated against, and was proactively targeting, leaders in Israel’s Judeo-Christian community. He was determined to stop that.

The problem, Myers says, is that the government has believed a few radical, ultra-religious Jews who “initiate slanderous, vicious propaganda by saying we’re a missionary cult whose sole aim is to convert Jews to a foreign religion.”

Since it was formed in 2004, Myers’ Jerusalem Institute of Justice has taken on more than 182 cases of discrimination against believers, successfully completing roughly 90 so far. Cases range from instances of blocking immigration, illegal termination of employment, zoning discrimination for congregational facilities and confiscation of passports to outright revocation of citizenship.

“It was God’s grace to put me in a good law firm and set the standard of what level of quality work believers should practice,” Myers says.

Myers’ family also leads an evangelical congregation, Shemen Sasson (“Oil of Joy”), which started as a living room Bible study and now draws approximately 300.

Eitan Shishkoff

While praying one day for Jews from the former Soviet Union to immigrate to Israel, Eitan Shishkoff was interrupted by a vision of a desert oasis surrounded by tents. “This is what the Lord wanted to do: Fill the tents of this oasis with every kind of assistance that new immigrants would need in coming back to Israel,” he says.

While Shishkoff mulled over the vision, he and his family relocated to Israel from the United States. “I was 45 years old when I got here,” he says. “My wife and I just sort of

looked at each other, and I said, 'Maybe we'll pick oranges on a kibbutz,'" Shishkoff recalls. "I had 17 years of experience in a ministry, but we didn't assume anything."

When he shared his vision for the first time five years later, leaders of his Messianic congregation immediately blessed Shishkoff to begin his own work. Thus in 1995 began Tents of Mercy, a congregation in the Haifa area that has since planted four more ministries in northern Israel and founded an aid organization focusing on needs specific to new immigrants.

It came right in time. An immigration wave in the 1990s added million new Israelis, mostly from the former Soviet Union, to the population—an approximate 20 percent increase. Economic and lingual challenges topped their list of troubles.

"A person, in order to come anywhere near their previous level of education, has to go through a lengthy process of mastering the language, then the culture," Shishkoff explains. "It's an incredible struggle for the new immigrant. Many of them are still sweeping streets and mopping floors after years of being here, and they came with high [academic] degrees."

In addition to contributing to city welfare funds, Tents of Mercy provides financial aid, food and clothing to new immigrants, and scholarships to retrain them for employment in Israel. In framing Tents of Mercy, Shishkoff looked to the book of Acts in order to model the original Messianic Jewish community. He has a passion to train leaders and "to equip Israel's Messianic youth to be the workers and leaders in the final harvest."

"What God is doing in Israel right now is historic," he says.

Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram

Ari Sorko-Ram's storied career includes years of acting in Hollywood, working in the Los Angeles County sheriff's office and in the National Football League, and performing military service in Israel, to name but a few endeavors.

His wife's background includes directing award-winning films, recruiting American Messianic Jews to live in Israel, working as a journalist and imbibing a rich spiritual heritage from her parents, Gordon and Freda Lindsay, who founded Christ for the Nations Institute based in Dallas.

Together, Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram put their imprint on Israel's Messianic landscape. Shira was encouraging Messianic Jews to repatriate to Israel in the 1970s when Ari, heeding the call, became one of them. "The Messianic sabras [native Israelis] at the time, well, you could count them on one hand," Ari says. "There was no Messianic Jewish movement whatsoever, and it was quite a challenge."

Within his first year in Israel, he married Shira, settled in the nation and set to work establishing a congregation that operated within a Jewish context and was conducted in Hebrew. "At that time people were worshiping on Easter, not Passover, Sunday and not Shabbat," he recalls. "If you were a believer, you weren't really connected with the Jewish biblical calendar. After several years believers began to change to a Jewish biblical calendar and expression."

In 1995, Tiferet Yeshua ("Glory of Jesus") congregation in Tel Aviv, still celebrating Jewish feasts, cut off all service translations to encourage fellowship in Hebrew. The result

today is a native Israeli congregation with a Jewish brand of worship and open evangelism.

The Sorko-Rams also established I Stand With Israel, an organization that assists Jewish and Arab Israeli believers, including those persecuted for their faith. Their organization, Maoz, filled another gaping need in Israel—Hebrew books. “The only believers maturing fast were those who could read another language,” Ari says.

“There was a dearth of discipleship books in Hebrew.”

Today there are approximately 85 discipleship and teaching books in Hebrew, including the first modern translation of the New Testament. Now, says Ari, through the efforts of many, “Messianic Judaism is on the map.”

Jo Kaplan

Tour guides rarely show visitors to Israel the poverty that some of its citizens experience. Even after having spent years in Israel, Jo Kaplan was hardly aware of it. “My eyes were opened to the faces and places that I did not know existed,” says Kaplan, executive director of the Joseph Project, the largest importer of humanitarian aid to Israel. “There’s a whole other side of people in Israeli society that you don’t see.”

One in every four Israelis lives below the poverty line with no money for clothing, furniture, rent and sometimes food. To meet those needs, the nonprofit Joseph Project was founded in 2000 by Joel Chernoff, general secretary of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America.

Long before the deluge occurred, Chernoff prophesied that Jews were going to pour into Israel from Russia. When the immigrants began flooding in, they took their place at the lower end of a callous economy. The mission of Joseph Project is to ease their adjustment and prepare for future deluges of immigrants. "God brought all these immigrants back to the land, and He's not going to take care of them here?" Kaplan asks. "We're just fulfilling what God is pushing along."

From distributing toys to hospitalized children to braving war zones, the Joseph Project has blanketed Israel with some \$35 million worth of supplies so far. When the Hezbollah terrorist group fired rockets at northern Israel in 2006, welfare agencies and nongovernmental organizations were caught off-guard, and it took them several days to distribute needed supplies in the region, Kaplan explains. "Wars in Israel are by surprise, so I learned to stockpile," she says.

Joseph Project works with 30 Messianic Jewish aid centers linked to local congregations. Kaplan herself strategically chooses where to shower these gifts of love. Having emigrated with her family from California in 1995, she understands the difficulties of making ends meet in the Promised Land.

"I know what it's like," Kaplan says. "The person at the head of an aid organization in Israel has to have this kind of heart."

Howard Bass

What began as a bike ride around the United States ended in the southern Israeli desert about a year later. Howard and Randi Bass decided to cycle around America after their wedding

in 1980, but God met them along the way and dramatically altered their course.

During the trip, Howard, who is Jewish, was told by a Christian co-worker that God wasn't done with the Jewish people. He and his wife accepted Christ shortly thereafter and moved to Israel seven months later. Symbolically ending their journey, the Basses biked from Netanya to Beersheba, where they settled.

In Beersheba, the couple encountered a geographical and spiritual desert. No believing congregations existed in the city. The Basses met casually with other believers there, and those meetings eventually grew into Nachalat Yeshua ("Yeshua's Inheritance"), a congregation that Howard leads. It is one of a mere dozen or so in the Negev Desert.

Bass likens Beersheba and his congregation to Isaiah 41. The chapter says that as a way to show His power God planted various trees in one place that were unable to thrive together naturally. "In the U.S. there are a lot of support systems," Bass says. "In Israel there are none. As a believer, it is a good place to be. You can't be complacent in Israel."

Nachalat Yeshua has another congregation in Arad, a desert city near the Dead Sea. There, believers are persecuted daily. In Beersheba, persecution has come in two full-blown attacks, one in 1998 and one in 2005, both during congregational services.

In 1998, roughly 1,000 Orthodox Jews marched to Nachalat Yeshua in protest. Seven years later, the opposition turned violent when about 500 Orthodox Jews entered the compound,

destroyed equipment and tossed objects and people into the baptismal pool. When police arrived, they called it a pogrom, Bass says.

Despite the persecution, the congregation holds outreaches, distributes food and clothing, and provides drug rehabilitation. Bass has a positive take on the Negev's spiritual climate: "More believers are moving to the Negev," he says. "More people are praying for what God is doing out from the Negev and for the Negev."

Anis and Nawal Barhoum

For more than two decades, Anis and Nawal Barhoum's House of Light ministry has focused on restoring families, with one-on-one outreach coloring every aspect of its activities.

Without intention or advertising, House of Light has become a terminal for extreme cases. After a notorious drug dealer asked Anis to help him get his life right, a succession of other addicts sought his help. Then the Barhoums began to harbor women threatened with "honor killings"—when Arab families murder women thought to have shamed them. The couple has negotiated the safe return of many daughters and wives, some of whom have accepted Christ while at their home.

But what the Barhoums have done with extreme intention is gather young Arab and Jewish children together, allowing the two groups to come to a natural reconciliation. The Barhoums' home in Shfaram, between Nazareth and Haifa, is host to King's Kids, where up to 70 children and teenagers gather weekly. Every six weeks, the Arab children meet their counterpart group of Messianic Jewish children from other towns.

Anis says this is the age at which to capture children's hearts—"before our youth go to university and the Jewish youth go to the army, where both get ideas that are not so easy to change."

Although racial integration is planned among adults in Israel, coexistence is becoming natural for these children, thanks to pioneers such as the Barhoums. "This is my dream, how the Jewish and Arab youth are working together," Anis says.

Anis also is the chaplain to gentile inmates in all 22 Israeli prisons, holding Bible studies and mentoring prisoners. At the jails closer to their home, the Barhoums mentor the inmates' entire families.

The House of Light has been run from the Barhoums' home since it was founded in 1984. Nawal says this is "a time of grace" in their predominantly Muslim town of 35,000, where instead of opposition many seek the Barhoums' counsel and help. Also, Nawal says, the many Messianic Jews who come to their neighborhood for fellowship is a testimony in itself. "It's an opportunity to tell about Jesus when they see Jews who believe in Jesus," he says.

Ishai and Anat Brenner

Ishai and Anat Brenner are dedicated to seeing the salvation of Israel, soul by soul. Ishai can be found daily witnessing on the streets of Israel while Anat fields calls from women considering abortion. The family also has opened their home to unwed, pregnant women who have decided to keep their babies.

The home ministry of Abundant Life was birthed in 2003 after a

woman who decided to keep her baby was fired from her job and subsequently evicted from her apartment. "We realized it wasn't enough to persuade them to keep their babies," Anat says.

An entire floor of the Brenner home in Kfar Saba is allotted for unwed pregnant women in dire circumstances. The family accompanies the women through labor and helps them begin life as single moms.

Anat, 47, counsels a spectrum of Jewish and Arab women who have had or are considering having an abortion, and teaches at schools about the consequences of abortion. With an estimated 50,000 abortions performed annually, Israel has a higher abortion ratio than the U.S. and one of the highest abortion rates in the world.

"Israel is a very promiscuous society," says Ishai, who distributes pro-life literature and evangelizes at New Age festivals and in cities rocked by terrorist attacks. "Young people are looking for relationships, and what you see here is the price."

The son of a Holocaust survivor, Ishai, 53, left Israel after serving in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. He heard the gospel and was saved in Canada. Anat was born again during her travels in Europe after serving her mandatory military service. Being native Israeli believers who met and married in Israel, Ishai and Anat are naturally passionate about seeing other Jews get saved.

"The Jewish people went away for 2,000 years. Now God is starting to work among the Jewish people," Ishai says. "A

quick fix doesn't work here."

Anat says it all comes down to individuals. "God is calling us to remember the widows, the orphans and the aliens," she says. "That is the heart of this work."

Karen Dunham

Amid a sea of colorful Muslim head-scarves in an Arab wedding hall in Jericho is an unveiled American woman from Florida running a most unlikely church beyond a Palestinian checkpoint. That has been the hallmark of Karen Dunham's six years in Israel: unlikely, yet remarkable.

Dunham has earned rare favor with both Palestinian authorities and the Israeli army, who are hostile entities, but it wasn't without paying a high price. "I came here not knowing anything about the land, Arabs or Jews," Dunham says.

Shortly after she arrived in Israel, one conversation set the course of her stay when the words of a Catholic priest burned in her heart: "If you can feed Jericho, you can win the city for Jesus."

Dunham moved with her young son to a squalid refugee camp in the dusty desert city, off-limits to Israelis and avoided by most tourists during the intifada, or Palestinian uprising. Distributing rice to a few families and holding Bible studies, Dunham began her humble ministry while warding off scorpions, car bombs, house fires and, ultimately, death threats.

Dunham did not quit. In fact, she obeyed another radical,

divine directive: to rent a hall and start a church.

Some visitors to the weekly services come out of curiosity and some attend for financial aid, but they all hear the gospel. The church has blossomed, and the tense atmosphere in Jericho has eased. Imams, government officials and business leaders all have officially welcomed Dunham.

The transformation was not lost on the Israeli army. Soldiers approached Dunham and asked if she would do the same in the 26 other refugee camps in the Palestinian territories. Living Bread Ministries is now a nongovernmental organization (NGO), and Dunham has visited places where few have had official access—or the mettle—to go.

“The camps are centers of great hostility. They’re teaching them there to be enemies of Israel,” Dunham says. “If we can link arms with ministries across the country, we can take the land.”

She has begun distributing aid and Bibles in two other major Palestinian cities and is convinced that terrorism can fall. Her strategy is, “If you win the refugee camps you can win the city.”

Naim Khoury

It is tough being an evangelical Christian Palestinian in a sea of Orthodox Christians and Muslim Arabs. Naim Khoury’s preaching about the spiritual significance of supporting Israel has brought him persecution, death threats and even bullets.

The bold, outspoken pastor of First Baptist Church in Bethlehem, the largest evangelical Christian church in the West Bank, has been shot, and his church bombed several times, for his stance on Israel. "We've had all sorts of problems, but no turning back, no turning back," says Khoury (who asked not to be pictured).

Khoury's journey toward supporting the Jewish nation began before he accepted Christ, when as an eighth-grader he asked why the Mediterranean Sea was colored red on a map. "Don't you know that one day we'll kill the Jews and throw them in the sea?" the teacher yelled.

"The first week after I got saved the Holy Spirit reminded me of that story," Khoury recalls. "I went and bought an Old Testament. Priests had told us it was rubbish, but the more I studied it, the more God increased a special love in my heart for the Jewish people. I realized that the covenant of God with Abraham is an everlasting covenant."

In a land where politics and religion are the cause of much bloodshed, Khoury has gone against the Palestinian culture. Traditional churches teach replacement theology, and believing Israel is the rightful heir to the land is taken as betrayal.

Khoury comes from a devoted Greek Orthodox family. He was saved as a teenager, and though it took another 27 years, every member of his family, including his nine siblings, came to Christ. His oldest brother was martyred in a Muslim neighborhood in Jerusalem.

Cut off by the concrete security wall and a checkpoint, Palestinian believers feel isolated from their Christian

brethren around the world. Out of 200, some 90 percent of the Bethlehem congregants are unemployed, Khoury says. Born-again Palestinians suffer as a minority within a minority in a desperate political and economic situation in the territories.

“The Prince of Peace was born here, and yet there is no peace,” Khoury says. “That’s our prayer and mission, our desire and hope for Bethlehem.”

Pamela Suran

Vibrant colors, striking landscapes, pointed Scriptures and divine inspiration. With these elements in her paintings, Jerusalem-based Messianic artist Pamela Suran expresses the beauty and message of the land of Israel.

“I wanted to take hold of the promises to Israel and marry them to landscape,” she says. “My ministry is a combination between my art and teaching the land of Israel, bringing the land of Israel together with the Hebrew Scriptures.”

Suran, who moved to Israel more than two decades ago, fell in love with the simplicity of the landscape. Trained as a fine artist, she has worked in oils, watercolors, drawing media, mural painting and mosaics. She apprenticed under French opera set designers and has exhibited her work in Israel, the U.S. and European countries.

After her salvation, she combined her talent and experience with spiritual insights. But it wasn’t until she came to Israel that her paintings began to tell a particular story. “Suddenly, being reunited with my people, I became part of a greater body, and I was voicing the greater voice rather than

my own personal perspective,” Suran says.

“The Bible has a certain geographical and historical context, which has to do with the Jewish people, and a specific land where the state of Israel is today. The visuals of the land help to give people that understanding and that context.”

Painting holidays series, the tribes of Israel, the Holocaust and regions of Israel, to name a few subjects, Suran gives voice to scriptural proclamations and the foundations of her faith. Her inspiration is drawn from both personal revelation of Scripture and a response to events in Israel.

Suran believes her art is a contribution to Israeli culture and to the local body of believers. She also works as a tour guide, another outlet for Suran to convey the value the land has to her. “Hopefully I’m one of the small pieces of putting together Israel’s identity in the Messiah.”

Salim Munayer

Salim Munayer was attending a believers’ conference in 1989 when he realized the acute need for reconciliation. As tensions in the nation were boiling over with the onset of the first intifada in Israel, so were relations between Arab and Israeli believers.

Munayer, a Christian Palestinian, related some of the exchanges: “You Arabs read [the Bible] carefully—this land is our land,” Jewish believers said. “You Jews read the promises but not the stipulations of the covenant,” Arab believers accused.

“In this simplistic story we have the theology that splits the church: We don’t have a theology that embraces both people, a theology that embraces hope for the Jews and justice for the Palestinians,” Munayer says.

Reconciliation, he says, was not a major agenda in the body at the time. Rather the two communities, both minorities among their people, merely ran parallel, each suspicious of the other. To provide a way for young Israeli and Palestinian believers to pursue biblical reconciliation, Munayer established Musalaha—which means “reconciliation” in Arabic—in 1990. Some 1,000 participants annually sojourn into the desert or attend training courses and conferences. Follow-up meetings solidify their experiences.

“The desert is a place where the imbalance of power disappears: They have to cling to each other and to God to find a solution,” he explains.

Munayer, born into a Greek Orthodox family in Lod, had to reconcile with his own identity. He grew up in the context of an Israeli lifestyle somewhat oblivious to the sufferings of the Palestinians. In fact, Munayer was saved under the tutelage of a Messianic Jew. While teaching at Bethlehem Bible College, Munayer was exposed to the suffering of the Palestinians. His students often challenged him, asking what Jesus would do if He had to go through checkpoints and what the Bible said about land confiscation.

Munayer says Christian Palestinians are challenged from all sides. Muslims see a love of Israel as betrayal of the Palestinian cause while Christian groups from overseas tell Palestinian believers they need to move out and make room for the Jews.

“You realize that, for you, as a believer in Jesus, reconciliation is essential,” Munayer says, “not only as personal faith, but as an answer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

Sandy Shoshani

Sandy Shoshani ticks off the staggering statistics: The number of publicly funded abortions is 20,000 annually, but when counting those financed through private insurance the figure rises to between 40,000 and 50,000—nearly one-third of Israel’s 140,000 births.

“There are only 7 million Israelis, and there have been at least 2 million abortions since 1948,” Shoshani says. “We’re just killing ourselves.”

Shoshani is the national director of Be’ad Chaim (“Pro-Life”), one of the few organizations in Israel fighting abortion. The procedure is not only legal until the end of pregnancy, it is socially and religiously acceptable and is not on anyone’s political agenda. “The rabbis say that a baby is not entirely recognized as a human being until the head appears,” Shoshani explains.

Be’ad Chaim, based in Jerusalem, educates people about the process and consequences of abortion and assists women who choose to keep their babies in meeting practical needs. The organization offers free pregnancy testing, counseling, birth assistance and supplies for the first year of the baby’s life. Several pro-life books have been translated into Hebrew, and post-abortion counseling is also available. Shoshani is looking to provide a home and training for the women after

their babies' births.

Some believers in Israel call abortion "luxury politics" that secure countries can afford to debate while Israel must focus on its borders. But Shoshani believes abortion is precisely the cause of Israel's woes. "We're bringing a curse on our nation," she says. "If we want to see the blessing of God, we are going to have to stop the shedding of innocent blood.

"How can we be killing one out of every four babies and expect the blessing of God? It's not any different than what they did in the Ben-Hinnom Valley when they sacrificed babies to Molech."

Slowly congregations in Israel are taking up the cause. Young people have started staging "life" rallies, and the second national day of prayer for abortion was held this year. Progress is measured one life at a time, Shoshani says: "I've seen babies saved, and that is progress."

Shoshani, originally from Massachusetts, is married to Oded, pastor of a Jerusalem congregation. They have seven children.

Shmuel and Suzie Salway

Teenagers everywhere face peer pressure, but Jewish youth who believe in Jesus encounter scorn and sometimes outright persecution for being Messianic, and they currently make up less than 1 percent of the population. "Most of the youth lead a double life," says youth worker Suzie Salway. "They go to school and nobody knows they are believers."

Shmuel and Suzie Salway have a vision to see the next generation get serious about Jesus. The two native Israelis were both youth workers in their own Tel Aviv-area congregations before they were married, and now share leadership at Adonai Roi ("The Lord is My Shepherd") in Tel Aviv.

Shmuel, 35, grew up in a believing home. Suzie, 31, traveled the world seeking "truth," but wasn't saved until she returned to Israel in her 20s. Their passion for discipling Israeli youth is shared.

"The world is attractive, there are lots of temptations," Shmuel says. "In the army you might be laughed at. The temptation is to be the same as everyone else."

The Salways work with an organization called Neged HaZerem ("Against the Flow"), which is a gathering of Israeli youth groups into one big event. The teenagers can see that though they are few, they are not alone. "They are going to school among thousands of unbelievers," Suzie says. "Most of them have relationships with nonbelievers. They go to one or two weekly [youth] meetings, that's it."

In Israel, it is illegal to evangelize anyone under 18. In this unique situation, many young Israeli believers are growing up as second-generation believers, following their parents' footsteps, but many find it hard to connect with God for themselves. The Salways, however, are optimistic.

"The number of youth who follow Yeshua is continually increasing: More youth groups are springing up all over Israel," he says. "There are more youth conferences being

organized. There is a greater awareness concerning the importance of the future young leaders of our nation.”

Tom Hess

When he first visited Israel in 1982, Tom Hess believed in replacement theology and thought God’s purpose for Israel was finished. But Hess says that during his two-week stay, God called him to move to Jerusalem and start the first known 24/7 house of prayer here since ancient temple times.

The Jerusalem House of Prayer for all Nations is located on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. Prayer has been continuous there since 1987. With a biblically based focus on Israel and a physical location in an Arab neighborhood, Hess’ ministry has a compassion for both Jew and Arab.

The House of Prayer is built on three mandates, with the primary focus taken from Isaiah 62:6-7—to be watchmen on the walls on Jerusalem. This, Hess says, “is God’s strategy for seeing the fullness of Jerusalem being established as ‘a praise’ on the earth.”

Volunteers are involved in two-hour watches each day. Each of the 12 watches focuses on specific nations, beginning and ending with prayer for Jerusalem. The watches are usually prayed in the major language of the nations in that gateway.

Another ministry mandate, based on Isaiah 19:23-25, is to promote unity between Jews and Arabs so that Israel, Egypt and Assyria will worship together, releasing a blessing to the whole earth. “Our heart is to stand not [only] for the Jews but the Arabs as well,” Hess says. “Our heart is to see them

reconciled to each other and to Him.”

Hess educates leaders from around the world about God’s purpose for Israel. Since the first All Nations Convocation in 1992, tens of thousands of delegates from 225 nations have come to the prayer conference held annually in Jerusalem. In the last few years, three more houses of prayer have been established in Jerusalem, with hundreds more across the globe.

“When we started, there were only a few dozen 24/7s worldwide,” Hess says. “Now there are thousands in 160 nations not only to pray for their cities and nations, but also to pray for peace of Jerusalem, to provide a prayer shield of protection over Jerusalem and Israel, and open a fountain over Jerusalem, Israel and all nations.”

Yossi Ovadia

While working as an engineer, Yossi Ovadia was responsible for the infrastructure of Karmiel, but in 1988 he says God called him to begin working on the spiritual development of the city.

Indeed Karmiel, an isolated city in the heart of the Galilee region, is a well-designed municipality of 50,000 residents, but it had no believing congregation. Kehilat HaDerech (“The Way Congregation”), which started as a home group with 10 people, has since grown to 130 members.

Attendance actually doubled within two years after the Lebanon War, when northern Israel was battered with rockets. Ovadia continued to hold services, interrupted frequently by sirens that sent congregants running for shelter. The congregation helped residents and business owners get back on their feet

financially after the war, which shook things up spiritually as well.

“The hearts of the people, after war, were very open,” Ovadia says. “Each conversation was about the Lord.”

Ovadia was born into a traditional, religious Jewish family, but he left his faith at age 16. After his military service he met a Christian girl who shared the gospel with him. “Two things sunk into my heart: One, she loved the Lord, she loved my God; and two, she loved the Jewish nation,” Ovadia says.

He then met an Arab girl with similar beliefs. “I started to get jealous of them, just like it’s written in the Bible,” he recalls. “I saw that they love my God, they know my God more than I know my God.”

A young Ovadia searched the Scriptures and accepted Yeshua for himself. He now pastors full time and trains his people, half of whom are either Israel-born or have lived in the country more than 20 years, to serve in ministry. The Way is one of two Messianic congregations in the city and one of very few Hebrew-speaking congregations in northern Galilee.

The name Karmiel, which means “God’s olive groves,” is significant to Ovadia. “Like the symbol of the olive tree,” he says, “we want to be the oil that will be light to the people around us.”

Wayne Hilsden

From the time he arrived in Jerusalem in 1983, Wayne Hilsden

has taken an interest in the spiritual development of Jerusalem. He helped establish an Israeli Bible college, organized citywide pastors' prayer meetings, planted several churches and leads a local congregation.

Lately, Hilsden has taken the biblical mandate to "not forget" Jerusalem to a new level by investing in the city's physical infrastructure. "I'm fascinated by the change in downtown Jerusalem, which was becoming a neglected and uninspiring place," Hilsden says. "I now watch people return to a city that's being re-gentrified. I wanted to become a player in that."

King of Kings Ministries (KKM) purchased a theater in the heart of the city and renovated it to be a conference center. Named the Jerusalem Pavilion, the facility opened in 2004. Two years later, KKM purchased the penthouse floor of the same building and built the Pavilion Prayer Tower, which has panoramic views of Jerusalem and is one of the city's four 24/7 prayer houses. The facilities are used for local and international events, and Hilsden says they have given his ministry "a platform to bless the wider community."

When Hilsden and his wife, Ann, first arrived in Israel from Canada, they were careful not to import a "Canadian structure," he says. "We were on a learning curve, and if we came with a defined vision that was already, in a sense, fixed, then we wouldn't have room to be sensitive to the local context we were in," Hilsden recalls. "We believe the gospel only has credibility here when it can be proven to work in the laboratory of a local congregation, in a local Messianic community."

Unspoiled by a split or scandal, the vibrant King of Kings

congregation is, as Hilsden describes it, a “spiritual absorption center” for expatriate volunteers in Jerusalem, who establish themselves before moving on to indigenous congregations. KKM founded Israel College of the Bible in 1990 as a training center for Israelis, then promptly set local leaders in place. The college is locally run today.

“It goes far beyond building one local congregation,” Hilsden says. “Whatever we build is going to build up the whole body.”

Nicole Schiavi is a freelance journalist based in Israel. She traveled throughout the country to conduct these interviews.