

Israel Releases Jews for Jesus Evangelist on Bail

A campaigner on staff with the Jews for Jesus organization was released on bail late in the evening on Nov. 24 after being held for four days and nights because he was holding up an evangelistic sign.

Barry Barnett, a British citizen, was part of a team serving on the "Behold Your God" Israel campaign in the Beer Sheva region. He and other team members, who were all Israeli, were holding up the sign with an evangelistic message and cellphone number printed on it when they were approached by six immigration officers on Nov. 20.

The officers seized the banner and arrested Barnett, who was in the country on a B2 tourist visa. Barnett was held for several hours at an immigration office before being moved to the prison in Ramle, near Tel Aviv.

Though released, the legal issues have not yet been settled. Released on bail, Barnett and his wife, Alison, are still in Israel, staying in the Rosen Center owned by Jews for Jesus. The Ministry of the Interior issued Barnett an expulsion order, which required him to leave by Dec. 3. Jews for Jesus plans to fight this order.

Although Barnett did not feel he was ever in immediate danger, he describes his time in prison as a harrowing experience. Held in a cell with nine others, Barnett says the worst part was feeling like a caged animal. The men were allowed to go to a small courtyard three times a day. Barnett explains that the courtyard had just enough room to hold a ping-pong table.

Barnett's greatest concern was that he would face a lengthy prison sentence. This created an immediate sense of loneliness because he thought he might be the only Christian in the

prison. However, Barnett says one of the greatest blessings was that within just 24 hours, he learned he was not alone but that there were six other Christians also imprisoned there. One was a pastor, who led a small prayer service each day at 2 p.m., which gave Barnett comfort.

During Barnett's four days of imprisonment, he talked with others in the prison and even gave some English lessons to a few of the prisoners.

His ordeal also demonstrates the power of prayer. In a video posted on the Jews for Jesus website, Barnett expressed deep gratitude for "all the prayers that went out throughout the world [because] everything happens through prayer and God is good."

The Israel director of Jews for Jesus, Dan Sered, explains that according to Israeli law, an expulsion order is less severe than a direct deportation. If he'd been deported, Barnett would not be allowed back into Israel for 10 years. However, Sered says that Barnett had every right to express his faith, stand with a banner and talk to others about his faith in Jesus even while in the country on a tourist visa. Appealing the expulsion order will press the government to ensure that religious freedoms continue for both citizens of Israel and visiting tourists.