

Changing Times: Messianic Jews Finding Their Place in Israel

A lone guitar chord echoes across the room as more than a hundred Israeli soldiers rise to their feet to ask for help. With outstretched hands they reach toward the heavens and like David the warrior Psalmist they cry, *"We are surrounded by enemies, but you Lord are able to deliver us. With you O Lord, I can be a brave soldier."*

For these 18- to 24-year-old Messianic Jewish soldiers fighting for Israel, Yeshua the Messiah is a source of comfort and strength. "I wouldn't be able to last one more day in the army without Yeshua in my life," says Oren, a commander in an elite naval unit. "The pressure is so intense," he admits. "These times of worship and prayer are like a breath of fresh air for me."

Only a few years ago, this would have been unimaginable. It was not that long ago a Messianic Jew in Israel could not get a job or rent an apartment without hiding his or her faith. Messianic Jews were considered a security risk by authorities and prohibited from serving in sensitive army units. They certainly were not allowed to command elite troops in the Israeli army.

Now we have a younger, savvier generation of native-born Messianic Jews, and all has changed. Messianics are now serving as commanders, high-ranking officers and fighter-jet pilots in every branch of the Israeli military including intelligence, which requires the highest level of security checks. The Israel Defense Forces in coordination with the Prime Minister's office has given a green light for Messianic Jewish soldiers to help lead the battle for the defense of

Israel.

Messianic Jewish Solders: A Formidable Force

A large percentage of Messianic Jews choose to serve in elite fighting units, and there are growing numbers of Messianic officers and commanders volunteering to serve in specialized units. Messianic Jewish youth in Israel are highly motivated to serve in the IDF, and together with strong family and congregational support, they are increasingly being recognized as excellent soldiers for Israel's army.

Orly, a 19-year-old Messianic Jewess serves in a highly secretive intelligence unit where she instructs soldiers in the use of high-tech surveillance equipment. "The soldiers I teach are responsible for the lives of millions of people," she says. "It gets really intense, and it helps me a lot to be able to pour out my heart before the Lord and share with my Messianic friends," she says.

When 18-year-old Elisha, a Messianic Jewish Sabra (Israeli born) completed his basic training, he joined the hundreds of soldiers at the Western Wall in Jerusalem to pledge allegiance to the State of Israel, and receive his machine gun and Hebrew Old Testament given to all new recruits. During the ceremony, Elisha raised his hand above the battalion shouting to the commander, "Sir, may I use my Brit Hadasha (New Testament) with the Tanakh (Hebrew Scriptures) to pledge allegiance with?" The officer shouted back, "Yes, you may, Elisha!" And so Elisha joined the growing numbers of hundreds of openly Messianic Jewish soldiers serving in the IDF.

Elisha was chosen to serve in the highly sophisticated Iron Dome Anti-Missile unit so effectively protecting Israel's citizens from the thousands of Hamas rockets coming out of Gaza. Like most young Messianic Jews in Israel, Elisha, who has been promoted to first sergeant, says he is proud to serve his country. He affirms his faith in the Messiah Yeshua gives

him an even greater desire to serve the nation of Israel. In his own words ... "I feel like I am doing something really important. This is something I am prepared to do for my people. I am glad that I can be here for such a time as this."

'Do As I Do'

That is the commandment Gideon gave his troops as he led them into battle (Judges 7:17). It is also the motto of Joshua, a Messianic Jewish IDF captain and platoon commander who today trains and leads troops protecting the borders around Jerusalem.

His teams of young soldiers face a tense and complicated situation daily. Defending the capital of Israel from armed terror groups is both dangerous and frustrating.

"For me, this is a really important job," says the Messianic captain. "We are dealing with a huge problem here, and nobody knows how to fix it. Not many soldiers want to do this job. A big part of my job is keeping my soldiers motivated. Everyday I need to remind them about how important their job is. I've come to realize that we don't live in a world where everything goes the way you want," the experienced captain says. "Serving here wakes us up to the harsh realities of life in Israel and just how complicated it can be."

Messianic Officer Joshua talked about his role in training and leading his soldiers during these troubled times as Israel is again experiencing heightened tensions after a series of high-profile kidnappings, torture, murder and terror attacks leading to the war that broke out with Hamas in Gaza this summer.

"People in Israel are angry about the constant terror attacks on our people and some IDF soldiers are calling for revenge against Arabs. So I called an emergency meeting with all of our soldiers and explained to them that this kind of behavior is illegal. As soldiers in the IDF they cannot take these

matters into their own hands. The IDF has a clear code of ethics and guidelines requiring restraint in order to preserve innocent lives, Arab and Jewish. There is absolutely no place for any anti-Arab behavior in the IDF,” the Messianic captain emphasized.

The officer explained that soldiers who have been caught calling for revenge against Arabs were immediately put in prison. “I warned all of my soldiers that they cannot make these types of statements. Not on Facebook, not on the Internet or even in conversations. It is absolutely forbidden, by law, for an IDF soldier to make these kinds of statements,” the Captain told his troops.

“I told them that if they take revenge on the Palestinians they are no better than the terrorists, who teach their children to hate and kill the Jews. I told my soldiers that in Israel and in the IDF we will not allow our soldiers to fall into that dark hell,” Captain Joshua warned his troops.

“I explain to them that we cannot do whatever we want just because we are angry. This is a civilized country with very high moral standards. We will do whatever we can to protect our country, but we also insist that our soldiers do not take matters into their own hands,” he told his soldiers.

Spokesman for Israel

Because of his strong regard for high moral standards coupled with his experience and personal example in the field, the Messianic captain was chosen to be a spokesman for IDF. The Israeli army asked Officer Joshua to help explain Israel’s dilemma to the world and demonstrate the exemplary moral values he requires of Israeli soldiers. While Palestinians obsessively complain about the so-called “atrocities suffered at the hands of Israel,” Captain Joshua tells the real story in a number of short video clips produced by the IDF. Here is a sample.

A brief survey of social media will reveal that young Messianic Jews the world over have become an important source of support for Israel battling against the torrents of anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli bias in the media.

God of the Armies of Israel

There are many hundreds of Messianic Jewish soldiers now joined in the battle for Israel. These young Messianic soldiers are a unique generation having watched their parents stand on God's promises in the face of wars, terror, persecutions and even hatred because of their faith, sometimes standing alone, yet never losing hope in the One they trust.

These Messianic Jewish fighters are eyewitnesses to the faithfulness of the God of Israel, His provision and protection.

Growing up in this faith crucible of persecutions and conflict, standing together for the right to be followers of Yeshua in their own land, among their own people, this vibrant young generation of Messianic military officers, fighters, doctors, nurses, lawyers, professors, school teachers, artisans and business men and women are having a huge impact on Israel and on attitudes toward Jesus and Messianic Jewish faith in every sector of Israeli society.

Seeing their love for the people of Israel, their desire to please God and their commitment to the Jewish nation, this young generation fills my heart with faith and hope for our future—Israel's future. Watching them run to the battle ready to serve our people, full of faith and confidence, ready to give their lives for God, and for their nation, I am brought to my knees in tears of gratitude to the God of the armies of Israel.

David Lazarus *is pastor of the Messianic congregation Beit Immanuel in Jaffa-Tel Aviv. For the original article, visit .*