

Extend God's Kingdom in Tel Aviv

When you arrive in Israel and drive past road signs to Jerusalem or Nazareth, it is easy to think you have just entered the biggest theme park in the world. Almost a million Christians visit Israel every year. As a native-born Israeli, I am blessed to see these groups walking the land and discovering the world of the Bible for themselves, but I am also saddened to know that few of them connect with local Israeli believers.

I understand that for most people it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to walk where Jesus walked and that tour companies pack their schedules with trips to as many ancient sites as possible. But what about the living stones—the local people the Lord is building into His spiritual temple?

Just 25 years ago there were only 200 or so Jewish believers in Israel. Today there are more than 130 local indigenous congregations. In a country historically so closed to the gospel, this tremendous growth in just two decades is a miracle. Today there are Jewish believers, “living stones,” all over Israel, and every day they proclaim God's faithfulness with their lives. More than ever we need intercessors to stand with us as we witness the fulfillment of prophecy.

The body of Messiah is alive and growing in Israel but faces its own challenges. Harassment and persecution from anti-missionary organizations is commonplace. We live in this land, we raise our children here, we pay taxes, we serve in the army, we are active members of society, and yet we experience persecution for our faith. If Christians will not stand with us, who will?

An article in the *Jerusalem Post* reported that a Jewish organization “received \$87 million from evangelical Christians last year for a variety of immigration and absorption programs, as well as social welfare and defense needs.” While this effort to support good causes is admirable, none of this wealth was invested into the kingdom. Lives could have been touched spiritually as well as physically. Many congregations also run humanitarian projects, but they are struggling financially.

The body of Messiah in Israel is small, and rising costs make it difficult for congregations to provide facilities.

Tel Aviv is the largest city in Israel and reportedly has the densest Jewish population in the world. This busy, multicultural metropolis struggles with the same challenges other cities all over the world do: poverty, homelessness, alcoholism, drugs, prostitution, homosexuality and religious cults.

The people are spiritually hungry and looking for answers. “How shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14, NKJV). Many Israelis have never heard the gospel, and those who have heard of Yeshua have no idea He has anything to do with the Jewish people. They are usually amazed to discover that Yeshua was Jewish and fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah promised to Israel.

As a local pastor, I have no doubt that God is moving in Israel today. Israelis are responding to the gospel and coming to the Lord. There is an openness that was not evident a few years ago. The harvest is ready.

Israel is not just about wonderful tours of the Holy Land; there are 7 million people here who don’t know the Lord. My challenge to you is this: If you want to make a difference for the kingdom, come and visit us, worship with us, find out what God is doing among the local believers. Make it a priority to

stand with your Israeli brothers and sisters. Together we can extend the kingdom of God here in Israel!

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