

A Jewish Awakening?

With more Jews professing faith in Yeshua than ever before, Israel's supporters wonder if this isn't the beginning of an end-times prophecy being fulfilled.

Inside a prayer cave on the mountain where Elijah once challenged the prophets of Baal to call down fire from heaven, Jordan Elias was playing a song of worship and repentance when he had a radical encounter with God.

"It was as if a presence burst through the door and filled the cave in an instant, and I immediately sensed the holiness of God," recalls the 23-year-old Elias. "It was heavy. A good word to describe it is *ka'vod*. In Hebrew, it means 'the weight of His glory.' I tried to stand, but the presence of God just compelled me to my knees and onto my face. I began weeping and crying out: 'Lord, I'm Your servant. Give me Your fire.'"

Based on the experience, Elias wrote the song "Do You Want the Fire?" for his debut album *Desert Cry*. The title is derived from a pattern found throughout Scripture—the "cry of the prophets." From Moses to Yeshua, the Messiah Himself, the ones God called to speak for Him drew away into the desert where He gave them the same message for their generations: "Repent and return to the Lord."

Elias is among a sharply increasing number of Jews worldwide who profess faith in Yeshua. Although no definitive study has been conducted on how many there are, the numbers are not just rising, but spiking, observers say.

Jews for Jesus, the San Francisco ministry involved in Jewish evangelism since 1973, estimates—based on its mailing list and conference attendance—the number has increased from tens of thousands in the 1970s to between 75,000 and 100,000 today.

Other experts estimate the numbers to be higher. Rabbi

Jonathan Bernis, president of Phoenix-based Jewish Voice Ministries International, and Joel Rosenberg, a *New York Times* best-selling author of fiction and nonfiction books about Bible prophecy and current events, believe the growth to be from several thousand in the late 1960s to 250,000 to 500,000 today as Jews come to Yeshua “in record numbers.”

“I couldn’t be more excited that more Jewish people are coming to faith in Jesus as the Messiah than at any other time since the first century,” Rosenberg says. “I believe this began in 1967 with the reunification of Jerusalem and Judea, and Samaria coming back under control of the Jews in Israel. The 1967 Six-Day War seemed to lift the curtain, as it were, on a spiritual awakening of Jewish people around the world.”

In Israel, it’s believed the number of Jewish believers has grown from fewer than 200 in 1967 to as many as 15,000 today. “In the last 20 years, more Jews have come to Yeshua in Israel than any time since the book of Acts,” says David Davis, senior pastor of Kehilat HaCarmel, where Elias spent a year while composing music.

Since the end of World War II, there has also been a widespread return of Jews to Israel from other nations. Observers of this view it as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The book of Ezekiel records God’s promise to one day bring Jews back to Israel, to reverse the *diaspora* that scattered them worldwide because of sin (see Ezek. 11:16-17). Thousands have come from Russia, India, China, Iraq, Iran, Ethiopia and many other countries.

Believers also see it as a sign that Romans 11:25-26 is being fulfilled, which says after the “fullness of the Gentiles has come in ... all Israel will be saved” (NKJV).

Elias explains: “It’s like when Israel gets saved *en masse*—when revival breaks out on a national scale in Israel and the world sees that—it’s going to be like life from the

dead to the nations in regards to salvation. It will be the catalyst for the greatest revival to ever hit the planet.”

Searching for Answers

Yet why today? Why this intensified interest in Yeshua now?

Some Messianic leaders attribute it in part to current societal uncertainties that are fueling deeper questions about life and a search for answers. Others see it as the latest surge of awakening among several that have occurred in the last 100 years.

Jews for Jesus Executive Director David Brickner says that amid growing anti-Semitism, the nuclear threat from Iran and a resurgence of interest in end-times prophecies, young Jewish evangelists are finding a “great openness, especially among their own age group.” Hundreds are embracing Yeshua, he says.

Many college-age Messianic Jews are also participating in evangelistic trips to Africa, India, Nepal, Thailand and other countries where Israeli youth vacation after getting out of the military at age 21. Often they are receptive to the good news.

“Israelis, particularly young Israelis, are looking for answers,” explains Susan Perlman, director of communications for Jews for Jesus. “They are living in very uncertain times and they are searching for meaning. Some are going into very ultraorthodox Judaism, some are dabbling in the New Age movement and mysticism. But there is a growing number who are beginning to see that Jesus just might possibly be the Messiah that our people have been waiting for.”

Michael L. Brown, president of FIRE School of Ministry in Concord, N.C., says what is happening today among Jewish youth in Israel is similar to what occurred among Jewish young people in the U.S. during the Jesus movement. “There are now Israeli youth rallies for Jewish believers in Jesus that can

draw 1,000 people or more," says Brown, who is Jewish. "That is unprecedented."

The openness is not limited to youth, says Ari Sorko-Ram, co-founder with his wife, Shira, of Maoz Israel Ministries, a Messianic organization based in Israel. He says seekers of all ages have been visiting his congregation regularly asking about his faith. "I believe that this is the time of the beginning of Israel's restoration spiritually, when new life will be breathed into the dry bones and a great and mighty spiritual army will rise up in Israel in this generation," he says.

Most Jewish believers live in the U.S., where their numbers have increased from 25,000 or 30,000 in the 1970s to at least 60,000 today, Perlman says. In Los Angeles, among the 200,000 people who work in the entertainment industry, about 6,000 are now Christian or Jewish believers, according to Karen Covell, director of Hollywood Prayer Network, which focuses intercession on the entertainment industry. She has seen a "spiritual shift" in recent years, especially among Jews who are searching for spiritual answers.

"Jewish people are really seeking for more answers spiritually. They are getting very hungry for more and are seeking out God," Covell says. "I think we started seeing it when the kabala movement got more popular. Madonna was seeking answers, and we started seeing more people open to their Messiah too. It just seems that God is softening their hearts."

Other factors seem to underscore this.

Recently, evangelists with Jews for Jesus encountered unexpected interest from students at major U.S. universities, including the University of California at the Los Angeles and Berkeley campuses; the University of Chicago; and New York University, Perlman says.

The ministry is also experiencing success in the city of New York, which has one of the largest Jewish populations in the world. Dozens of young people handed out hundreds of thousands of gospel tracts there recently and engaged with people by asking them, "Who do you think Jesus is?"

The volunteers wore T-shirts that read "Jews for Jesus," "Be More Jewish," "Believe in Jesus" or contained prophetic Messianic verses that pique interest.

"Many people are very interested to interact with that question and give their views," Perlman says. "From there, we move onto deeper spiritual conversations and have had the opportunity to pray with some of those people on the street corners of New York."

At a recent Bible prophecy conference at Calvary Chapel Chino Hills in Southern California, speaker David Hocking told the audience he's been invited to address numerous Jewish synagogues throughout the nation, spending hours answering questions about Messianic prophecies and why he believes Yeshua is the Messiah. "I find the same thing going into many communities," Hocking says. "Jews are asking questions they have never asked before."

Because signs, wonders and miracles are increasing, Sid Roth, founder of Georgia-based Messianic Vision, says it's time to "evangelize the Jew" who, according to 1 Corinthians 1:22, requires "a sign." Roth also hosts the TV show *It's Supernatural!* and is engaged in a campaign to mail copies of his 2009 book, *They Thought for Themselves*, to 2 million Jewish homes. It contains the stories of 10 Jewish people from different backgrounds who found their Messiah.

Under what he calls "God's eternal law of evangelism," Roth says God starts with the Jew first when He wants to reach the world. Jesus went only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24), and the apostle Paul went to the Jew

first (see Rom. 1:16). Roth says by reaching out first to the Jew a spiritual door is opened that will bring about a large-scale revival.

“There has been an increase in signs and wonders with a purpose of evangelizing the Jews ... which will release the greatest revival in history,” Roth says. “When you reach out to the Jew first, it opens a supernatural door for all people.”

20th Century Roots

Some Messianic leaders also see a link between the current surge in Jewish believers and earlier ones in modern history. Several occurred during the 20th century, according to Mitch Glaser, president of Brooklyn, Chosen People Ministries, which was founded in the 1890s by a Messianic rabbi.

While doing research for his doctoral degree at Fuller Theological Seminary, Glaser learned that a large number of Jews had become believers in Yeshua in the 1920s in Europe and North Africa as a result of work done by about 700 British and Scandinavian missionaries. The missionaries were motivated by Romans 11 and understood the Second Coming would coincide with the “return of the Jewish remnant—a sign of the end of the age,” Glaser says.

As economic distress gripped Eastern Europe at the time, many of these Jewish believers left for Germany, England, France, the U.S., Canada, and Central and South America. Sadly, Glaser says, “hundreds of thousands” of Jewish believers perished in the concentration camps during the Holocaust.

“There are lots of accounts of Jewish believers sharing the gospel while suffering in the concentration camps,” Glaser says. “At the end of the Holocaust, two things killed this vibrant Messianic movement.

“No. 1, the Holocaust itself. The Holocaust alone wiped out

the majority of the Messianic movement because it was concentrated and focused on Europe.

“Secondly, there were still millions of Jews left in Russia ... and once the Iron Curtain fell the Russian Jews were really stuck with no gospel witness.”

It wasn't until the late 1960s during the counterculture revolution in the U.S.—a time when Jews made up 2 percent of the population but 20 percent of the “flower children”—that the number of Jewish believers swelled again.

“In the late 1960s and early '70s, at the height of the Jesus movement, a significant number of Jews came to faith in Jesus,” says Perlman, who became a believer after she met Christian rock musician Larry Norman in New York City and he invited her to hear him sing at a church. “That was a very high point for Jewish evangelism.

“A second big spike came after *glasnost* when many of the Russian Jews were open to considering religious answers. We saw a really large number of Russian Jews coming to faith in Jesus, and we feel this move right now in Israel is another one of those major spikes.”

Also, Glaser says he's now seeing the emergence of a second generation of Messianic Jews—the children of those who came to faith in Yeshua during the Jesus movement in the U.S. and its counterpart in Russia in the 1980s and 1990s.

“Do I see a growing number of Jewish people worldwide embracing Yeshua as the Messiah? I'd say everywhere from Brooklyn to Toronto to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and even Buenos Aires,” Glaser says. “I see that it is happening. The greatest movement has been among the Russian Jews, and there is a growing movement among the Israelis that is very exciting.”

Meanwhile, a growing number of Jewish musicians such as Elias—and others associated with Messianic record label

Galilee of the Nations—are composing songs inspired by a heavenly fire. They say it’s part of a new sound coming out of Israel because whenever God does a “new thing, there is a new song.”

“Throughout history, music has always played an intricate role in revival,” says Yochanan Ben Yehuda, the label’s founder and president. “The singers and musicians will go before God’s people in the greatest revival that will ever hit this planet.”

Troy Anderson, a writer and a newspaper reporter, lives in Los Angeles.