

Israel Publication Kind to Messianics

In a recent analysis of Messianic Jews, a Jerusalem Post columnist said he found that Israelis, by and large, do not have negative feelings toward believers in Jesus.

✖ **Feb. 20, 2009** – Christian leaders were pleased this week to learn of a feature-length story that recently appeared in a *Jerusalem Post* publication giving fair treatment to Israel's Messianic community. The minority religious group had been increasingly harassed last year by Orthodox Jewish groups, according to the U.S. State Department.

"With the upturn in persecution of all believers [in Israel] by the traditional religious circles, I was not expecting this secular Israeli columnist to write such a wonderfully fair article about the believers in Israel," Israel Prayer founder Donna Diorio wrote in a newsletter to supporters after reading "Jesus for Jews," a cover story written by secular columnist Larry Derfner in the magazine section of the *Jerusalem Post*.

Derfner's piece, published last Friday, dispelled many myths traditionally held about Messianic believers by the Israeli population.

"Messianic Jews have a terrible name in this country," Derfner wrote. "Israelis who don't know any of them personally tend to be afraid of them. The community is widely viewed as a secretive cult that picks off vulnerable Jews and converts them to Christianity.

"My own impression of the Messianic Jews, though, is that they are a benign bunch," he continued. "[They're] native Israelis and immigrants who usually came from outside society's mainstream, who were spiritually hungry and found a new 'faith community.' [They're] all passionate Zionists and Israeli

patriots, with army service being very important to them.”

Derfner said he ran into a lot of suspicion among Messianic believers when he first began investigating their communities in December. “People seemed worried that I was either going to write about them as brainwashed weirdos, as many media accounts have done, or that I was working undercover for [Orthodox Jewish groups],” he said.

Pointing to acts of violence members have suffered to harassment they receive from the Orthodox groups and antagonism from the Interior Ministry, he said Messianics seem “more a persecuted minority than a menace.”

“The Messianics aren’t a cult, either,” Derfner said. “They have no single leader or even a leadership team, and none of them is considered by any means divine, or closer to God than others.”

Derfner delved into the personal lives of a handful of Messianic believers. Aside from persecutions decades ago, he said, “The Messianics say it’s only militant Orthodox Jews who give them problems; the mainstream Israeli Jews they live among are completely tolerant.”

According to a study released Thursday, the vast majority of Israelis do not feel threatened by Christians.

According to a poll conducted by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies and the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations, 74 percent of respondents did not see Christians as “missionaries,” and 76 percent were not bothered when encountering a Christian wearing a cross.