

Suspect Indicted in Bombing at Messianic Leader's Home

✖ Officials in Israel last week indicted the man accused of sending a bomb to the home of a Messianic minister in March 2008 that nearly killed the pastor's teenage son.

Jack Teitel, 37, was indicted for attempted murder, among other charges, for allegedly sending a bomb hidden in a gift basket to the home of David Ortiz, pastor of a Messianic congregation in Ariel, Israel.

(Photo of Ami Ortiz, Compass Direct News)

The package, opened by Ortiz's 15-year-old son, Amiel, damaged the family's apartment and left Amiel covered with blood and burns, and full of needles and screws contained in the bomb. Now, 20 months later, 16-year-old Amiel is back in school and playing basketball.

When Teitel walked into court, the West Bank settler shouted that God was proud of him. "It was a pleasure and honor to serve my God," Teitel reportedly said. "God is proud of what I have done. I have no regrets."

Police said Teitel is an ultra-Orthodox Jewish nationalist who picked out his targets based on his nationalist philosophy.

Along with the Ortiz case, police said Teitel is responsible for the June 1997 shooting death of Samir Bablisi, a Palestinian taxi driver who was found in his cab with a single bullet wound to his head. Two months later, police said, Teitel shot Isa Jabarin, a Palestinian shepherd who was giving Teitel driving directions to Jerusalem.

Police also said that Teitel attempted to burn down a monastery and unsuccessfully planted several bombs. He is also

accused of the September 2008 bombing of Zeev Sternhell of Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The bombing left the emeritus history professor slightly wounded.

Teitel told police he was trying to kill David Ortiz, not injure his son.

In all, Teitel has been indicted for two cases of pre-meditated murder, three cases of attempted murder, carrying a weapon, manufacturing a weapon, possession of illegal weapons and incitement to commit violence.

Adi Keidar, Teitel's attorney, reportedly said his client is "mentally unstable." He cited Teitel's alleged confession to acts he did not commit. After a psychiatric evaluation by the state, Teitel was deemed fit to stand trial.

Keidar is representing Teitel on behalf of the Honenu organization, a nationalistic law firm endorsed by Mordechai Eliyahu, a rabbi known for his far-right Orthodox views.

Honenu is known for defending, among others, Ami Popper. Popper was convicted in 1990 for shooting seven Palestinian workers who were waiting for a ride at a day labor pick-up site. Popper's attack, like all others cited in Honenu's website, was said to come "in response" to Palestinian aggression. Despite numerous attempts to contact Keidar, he could not be reached for comment.

David Ortiz said he is not surprised by Teitel's claim that God is proud of him. Ortiz cited biblical verses where the early Christians were warned that one day people would kill them and think that they were doing the will of God. Teitel, Ortiz said, saw him as an enemy of the nation of Israel.

"He saw me and the professor as false prophets," Ortiz said.

Police have brought no evidence linking Teitel to any other co-conspirator. But Ortiz's wife, Leah, said she thinks Teitel

worked with others. Teitel's neighbor, Yosef Espinoza, was brought in for questioning and later released. Teitel does not speak Hebrew, but when he was arrested he was distributing handouts written in Hebrew criticizing homosexuals in Israel.

When his apartment was raided, police found a cache of illegal weapons he has been indicted for owning. Ortiz also said that a tape from a closed-circuit television camera taken on the day of the bombing shows Teitel was driven to the Ortiz apartment by another person.

Regardless, Leah Ortiz scoffs at the claim that Teitel was politically motivated. Instead, she said, he used politics and religion as a foil to justify murder.

"He is a serial killer," she said.

In spite of all the pain that the Ortiz family has gone through, Leah Ortiz said she has seen much good come from the tragedy, including miraculous healings. She said that the bombing has helped soften the opinion of people in Israel toward Jews who believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

"It has made them face the facts of how they see Jesus," she said.

Howard Bass, a leader of a Messianic congregation in Beer Sheva, Israel, said he isn't so sure.

"It's not that simple," he said, adding that such attacks may help tolerant people to eschew violence, but that others will actually be encouraged by the bombings. "It makes people aware of how far they [people set against the Messianic Jews] will be willing to go and abhor them. It's bringing things to light and forcing people to make a decision: What is good and what is evil?"

Hostile Environment

Bass himself was a victim of at least one attack by anti-missionary, Orthodox extremists. On Dec. 24, 2005, several hundred Orthodox Jews mobbed an outdoor service Bass held. The mob destroyed church equipment, terrorized congregants and threw Bass into a baptismal pool.

Bass has since sued Yad L'Achim, an Orthodox, anti-missionary organization he said is responsible for inciting the attack. A court decision in the case is due later this month.

On its website, Yad L'Achim asserts that missionaries are "devious" and are trying to "destroy the Jewish people." The organization makes no distinction in its website between missionaries and Messianic Jews. The site also goes as far as to accuse Messianic Jews of "playing the victim to the hilt" in reference to the Ortiz bombing.

Despite numerous attempts to reach members of Yad L'Achim, no one was made available for comment.

According to the 2009 International Religious Freedom Report issued by the U.S. Department of State, there are 10,000 Messianic Jews in Israel. The report documents several cases of violence against Messianic Jews, including one case on May 15 in which "ultra-Orthodox residents of the Tel Aviv suburb of Rehovot attacked and beat a group of Messianic Jews who were handing out New Testament pamphlets on the street."

Additionally, Bass cites a book published this week in Israel titled, The King's Torah. Bass said the book encourages the killing of gentiles and anyone else deemed to be a threat to Israel.

"We're seeing a spirit rising," Bass said, "where they feel they have a legitimate right to kill anyone who threatens the Jewish state."

Mentioning the book, David Ortiz agreed with Bass, calling the bombing and recent anti-Christian aggression "a shadow of things to come."

As for what the Ortiz family wishes for Teitel, Leah Ortiz said she hopes he will receive a sentence that is "equal to his crime." Because Israel has no death penalty, this very likely would mean life in prison.

Regardless of what happens in court, members of the Ortiz family say they have forgiven Teitel. David Ortiz hopes one day to sit down face-to-face with Teitel and talk. He said he hopes Teitel will become another Apostle Paul.

"There is something inside him that makes him want to kill people. If God has had mercy on me, maybe he'll have mercy on others," Ortiz said. "The Lord forgave David and many people in the Bible-my goal and my prayer for him is that he will repent and be saved."