

12 Ministries Making a Difference in Israel

When Canadian native Wayne Hilsden moved to Israel in 1983 to help establish a fledgling congregation in Jerusalem, little did he know that he would wind up staying for three decades, or that King of Kings Community Jerusalem would turn into a multi-faceted ministry that has helped give birth to six churches, a Bible college, a thriving prayer initiative and various outreaches.

However, most precious to the former professor at Eastern Pentecostal Bible College are the carefully built relationships that enable him to share the message that Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) is the Messiah awaited by Israelis.

“There’s a greater measure of openness about one’s faith,” says the senior pastor of King of Kings. “When we came to Israel, the average Jew didn’t believe it was possible to become a believer. Even those who came to Christ believed they were the only Jews in existence who had done that.”

From a smattering of 15 messianic congregations around Israel when he arrived, Hilsden estimates there are 150 today. These churches have more than 15,000 Jews who consider themselves followers of Yeshua.

Those numbers may seem minuscule in a nation of more than 8 million. But leaders who focus on providing humanitarian aid, social assistance and spreading the good news in a nation largely resistant to Christ say what God is doing in Israel rivals the exodus from Egypt.

The miracles are occurring “right before our eyes,” says Gary Cristofaro, director of development for Ezra International. Since 1995 the ministry has aided the return of more than 43,000 low-income Jews to their ancestral homeland. A similar

number are waiting for help securing documents, passports and assorted immigration papers.

“God is gathering His people from the four corners of the earth,” says Cristofaro, a former Assemblies of God pastor. “The miracles are greater than when He brought them out of Egypt. Understanding this can make a difference in people’s faith. The things we worry about are pretty tame compared to this. It’s a very exciting time. A lot of people’s hearts will fail, but if more understand where they are in His economy, it will make a difference.”

Ezra International’s founder, Mel Hoelzle, points to God’s promise in Jeremiah 16:16 to develop a network of fishermen and hunters to help with the return of Jews to Israel.

The former business leader discovered such networks in Eastern European churches and others after the fall of communism. In a vision, God told Hoelzle He brought down the Iron Curtain, but another wall (poverty) was holding His people from returning home.

“That’s why we work with poor people,” Hoelzle says. “It was unbelievable how in Russia, Siberia and Ukraine, we had people coming up to tell us about dreams and visions that He would call them to help Jewish people. And now they had the opportunity to work with an organization like ours.”

Among other present-day miracles is improving Christian-Jewish relations, fractured by anti-Semitism in the church for 2,000 years.

The thaw has been aided by such long-standing efforts as the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, established in 1980 after 13 nations closed embassies to protest the Knesset’s declaration of Jerusalem as Israel’s undivided capital.

More recently, an 8-year-old ministry that provides portable shelters to Jews, Palestinians and other residents during

rocket attacks is also opening doors of understanding.

Rabbi Shmuel Bowman says Operation Lifeshield has attracted support from diverse quarters. When Jews and Christians come together for a unified purpose, the program saves lives while bringing down long-standing walls, Bowman says.

“The Jewish Federation in Birmingham, Alabama, now has a Christian on staff whose job is to connect to Christian communities and talk to them about Israel and why bridge building is important,” says the Torah scribe, who lives just south of Jerusalem. “If people can get together and talk about things we care passionately about, that opens doors to conversations and relationships.”

Wide-Ranging Outreach

“Ministry to Israel” is a broad term, encompassing everything from church planting and humanitarian aid to helping soldiers without extended family and protecting people vulnerable to attacks—especially those in southern Israel shelled by a hail of rockets this year from Hamas forces in Gaza.

In a nation prospering amid intense opposition from surrounding Middle Eastern neighbors, it may be hard to see Israel as a land of need. Indeed, during his multiple visits each year, Hoelzle finds a place vastly different from the snippets that appear via network news reports.

“Israel does a good job of protecting their people,” he says. “I feel safer there than I do on the streets of Los Angeles or Chicago.”

Yet, many are left behind in the country’s economic development, particularly Palestinians, Russians and Ethiopian immigrants. The latter two groups are part of the ongoing “*aliyah*” return aided by groups such as Ezra International.

The Messianic Jewish Alliance estimates 1.7 million, or

approximately 20 percent, of Israel's residents live below the poverty line. Jonathan Bernis, president and CEO of Jewish Voice Ministries International, says those numbers reflect groups still struggling to adapt to an advanced, high-tech-style economy.

In addition to lacking job skills, people such as elderly Russians and Ethiopians also run into language barriers. While many Israelis speak English, a failure to master the Hebrew language places immigrants outside the mainstream, Bernis says.

Yet, such needs are also creating an opportunity for messianic churches and Christian ministries that have gained credibility in many sectors of society.

"There's still a disdain for Jewish believers among the ultra-Orthodox and a majority in political leadership," says Bernis, who started Hear O Israel Ministries in 1984 before later merging it with Jewish Voice.

"But I think the messianic Jewish movement has gained a constituency. It has done a good job of providing clothing on behalf of the Christian community."

Some of the numbers are impressive. During the past 20 years, Vision for Israel & The Joseph Storehouse has assisted more than 750,000 people and 193,500 students, the latter through its Pack to School project providing school supplies to needy children.

Statistics pale in significance, however, when co-founder Barry Segal has touching encounters like his meeting with 64 Holocaust survivors in mid-August. Barry and his wife, Batya, sang to them and provided financial vouchers in advance for the Jewish holidays (Rosh Hashanah, Sept. 24-26, and Yom Kippur, Oct. 3-4).

This tender moment came right before the ministry distributed

8,500 backpacks and other assistance to children. Soon after, 500 members in Vision for Israel's Lone Soldiers program received hiking bags stuffed with personal supplies.

In early September, Segal's staff also gave out thousands of dollars worth of medical kits in backpacks to first responders who deal with the fallout of attacks from Hamas and other terrorist groups.

The latter has been even more challenging lately, as more than 2,000 Gazans and Israelis died in two months of fighting with Hamas before a shaky ceasefire went into effect in late summer. In addition to destruction, Segal says the collateral damage has included victims suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Segal shares about projects and topics such as food, culture and the Bible on his weekly *Roots & Reflections* TV program, which airs in Israel and globally on Daystar. The program's positive message about Israel and its people helps counteract the anti-Semitism that has resurfaced this year around the globe.

"We are not stuffing the good news down people's throats," says Segal, who grew up in the United States and discovered Yeshua as a young musician in the Midwest. "We're introducing people to the Bible and its great author through a relationship with Yeshua, the Messiah.

"We are not trying to convert Jews to another religion but bring them back to repentance and a love for the faith of their patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all looked forward to this covenant relationship."

Meeting Needs

The needs Hilsden sees around Kings of Kings' headquarters in an old theater in the heart of Jerusalem prompted the

formation of new outreaches this year. Its Anchor of Hope counseling center is based in what used to be a sex shop, while its compassion center offering various forms of aid launched last July. It plans to open a soup kitchen there in January.

“What we’ve been finding is the recent Gaza-Hamas war caused a quick downturn in the economy, partially due to [lower] tourism,” Hilsden says. “There are a lot of needy people, especially in Jerusalem. I regularly see homeless people on the streets, digging through garbage cans to find food. Our hearts go out to them.”

That statement can be repeated by numerous ministries that not only help those in need, but also continue to shine a spotlight on the land that occupies a central role in the Second Coming of the Messiah. Some examples:

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ)

Among its outreaches is hosting annual observances of Sukkot (this year observed from Oct. 8 to 15), a Jewish festival commemorating God’s faithfulness to the Jewish people during their exodus from Egypt. The ICEJ, which held the first Christian celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in 1980, helps educate Christians worldwide about Israel’s unique calling in God’s plans.

The embassy also helps combat anti-Semitism, which has surged this year in places such as Germany, France, Great Britain and Eastern Europe. In September Greece strengthened its laws against anti-Semitism and other hate speech because of the rise of a neo-Nazi Party there.

During a trip to Ukraine last January, Ezra International’s Cristofaro encountered flyers containing “Blood Libel” claims. Popular in Nazi Germany, their primary accusation is that Jews murder Christian children to use their blood during holiday rituals, including baking Passover matzahs.

"It's hard to believe this is happening in the 21st century," Cristofaro says. "This happens in the Middle East and then is repeated by the Orthodox Church. Anti-Semitism is not just coming from neo-Nazis and Arabs but what many Jews see as the church."

Maoz Israel Ministries

More than 35 years old, Maoz Israel marked its birth with the 1977 marriage of founders Shira Sorko-Ram and her husband, Ari, a former actor and professional football player for the Arizona Cardinals (formerly St. Louis Cardinals). Now as Israeli citizens, they have founded the Tifaret Yeshua (the Glory of Yeshua) congregation in downtown Tel Aviv.

In addition, they manage a nonprofit publishing company that prints and distributes Bible-based books in Hebrew and a humanitarian-aid organization () that supports widows, orphans, needy people and terrorist victims.

The organization also provides scholarships to help immigrants with Hebrew studies and career training, as well as college courses for Messianic Jews.

Revive Israel Ministries

Directed by Asher and Betty Intrater, this apostolic ministry is dedicated to bringing revival to Israel by reconciling its people with Yeshua as Messiah. In addition to past involvement with several messianic churches in Israel and the U.S., the couple now helps pastor Ahavat Yeshua (Love of Jesus) in Washington, D.C.

Revive Israel's evangelistic strategy focuses on building personal relationships in the workplace, schools and neighborhoods. It also spreads the gospel through one-on-one street witnessing, broadcasts and literature distribution.

The ministry distributes a third of its donations to helping

the poor, widows and orphans, and assisting Israeli business owners whose faith in Yeshua prompts challenges. Based in a residential community just outside Jerusalem, it also is cooperating on projects to develop a messianic industrial park and a residential development.

Operation Lifeshield

Responding originally to disruptions in northern Israel during a 2006 war with Lebanon, this year's attacks from Gaza have shifted its emphasis to the country's southern region. Bowman felt so strongly about the mission to protect residents from disruptions that he left his Orthodox Jewish temple to devote all his time to Operation Lifeshield.

Bowman draws key inspiration from Esther 4:14 and Mordecai's admonishment to Esther that God had placed her in a strategic location to save Israel. He recalls how he and others who helped initiate this effort mused: "Perhaps this is our time."

Since then the organization has distributed nearly 300 portable bomb shelters that can protect anywhere from a dozen to 50 people. The school, medical clinic or governmental entity requesting one agrees to provide ongoing maintenance.

"We're such a boring organization," Bowman jokes. "We have one mission and that's to prevent Israelis from rocket attacks. Pastors tell me to allow congregants to make a donation, be able to see where that donation has gone and connect with Israelis—they won't give to something abstract or undefined."

Media Ministry

While their ministries don't have an identical emphasis, two outreaches to Israel stem from those with roots in writing and commentary.

The co-pastor of Tel Aviv's Tifaret Yeshua, Ron Cantor is the founder of Messiah's Mandate, a teaching ministry aimed at

raising up leaders for the coming Israeli revival.

The active blogger and author of *Identity Theft* (Destiny Image, 2013), Cantor is a thorn in the side of both anti-Semites and supporters of “replacement theology.” His novel explores how Jesus has been robbed of his Jewishness, while in a weekly podcast and blogs he explores the truth about such topics as Israel’s rebirth in 1948.

Through both novels and non-fiction, author Joel Rosenberg has written extensively about Middle Eastern and end-times subjects. His latest novel, *The Auschwitz Escape*, explores a Jewish prisoner relying on God’s power to escape the concentration camp and alert the world to Nazi atrocities.

In 2006, Rosenberg and his wife, Lynn, set up The Joshua Fund to mobilize Christians to bless Israel. They have led numerous prayer and vision trips to Israel, organized conferences and seminars on four continents, and provided food and other supplies to the needy.

Chosen People Ministries

Founded 120 years ago in Brooklyn by a Hungarian immigrant and now directed by Dr. Mitch Glaser, this ministry seeks to evangelize, disciple and serve Jewish people. It operates in 13 nations with programs that equip churches to do Jewish evangelism, support messianic congregations, print messianic materials and participate in benevolent distribution.

Representatives of Chosen People Ministries also conduct “Messiah in Passover” presentations in churches across the U.S. The ministry hosts an annual messianic Jewish retreat in Maryland and leads tours of the Holy Land annually.

The Joseph Project

The Joseph Project is the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America’s humanitarian-relief arm. The alliance, which will

observe its centennial anniversary next year, has distributed more than \$100 million in aid to the poor of all faiths in Israel.

The ministry collects, ships and distributes more than 75 tons of clothing, furniture, household goods, medical supplies and other aid annually. It supplies this assistance through a network of 35 relief-aid centers, more than 100 Israeli partnering organizations, and messianic congregations.

Donations have increased in recent years, with the Joseph Project tripling the number of 40-foot containers it shipped to Israel between 2010 and 2013, when aid totaled more than \$5 million.

A Divine Mission

Those involved in ministry to Israel cite numerous Scriptures to buttress their support, particularly Matthew 25:31-40, which Segal says in context is a reference to helping Jews. They also cite Genesis 12:1-3, Job 29:11-17, Job 31:16-22, Isaiah 11:11-12, Isaiah 43:5-6, Isaiah 49:22, Isaiah 61:1-3 and the 36th chapter of Ezekiel.

“Ezekiel 36 speaks about how God’s name is profaned as the Jewish people have been scattered,” Cristofaro says. “God is mocked, and people think He can’t fulfill His promises. He reveals himself to the Jewish people and the nations with this (*aliyah*) process. We have a choice: to sanctify or desecrate His Name.”

Hoelzle sees encouraging signs that more Christians are warming to the message of support for Israel, saying Ezra International has more churches helping finance the ministry than it did a decade ago. He thinks that stems from more awareness of ancient prophecies about Israel being fulfilled in modern times.

Indeed, during his ongoing trips to Israel, Bernis senses the

same kind of openness to Yeshua that he saw among American Jews during the heyday of the Jesus People in the 1970s.

Bernis, whose work in recent years has broadly expanded to establishing a network of medical clinics for Jewish communities in India and some countries in Africa, says he has talked to Orthodox Jews in Israel who have embraced Yeshua after supernatural experiences.

“There is a growing expectation of Messiah,” Bernis says. “We believe that ultimately the Jewish people—and particularly those in Israel—will cry out: ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matt. 23:39).

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4 More Ministries Impacting Israel

Here are some other ministries that are making a difference for the people of Israel:

 Chaya and Avi Mizrachi founded Dugit in 1993

Dugit: Simply the name of this organization in Tel Aviv is intriguing. The word “dugit” is Hebrew for “fishing boat,” like the ones used by the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. Established in 1993 by Avi and Chaya Mizrachi, Dugit likes to refer to itself as “fishers of men” in the heart of Tel Aviv.

The Dugit Messianic Centre has been reaching Israelis with the gospel of Jesus Christ for more than two decades, discipling them to become stronger believers and grounding them in the Word. With 20 percent of Israelis living in poverty, Dugit’s

Agape Distribution Center helps to provide food and clothing to the needy. Families are sent to the center by social services, including Holocaust survivors and those unable to work for health reasons. During the major Jewish holidays, Dugit distributes “baskets of love,” and the organization hands out free Bibles and testimony books in Hebrew, Russian and Arabic to quench spiritual thirst.

The Dugit Messianic Centre has  been reaching Israelis for Jesus for nearly two decades

Succat Hallel: In the mold of the many sites of the International House of Prayer in the United States, Succat Hallel is a place where anyone can come to worship and pray 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Americans Rick and Patti Ridings were summoned by God to Jerusalem in 1999 and began worship services in their living room. In 2004, the Lord opened the door to Succat Hallel to relocate to a facility overlooking Mount Zion and the Old City of Jerusalem. In fall 2006, a second private prayer room opened in the City of David where the original Tabernacle of David stood. Since 2007, Succat Hallel has hosted a youth/adult conference known as ELAV, which means “Unto Him.”

Jerusalem Institute of Justice: This organization is dedicated to cultivating and defending the rule of law, human rights, freedom of conscience and democracy for all people in Israel and its adjacent territories. Founded by Calev Myers in 2004, JIJ was established to provide pro-bono legal assistance for those suffering from illegal religious discrimination, including Messianic Jews. Myers immigrated to Israel in 1992, graduated from Hebrew University of Jerusalem and became a licensed member of the Israeli Bar Association. Since 2007, JIJ has strived to free men, women and children trapped in the sex trade and has been working to change legislation in Israel, which currently allows both the sale and purchase of sexual services. Additionally, JIJ focuses on Palestinian

human rights.

Bridges for Peace: Bridges is a Jerusalem-based, Bible-believing Christian organization whose desire is to see Christians and Jews working side by side for better understanding and a more secure Israel. Founded in 1976, BFP is a ministry of hope and reconciliation, giving Christians the opportunity to actively express their biblical responsibility before God to be faithful to Israel and the Jewish community. Its many programs include bimonthly publication of pertinent and positive news from Israel; its monthly teaching letter to bring fuller meanings of biblical concepts from the Hebraic roots of the Scriptures; its Chai Night prayer and study groups, which is a monthly intercessory prayer program for those desiring to pray for the peace of Jerusalem; and Operation Ezra, including a food bank and assistance to Jewish immigrants, Israel's elderly and its poor.