

Messianic Jewish Congregation Won't Appeal Israeli Court Ruling

A congregation of Messianic Jews in Israel who recently lost a lawsuit against an ultra-orthodox Jewish group that allegedly incited a riot against them has decided not to appeal their case, the church's pastor said.

After meeting with his congregation and members of the Messianic community in Israel, Howard Bass (pictured), leader of Yeshua's Inheritance in Beer Sheva, said that although there are strong legal grounds for an appeal, he believes it is not God's will to do so.

"We didn't see that it's right to appeal, even though there is good legal basis. But we don't feel it's the Lord's will to appeal," Bass said, later adding he felt the verdict was "totally distorted."

In 2007, Bass filed suit against Yehuda Deri, chief Sephardic rabbi in the city of Beer Sheva, and Yad L'Achim, an organization that fights against Messianic Jews in Israel, for allegedly inciting a riot at a December 2005 service that Bass was leading.

On Dec. 24, 2005, during a baptismal service in Beer Sheva, a group of about 200 men pushed their way into a small, covered structure being used to baptize two new Christians and tried to stop the service. Police were called to the scene but could not control the crowd.

Once inside the building, the assailants tossed patio chairs, damaged audiovisual equipment, threw a grill and other items into a baptismal pool, pushed Bass into the pool and broke his glasses.

In the days before the riot, Yad L'Achim issued notices to people about a "mass baptism" scheduled to take place at the facility in the city of 187,900 people, 51 miles southwest of Jerusalem. In the days after the riot, Deri bragged about the incident on a radio talk show, including a boast that Bass had been "baptized" at the gathering.

Bass demanded either a public apology for their alleged role in the attack, or \$389,052 from the rabbi and Yad L'Achim. The case, Bass said, was to "honor the name of Jesus Christ in Israel." He said he sought monetary damages "as a tool to elicit an apology" from Deri and Yad L'Achim.

The 2005 incident was the second time the church had to deal with an attack after Yad L'Achim disseminated false information about their activities.

On Nov. 28, 1998, a crowd of roughly 1,000 protestors broke into a Yeshua's Inheritance service after the anti-Christian group spread a rumor that three busloads of kidnapped Jewish minors were being brought in for baptism. The assailants threw rocks, spit on parishioners and attempted to seize some of their children, Bass said.

Bass decided to file the 2007 suit after consulting with members of his congregation and the greater Messianic community in Israel. On June 29, he held much the same meeting, with participants deciding not to appeal. Bass relayed details of the meeting in a group e-mail sent to interested parties.

"No one present, nor any who have communicated with me in the past few days, had a conviction that an appeal is the clear will of God," he said in the e-mail. "Some were uncertain; others were against."

The judge issued his decision May 24. Bass read about the decision on May 30 on a government website. The judge ruled that Bass' attorneys did not prove that the rabbi or the group

incited the riot. "He's saying what happened inside the walls is separate from what happened outside the walls," Bass said.

He said he was "astonished" at the judge's bias in the decision.

"It was a bit amazing to see how one-sided it was," he said, later adding, "It's not a righteous judgment, it is a bad judgment."

Bass said he believes the verdict is a "message from God" that injustice toward Jews who accept Jesus as the Messiah is now the "state of things" in Israel.

The judge ordered Bass to pay a fine to the defendants and cover their legal expenses for a total of approximately \$40,123. The judge gave Bass until June 11 to pay the fine. Because of an outpouring of financial support, the fees were being rapidly paid off, Bass said.

"It's amazing how quickly people started donating," he said. "That to me is a further indication of God's favor in the lawsuit. He's covered it."

He said a substantial portion of the donations came from inside Israel.

Also in his e-mail, Bass admitted to approaching the case with his hands tied out of respect for others.

"We did not take to court certain persons who clearly were instrumental in the riot, knowing that they would not testify against the Chief Rabbi or against Yad L'Achim," Bass said. "We strived to respect the Chief Rabbi because he is the Chief Rabbi of the city, despite his total lack of regard" for the church.

Sanctioning Violence

Bass said the verdict may embolden those who want to attack

Messianic Jews in Israel. At minimum, he said, the verdict leaves open the potential for future violence.

"They were given nothing to restrain them," he said. "They were not warned at all by the judge to be careful of what they do."

The *Yeshiva World*, a newspaper that caters to the Orthodox Jewish community, has called Messianic Jews both "missionaries" and a "cult." The newspaper quoted a statement made by Rabbi Dov Lifschitz, founder and chairman of Yad L'Achim.

"We mustn't become complacent in the face of the ongoing efforts of the missionaries, even as they are licking their wounds from this loss," Lifschitz said. "This ruling encourages us to continue to fight them with all the legitimate means at our disposal."

Bass said he understands that not appealing the court loss may lead to the impression that his faith community accepts the judge's ruling, and because of that, some people in Israel may now side with Yad L'Achim and other anti-Messianic groups.

"We've leaving ourselves open to all kinds of opinions," he said.

But Bass said he is looking at the case in the long term and through the eyes of God. He said that Jesus' trial was the perfect example of a public defeat and a travesty of justice that God used in a great way.

"His court case seemed like a loss according to the world at the time," Bass said.

To read Bass' complete response to the verdict, visit Streams in the Negev.