

EVANGELICAL OUTREACH  
TO ISRAELI JEWISH EMIGRES  
IN NORTH AMERICA AS OF 2001

A Personal Report Based on a Decade of Research and  
Ministry in the Field  
With a Limited Recent Survey

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## **Evangelical Outreach to Israeli Jewish Émigrés in North America**

*A Disclaimer and Note on Sources:* As I present the following description and analysis on the existence of Israeli Jewish émigrés in North America, where they live, their experience and situation here, and what has been and is being done to reach, disciple and congregate them for Messiah Yeshua, a disclaimer is in order. This is not a scientifically conducted survey based on the best social science survey methods on the level of Ph.D. research. Nor does it purport to be in any way exhaustive. I had neither the tools nor the time to conduct such a thorough investigation. My sources are:

1) My general knowledge of the field of Israeli ministry resulting from 20 years in Israeli ministry (having served for eight years in Israel and nine years in Greater Los Angeles). During this time I have developed a wide network of contacts. I conducted demographic and feasibility research in 1991-92 prior to launching our effort (Operation Ezekiel) to plant an Israeli Hebrew-speaking congregation in the San Fernando Valley region of Greater Los Angeles.<sup>1</sup> The field of Israeli outreach in North America is a small world with a good grapevine, so I am fairly certain of being aware of the most significant activity in this specialized corner of the LORD's vineyard.

2) I conducted a survey via questionnaire in early 2001 to gather any fresh information about Israeli émigrés and what outreach efforts may be taking place, primarily among the members of the LCJE network, and a number of other Jewish ministry contacts. This included several follow-up telephone conversations.

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<sup>1</sup> Three major sources were of much use to me in the early 1990s as I was researching yerida and Israeli émigrés in North America: 1) Migrants From the Promised Land, by Zvi Sobel, (1986) Transaction Books, New Brunswick (USA), and Oxford (UK). 2) Children of Circumstances, by Moshe Shokeid, (1988), Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London. 3) Jewish Israeli Migration to the United States Since 1948, by Pini Herman, (1988), a Masters thesis prepared at the University of Southern California, Department of Sociology, Los Angeles, CA.

## **Israelis in America: The Phenomenon of Yerida**

The occurrence of native born Israeli Jews (sabras), and other Jewish Israeli citizens, emigrating from the State of Israel to the cities of North America increased relatively dramatically after the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and has been a continuing reality throughout the decades since. There is a sufficient number of Israelis established in several cities now such that a critical mass exists to comprise communities that will draw others after them.

In common parlance this phenomenon is called “yerida” (“going down” in Hebrew, the opposite of “aliyah”). Israeli émigrés or “Diaspora Israelis” (“yordim” is generally a pejorative term and its use not advisable by outsiders) are a unique sub-people group within the broader Israeli people, who are a sub-group within the broader Jewish peoplehood. Being a unique people group, they are found in a unique situation in life, and have unique needs. Therefore they require a unique ministry focus and strategy to most effectively reach them. They are a hidden and largely unrecognized segment of the Israeli and Jewish people, and hence very few mission agencies, churches or messianic Jewish congregations have any focused outreach to them.

### ***How Many Israelis are there in North America?***

Numbers are hard to come by. I recently phoned the Consulate General of Israel in Los Angeles (March 6, 2001), and asked them for an estimate. The worker I spoke to said they have “no idea”. This is due to the great variety of legal/illegal and documented/undocumented statuses of these people. There are Israeli born persons who have become naturalized American citizens, others who have permanent residence (“green cards”), students, various work visas, student visas, tourists, tourists overstaying their visas, undocumented and otherwise illegal aliens. It is very difficult to determine and only broadly approximate numbers are possible.

There is a stock population (more settle and long term) and a flow population (transient). Some demographic research was done in the late 1980s by a sociologist at the University of Southern California named Pini Herman, an Israeli émigré himself.

Some of Herman's sources were census tracts, INS figures, Israeli Consulate estimates, and Hebrew newspaper circulation figures in the USA. Herman's research indicated that in 1988 there were 116,000 Israel-born Jews living in the USA. This did not include Canada, whose big cities have a number of Israelis.

Israelis travel "chutz la aretz" (abroad) frequently. There are over 100,000 Israelis entering the USA each year as tourists. It is common practice for young Israelis to make an after-the-army trek around the world. There is an international Israeli travel circuit that is known by word of mouth to the after-the-army travelers. This includes places like South America (Bolivia and Rio), Los Angeles, the Far East (India, esp. Goa in the 1990s, and Thailand).

Many of these young single Israelis are quite inclined to sojourn in some place along the circuit. They may look for temporary work and lodging in a given city and stay as long as the options look bright. Some stay for a few weeks, some for a few months, some for a few years, some for a few decades.

Due to this transient tourist flow, it can appear to the casual observer in L.A or New York in the summer that there are more Israelis than there in fact are on a settled basis. This is one reason for the inflated statistics popularly given. The conventional wisdom in the 1980s was that there were 300,000 in New York and 250,000 in L.A. Another reason for the inflated statistics is that yerida is an emotional issue, which has the effect of magnifying the numbers.

Herman's conservative estimate was 120,000 Israelis living in the USA as of 1991 (from an updated telephone conversation with him then). The distribution is as follows: 70% of all Israelis émigrés in North America reside in three states: New York, New Jersey and California. About one third of these are in California. The majority of those in New York are in Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan. The majority of those in California are in Greater Los Angeles. The majority of those in Greater Los Angeles are in the San Fernando Valley cities and moving westward from there (Calabasas, Agoura, Thousand Oaks). The conservative estimates then by cities are 51,000 in New York and New Jersey, 33,000 in Greater Los Angeles, and 36,000 in other cities, notably Chicago, Miami and Philadelphia. The 1980s were the "yuppie" boom period and Israelis were coming in larger numbers. Emigration from Israel has slowed during the 1990s due in part to economic slump in California in the early-mid 1990s, as well as economic growth and improvement in Israel during the same period.

The passing of Proposition 87 in California in 1994 made it much more difficult for illegal immigrants to stay in the USA. After the Northridge earthquake in 1994, I was aware of many Israelis who intended to return to Israel. I have not been able to determine whether or not the number has held steady or decreased in the late 1990s. (See *Appendix A* for a *People Profile* map of Israeli émigrés of Greater Los Angeles).

***Two Broad Demographic Groupings.*** After several years working with Israelis in L.A., I have been able to discern that there are two broad groupings of Diaspora Israelis in Greater Los Angeles. This would likely hold true for New York City as well. This is in no way rigid or clearly bounded set, but it is somewhat helpful for those seeking to reach them.

The first group is Israeli baby boomers born in the late 40s or 50s. They came early on (in the 60s or 70s or 80s), and have “made it” here (some would say, “got stuck” here). They have pretty much settled and have no plans to return soon to Israel. They have chosen to identify more as Jews and are probably somewhat integrated into the American Jewish community, though keeping some primary relationships with other Israelis. This group is easier to build a congregation from, since they are settled and not going anywhere soon. But this group is more resistant to the gospel precisely because they have settled, found a niche, and done something about Jewish identification.

The second broad group is the after-the-army-travelers. They are mostly singles, in the twenties. They are usually more open to the Gospel than the first group. They are open new ideas and tend to be seekers, for anything. This is the crowd most interested in the New Age and occult ideas, but also therefore more open to hear about Yeshua. They are really a lost generation (See *Appendix B- Report From Israel on Youth and New Age Festival* by Laura Fink).

This group may be more open to the Gospel, but it is more difficult to build a congregation from them since they are so transient, and passing through via the international circuit.

## Efforts to Reach Diaspora Israelis for Messiah Yeshua In North America

Before I present results of the survey of North American cities, I must draw our attention to a South American city because it represents an example of a sovereign way in which God is working to reach Israeli sojourners “chutz la aretz”(outside the land). The city is ***Cochabamba, Bolivia***. The people are Bob and Joyce Wilhelmson of New Tribes Mission.

The Wilhelmsons had been missionaries to a tribal native people in Bolivia for years. They were involved in all the activities involved in bringing the gospel to this group-literacy, translation, contextualization, etc. Then sometime in the early 1980s, some after-the-army Israeli travelers passed through Cochabamba. They heard about the missionaries reaching the exotic Stone Age Indian tribe and were curious and came to see if they could talk to the Wilhelmsons. Bob and Joyce welcomed them and were happy to share. In the process they shared some refreshments and also shared about Jesus.

These Israelis were fascinated and spread the news to their friends, “Go down to Cochabamba. Go visit the missionaries to the Stone Age tribe there. Really cool”. So the grapevine worked and the Israeli after-the-army crowd began coming....and coming.....and coming. Bob and Joyce worked out a system of invitng the groups of Israelis to call then from the the city, arrive in small groups. They would give the tha tak about the tribe, cookies and milk, and a gosepl message. Soon they made contacts with the believers in Israel to receive Hebrew literature which they could distribute to them.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the Wilhelmsons hosted thousands of Israelis and shared the gospel with them. This is a remarkable example of how God sovereignly chose to give an Israeli ministry to an unsuspecting couple who did not seek such. The Wilhelmsons felt totally inadequate, not having had any training or experience in Jewish evangelism. Who would have thought that a jungle town in Bolivia would be a hot spot for Israeli evangelism!? God uses those with availability sometimes more than those with mere ability.

The Wilhelmsons are an example of the approach that is effective in reaching Israelis today: Go to a city where on the Israeli traveler circuit, find some means of attracting them or meeting some needs they have, show them much love, and share the gospel. ***Yakov Damkani***, and Israeli evangelist based in Jaffa, has made trips to Goa, India and Japan to reach the Israelis on the international travel circuit.

As of August, 2000 the Wilhelmsons counted 9,900 Israelis that had visited, received the gospel message and usually Hebrew messianic literature (see *Appendix C* for an *August 2000 Newsletter from the Wilhelmsons*).

## **THE CITIES OF NORTH AMERICA:**

The survey I conducted via questionnaire included the following two questions:

1) Please inform me of what you know about Israelis (not American Jews) living in your area, or elsewhere in USA/Canada? (How many? Where are they? What are they doing?)

2) What is being done by Jewish ministry agencies, congregations or individual believers to reach out to them, either evangelistically or socially?

Following is a report of the responses:

### **NEW YORK CITY:**

*1) Doug Pyle, Israel Opportunities, and Chosen People Ministries:*

Doug Pyle has been in Israeli and Jewish ministry for most of the last three decades. He and his family lived in Israel for a time in the late 70s. Doug used to bring American youth Christian bands to Israel to do beach evangelism. I met him in the early 1980s when my wife Diana and I were working at Beit Immanuel in Tel Aviv. After about a decade of Jewish and Israeli evangelism in Southern California, Doug was invited in the year 2000 by Mitch Glaser, president of Chosen People Ministries to come to New York and reach Israelis.

Following is a summary of a phone interview with Doug (March, 2001):

“I am on loan from Israel Opportunities (my 501c3) to Chosen People Ministries. I have another volunteer worker, Rachel, from Finland who works with me. We do campus literature table ministry on several campuses in the city. We meet lots of Israelis on the campuses. We give out Hebrew literature, but I am out of it now.

I meet Israelis often in the city, on the subways, etc. I know there are very many Israelis in Queens.

There is a place called “Naomi Pizza” owned by Israelis and is a long term well known rhendevous for Israelis.

We know of no other ministry that is intentionally focusing on reaching Israelis. What is needed is a spiritually mature Hebrew-speaking person who can be a leader to begin Bible studies or a chavurah group. I don’t feel my Hebrew is good enough to teach in, and I am not Israeli.

We have known of two Israelis that have come to faith in Yeshua since I have been here, Uri and Shir-li, but they have moved on.”

2) *“Yesh Brerah”, Operation Ezekiel’s public access cable TV program in Hebrew, in cooperation with Jews for Jesus:*

I (Bill Bjoraker) have arranged with Avi Snyder, Chief of Station of Jews for Jesus in Manhattan to air several of our Hebrew language shows called “Yesh Brerah” (There is an Alternative”) in New York (Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn). These are mostly interviews with Israeli believers giving their testimonies. Our producers have edited a local Jews for Jesus phone number into the tapes. As of yet, they still have not been aired, but we expect them to be soon.

New York City has more Diaspora Israelis than any other city in North America and the world, probably 60,000-80,000. Yet, so little is being done to specifically reach them. Doug Pyle is the only one we know of trying to reach them utilizing the Hebrew language. He is not well supported with finance, team workers or other resources. There is definitely a need to mobilize and send (or raise up) a competent Hebrew-speaking congregation planting team to be deployed in New York to reach these people.

## **TORONTO:**

1) *Andrew Baron, Jews for Jesus:*

“Hi Bill - I do not know about intentional Israeli outreach in Canada. We do meet Israeli's and deal with them on an individual basis.

Contact Gideon Levytan of Chosen People Ministry in Canada. He is Israeli and he has had a long-standing ministry in Southern Ontario. I do not think he has an intentional ministry to Israelis, but you would have to ask him. The number is 416-250-0177.

You could also contact Noga Abarbanel - she is Israeli and involved in a Messianic Congregation in Ottawa.

Shalom,

Andrew Baron  
Jews for Jesus Canada”

2) *Gideon Levytam, Congregation Beit Sar Shalom, Niagra-on-the-Lake, Ontario (1and/1/2 Hours south of Toronto)*

This is my summary a telephone interview with Gideon:

Gideon is typical of many of the Israeli émigrés I have met. He is a baby boomer. He left Israeli after finishing the army in 1976, and marrying a Canadian kibbutz volunteer. They moved to her home area in Canada and have lived there ever since. He came to faith in Yeshua in 1980 and was disciplined by a Brethren church.

Gideon works as a carpenter and has been for six years the spiritual leader of Beit Sar Shalom Congregation in Toronto, a congregation established by Chosen People Ministries, and still under their oversight. His brother also lives in the Toronto area.

He reports that he knows there are a number of Israelis in the Toronto area, but does not know how many. He has not focused specifically on reaching them, not dome any programmed outreach to them. He has done so on the personal level with several over the years. He reports that he has been in touch with “no less than 100” Israelis over the 25 years he has been in the area. As far as he knows there is no ministry organization, agency, church that is specifically reaching out to Israelis.

The world of Israeli believers in North America is a small one, so Gideon knew Ilan Zamir, who lived for a while in nearby London, Ontario (Ilan is now with the Lord), and Ed and Lillian Shilo. Gideon performed the funeral for the Shilo’s eight-year-old son, Yonatan, who died of cancer a few years ago. He knows Noga Arabarbanel, an Israeli believer living in the Canadian capital, Ottawa since 1964.

Gideon’s email address: [glevytam@warplink.com](mailto:glevytam@warplink.com)

## **OTTAWA (CANADIAN NATIONAL CAPITOL):**

Noga Abarbanel grew up on kibbutz in Israel but came to Ottawa in 1964 and has lived there ever since, except for a short stint in another Canadian city. Noga came to faith in Yeshua in 1965. She reported to me that she knows of some Israelis in Ottawa, and that the local Jewish Community Center has held “Shira b’Tzibur” (Israeli folk singing) evenings for Israelis, but that only about 20 people participated. As far as she knows no ministry organization or congregation is reaching out to them.

Noga is involved in leading a small messianic Jewish congregation in Ottawa. She can be reached at email-[abarbanelnoga@attcanada.ca](mailto:abarbanelnoga@attcanada.ca)

## **DETROIT, MI:**

*1) Loren Jacobs, Congregation Shema Yisrael:*

“Dear Bill,

Loren here in the Detroit area. There are some Israelis here, but I don't know how many, and how well organized they may be. I wish I knew more to help you, but that is the extent of my knowledge.

Loren Jacobs”

## **PITTSBURGH, PA:**

*1) Brenda Forman, Shoresh USA:*

“Shalom!

We do not have a significant portion of Israelis living here, but I know of a few. Two that I have spoken to are both business owners and pretty assimilated. One of these two is a sabra, the other Russian.

I have heard of other Israelis from believers that are witnessing to them. The general consensus of those that have emigrated here is that they are secular.

We get many Israeli visitors here because of the yeshivas that are here, as well as the larger orthodox community. They are a pretty tight knit crowd.

I can't say that much is being done to reach out to them, strategically, as a group. I think we don't for several reasons. Pittsburgh has had a recent history of disruption in the Jewish believing community. Those of us who are in Jewish ministry here are pretty new (especially me!). Another reason is that there are not than many here, and those that are a pretty insular.

I do hope to meet some more Israelis though!

I hope this helps. I look forward to hearing your paper in LA.

Sincerely.

Brenda Forman  
Shoresh USA, Pittsburgh

**ORLANDO, FL:**

*1) Bruce Lieske, Lutherans in Jewish Ministry:*

“Bill,

There are some Israelis who live along Atlantic Avenue in Daytona Beach, FL who own stores. I came across them while doing tract outreaches at Daytona Beach several years ago. It almost seemed like a "Little Tel Aviv" to me.

Shalom in Y'shua,  
Bruce Lieske,  
Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism”

## **ATLANTA, GA:**

### *2) Derek Leman, Light of Messiah Ministries:*

“William:

I wish I knew more demographically for our area (Atlanta). We have 100,000 Jewish people, approx. 30-50,000 of whom are from the former USSR. I don't know how many are Israeli, although I personally have had a ministry to one Israeli, named Gabe. We also have students from "The Jerusalem School of Art" who come to our office to sell paintings (here for 6 month tours of duty). We keep copies of evangelism books in Hebrew for them.

I know of no ministry in Atlanta targeting Israelis (I probably would know if there was one). Our ministry is to Jewish people in general. There are several that target former Soviet Jewish people.

Hope this helps at least a bit.

Derek Leman”

## **EAST BEND, NC:**

### *1) Rick and Debbie Wallace, Rick's Tire Service:*

Debbie Wallace had heard about Bill BJORAKER and Operation Ezekiel through a student who had attended the YWAM School of Jewish Studies in Richmond, VA in the spring of 2000. Debbie and her husband Rick are in their mid to late 40s. They are vibrant committed Christians, and active members of their local church. They live in East Bend, a suburb of Winston-Salem, North Carolina where Rick runs a busy auto tire service. Debbie contacted me (Bill) in the late summer of 2000 and excitedly related to me the story that follows:

Debbie related to me that she had discovered that there were many Israeli “kids” living and working in her town. She had come to be familiar with them and had begun to talk with them in the streets and the mall. She realized in a short period of time that there were at least 20 –25 of them there.

When Debbie realized they were from Israel, her love for the Bible and the Land of the Bible naturally made her very interested and sympathetic to the Israeli Jewish young people. She found them very socially engaging and she became more and more delighted to talk with them. And of course she knew they needed Jesus.

Debbie phoned me here in Los Angeles in late fall of 2000 and inquired about our work with Israelis. I was able to answer a lot of her questions about Israeli Jewish identity and culture, and about how to share her faith with them. I sent her a large box of Hebrew language messianic literature, with post-it notes describing the content of the books.

I talked with Debbie by phone again in late February 2001. By this time she had found out that the 25 or more Israelis in East Bend were all sent out by an Israeli company based in Los Angeles. They were singles in their twenties, typical after-the-army travelers out to see the world. They were sent to work in the malls at booths and stands selling lotions, paints, toy helicopters, and various trinkets to the shoppers.

After several months of this business, the young Israelis managers concluded that it would be more lucrative for them to move on to other cities. So the 20-25 Israelis Debbie got to know personally and to love have now moved on. But during the four months or so that they were sojourning in East Bend, Debbie and Rick came to love these young Israelis. They had them over for meals, they went on picnics, they laughed and had wonderful times discovering each other. And since Jesus is the love and Lord of Rick and Debbie's lives, they told them about Jesus. They prayed before meal times as always. Even invited some of them to church. Debbie said most of the Israelis said they did not believe in God and Jesus was just a story. But they were polite enough to listen because Debbie and Rick were so loving to them. Many would stay and linger at their home and talk long.

The couple has many to their home for Thanksgiving Day dinner. Debbie packed up Christmas gifts for each of them with the Hebrew messianic literature I sent them (yes, Christmas...we note the lack of Jewish missiological contextualization here. But the loving innocence or naivete here seems to have been compensated for by the great degree of genuine love this couple have).

Debbie related how though the young Israelis have moved on, they are still in regular touch with many of them by email and phone calls and postal mail, from their locations on the international circuit- Mexico, South America, Hawaii, Thailand, and the "Carnival" in Rio.

Debbie noted how so many of them had not much hope for their future. They feel ominous about what is in store in Israel. It was hard for them to believe that Debbie and Rick really loved them.

Debbie says, "I love all my kids". She and Rick imparted to them the love of Yeshua largely in deed, but also in word. The words were very gentile, Christian, Churchy words, but they were genuine. Most of these Israelis want to remain in touch with Debbie and Rick. Debbie says more Israelis are coming in March-April, 2001. And trust me, this couple still have love to give.

This story reinforces an observation I have had in Israeli ministry. That God in His sovereignty will drop an Israeli ministry in some ordinary people's laps. People who did not seek or suspect that such a ministry would come to them. They feel unqualified, and by the standards of most missionaries trained for Jewish evangelism, they are unqualified. We see this in the case of Bob and Joyce Wilhelmson in Cochabamba, Bolivia. We see it with Rick and Debbie Wallace. God does not call the qualified to do His bidding, but He qualifies the called. Those He calls, He seems to qualify most saliently by giving them great love.

## **DALLAS, TX:**

### *1) Allan Bond, Jews for Jesus:*

"DALLAS EXPERIENCE(S): I found an orthodox (not Hasidic) ghetto of young marrieds barely inside the LBJ Loop (I-635s north perimeter) between Preston and Inwood Rds. They worshipped at a storefront at Preston Rd and Forest Lane. They were all very close together due to the demands of lifestyle. Very respectful of rabbis and taking themselves quite seriously (more so than their less than orthodox parents). Adat Shalom is a mission of FBC Dallas, and some of its members have personally met these Israelis. Deb Scheinberg knows the scoop. This is 1991-97 info."

## **CHICAGO:**

3) *Kirk Gliebe, Devar Emet Messianic Jewish Outreach, Skokie, IL:*

“Dear Bill:

I am working in Chicago and there are a bunch of Israelis around here. They seem to be setting up business in either the trades or in computers. I interact with some of them but I don't focus on them per se. They mostly seem to be living in Chicago and the near north suburbs.

I hope that helps. See you in LA!

Kirk Gliebe  
Devar Emet Messianic Jewish Outreach”

4) *Allan Bond, Jews for Jesus:*

“CHICAGO EXPERIENCE(S): Incredibly, out of 5718 contacts on our data base, only 4 are indicated as Israeli by our code. Probably bad paperwork. When I searched 'comments' for the word 'Israeli' I got 39 records. Almost perfectly split in these areas: Chicago mostly 5000-6000 north addresses on street numbering system: 11 North shore (Wilmette, Skokie) 8 west suburbs, especially Arlington Heights, 10 downstate, out of state, especially INDIANA. 10 Oarland Park (sw sub) , but I know a Jordanian down here too. I suspect more, but inconvenient Geographically for this branch to mine. (Don't add these figures) You get the idea.

## **SAN FRANCISCO:**

1) *Stephen Katz, Jews for Jesus:*

“Bill:

Hi. Stephen Katz here. I've actually been out of the branch missionary office now for over five years, so I'm not doing direct ministry in the Bay Area. My ministry is mainly recruitment and long distance ministry via email, snail mail and phone.

When I was in the branch we really didn't have much contact with Israelis. We did know a small handful, mostly young; some in college, others not. We saw 2-3 come to the Lord. We met them in the same way we meet all our contacts: either street ministry or through referral by others.

Stephen”

2) *Allen Bond, Jews for Jesus:*

“SAN FRANCISCO EXPERIENCE(S): Efraim Goldstein and I visited some Israeli scientists on sabbatical at Stanford in May of 1986. We were stunned how non-defensive and genuinely curious they were compared to the Ashkenazim. At the end of our whole presentation of the gospel they showed themselves to be still non-threatened. "That's very interesting for you; but we're Israeli. Why do we need God?" Consider the etymology of the word "Israel" and the irony of such a statement! Don't they have a cliché borrowed from the curse of Genesis: "By the sweat of our brow.." That's how we have a good airforce, that's how we can grow jungle plants in the desert, etc. They can write the book on contending with God.

In general, S.F. Jewish communities are invisible or non-existent due to assimilation and scattering settlement.

Allen Bond.”

5) *Robyn Wilk, Jews for Jesus:*

“Shalom Mr. Bjoraker,  
I will try to answer some of your questions. I am a missionary in the San Francisco Branch of Jews for Jesus.

1) *Anything you know about Israelis (not American Jews) living in your area, or elsewhere in USA/Canada? How many?*

We have 36 names of Israeli Jewish people. Where? They live all around the bay area-Berkeley, Cupertino, Los Gatos, Modesto, Oakland, Palo Alto, Richmond, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Clara, Santa Rosa, South San Francisco, Sunnyvale, Walnut Creek.

Most are in San Francisco and the South Bay.

*What they are doing?*

Some of their occupations include being a car salesman, owning a bookshop, in construction, a chef, a student, and an owner of a kosher restaurant.

*2) What is being done by Jewish ministry agencies, or individual believers to reach out to them, either evangelistically or socially?*

I am not really sure about this. We send them literature and call them to see if they are interested in getting together. I personally meet with an Israeli in Modesto when I am in the area. Basically, we minister to Israelis as we would any other unbelieving Jewish person.

Robyn Wilk”

### **SAN DIEGO, CA:**

*Barney Kasdan, Kehilat Ariel:*

*1) Anything you know about Israelis (not American Jews) living in your area, or elsewhere in USA/Canada? (How many?)*

2000 in San Diego

*What they are doing?*

Making money and enjoying the "good life".

*2) What is being done by Jewish ministry agencies, or individual believers to reach out to them, either evangelistically or socially?*

We reach out with Messiah through our classes and services at Kehilat Ariel and book table in public places.

## LOS ANGELES:

### 2) *Tuvye Zaretsky: Jews for Jesus, Los Angeles:*

“Hi Bill,

The main focused effort that Jews for Jesus, LA takes to reach Israelis is to be present to hand out literature and talk with people at the Israel Independence Day Festival at Pan Pacific Park in LA in mid-May. We prepare materials in Hebrew and English, taking names and address information to send further materials, and occasionally a phone number. We are only one of several other groups that are there for outreach on that day, including y our excellent team.”

### 3) *Ted Martin:*

“Dear Bill,

I don't know if I can be of help or not as those I come in contact with are from the former USSR, most having come in the waning days of Gorbachev. I do seem to run into some oriental Jews though and a few Israelis. A number seem to be in Fairfax area going down to Olympic and Pico. There is a deli in Agoura that is run by and hires Israelis but I'm not sure if they live in the area.

God bless,  
Ted Martin

### 3) *Allan Bond, Jews for Jesus, Chicago:*

“LOS ANGELES EXPERIENCE(S): You lived there. You know. Let me help you remember the 1986-1990 world. Silviu Rosdol may not be who you're looking for. He represents a lot of Jews who were born in Eastern Europe (Romania), spent a decade in Israel, but now live in the U.S.. His worldview may not be Israeli; but he understands that ethos. He lives in Fairfax, chases his fantasies and has no bread. Rahel Landrum of JFJ London also was born in Romania, grew up in the Land. West LA is the old community. (Sephardic synagogue on Santa Monica). Newcomers along Ventura Blvd., Encino and west, nicknamed the 'Gaza Strip.' I visited one in Encino (French/Sephardic). I'm told most of the French Jews are not Ashkenazi. No intentional Israeli distinction. Just visit the contacts as they come. I noticed a lot of Middle Eastern Jews both Israeli and Persian were involved in the schmatah industry, (one place was

called Camp David) and sold outlet style, even on Saturdays in the alleys behind the sweatshops along 14th downtown.”

#### *4) Bill & Diana Bjoraker, Operation Ezekiel:*

Bill and Diana Bjoraker served eight years (1981-89) in teaching and pastoral ministries at Beit Immanuel, Tel Aviv, Israel. After turning over leadership of the Beit Immanuel Congregation to an Israeli pastoral team they moved to Los Angeles to study at Fuller Theological Seminary. While studying missiology at Fuller, Bill did demographic research on the Israeli émigrés in Greater Los Angeles. He soon came to realize that there were about 40,000 Israelis in the area, that there were three Hebrew language newspapers published in the city, Hebrew language events, but no Hebrew language congregation of followers of Yeshua the Messiah. There was no ministry agency that was specifically targeting the Israelis using the Hebrew language.

Switching to the first person here, Diana and I realized that the Israelis express their Jewish identity quite differently than do American Jews. We realized that the most effective way to reach them was to begin something with an Israeli ethos, and using Hebrew. Diana and I began to pray, “LORD, something should be done to reach these people for You!?”. We gradually felt the LORD saying, “Yes, you are right. And guess who I am calling to do it?” Hence began our vision to establish an Israeli Hebrew-speaking congregation for the Israelis of L.A. We realized that our eight years in Israel was training for the task here. We called our work Operation Ezekiel after the prophet who followed his own Israeli people into exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and ministered to them there in Hebrew. We are in now in a modern Babylon (L.A.) and we knew we needed to reach the Israelis here in the “San Fernando Valley of Dry Bones.”

Upon arriving in California in 1990, I realized the Doug was here and still doing Jewish/Israeli evangelism on the campuses of Greater Los Angeles. Doug became aware of Venice Beach, Santa Monica, CA where there is a boardwalk where counterculturalists, hippies, body piercers, New Agers, etc., of all sorts present their artistic, chemical and philosophic wares. Doug and I both began to realize that there were many Israelis who would stroll the boardwalk on weekends. Venice Beach was one of the places Israelis on the international travel circuit would frequent.

Venice Beach became the key venue for us as the place to make first contacts with Israelis. Doug began to spend more time in literature table evangelism throughout the 1990s. My own Operation Ezekiel teams were regular on the beach in the mid-late 1990s (See *Appendix D – Sojourning for the Messiah*). We distributed tens of 1000s of pieces of Hebrew messianic literature. Doug did not have the vision to plant a congregation as we did, but we worked together in Venice Beach evangelism and he would give me contacts and occasionally bring an Israeli seeker to our Hebrew language chavurah meetings in the mid 90s.

From the time we arrived in California in from Israel in 1990, until September of 1999, we carried the vision God had given us for planting an Israeli Hebrew-speaking congregation in Greater Los Angeles. It was tough- Israelis are resistant to the Gospel. We started from scratch, “rubbing two Israelis together to make a fire” as I once heard it put. We researched, strategized, prayed, evangelized, raised support, held chavurah (house group) meetings, visited and followed up Israeli contacts. We recruited short-term workers, and all it takes to lay the foundations for a congregation plant. We held chavurah meetings for nearly 3 years at the home of an Israeli believer who we led to the LORD.

In 1997 we recruited **Israel and Shlomit Harel**, who were working with Operation Mobilization in South Africa, an Israeli couple whom we knew from our time in Israel, as long-term workers with us in Operation Ezekiel. This couple has evangelistic and church-planting gifts, and, as Israelis, have been effective in ways we could not have been. With the Harels coming on the scene, Operation Ezekiel was able to fulfill the vision of seeing the Israeli congregation planted firmly.

We worked together for two years, building up the chavurah to the point where it gained a self-understanding as a congregation. We met in the Harels home in Lakeview Terrace. We had a naming process with the core group in the early summer of 1999, and *Kehilat Or Yeshua* was born. Then in September, 1999, we offered the Harels full leadership and independence from O.E. They chose that option.

The congregation has grown since then, and there is now a "beit kehilah" (meeting place) in Tarzana, CA (in the San Fernando Valley, where most of the Israeli émigrés reside). Recently two Israelis came to faith in Yeshua through the congregation, **Avi** (who saw our Hebrew TV show, "Yesh Brerah"), and **Dganit**, whom **Yakov Damkani**, and **Simcha Davidov** and I had witnessed to during two different years ( 4 and 5 years ago) on Venice Beach. We are thankful to see the Harels and Or Yeshua reaping more of the harvest of the seed - sowing we did back then.

We rejoice in the fulfillment of this primary vision of Operation Ezekiel. To the God of Israel and His Messiah be the glory! The burden for it has lifted from the BJORAKERS, and we have passed the baton to the HARELS. As far as we know (though we have not done an exhaustive survey to verify this for certain), it is the only Hebrew-speaking Israeli congregation in the world outside the State of Israel. The leadership is well-connected to the Messianic Israeli leaders in Israel, so there is good networking and options for referrals of Israelis going to and from L.A.

***A Challenge for the Congregation.*** A long-term challenge for the congregation will be to maintain the Israeli Hebrew-speaking character into the next generation and beyond, should the LORD Yeshua delay His coming.

The forces of assimilation are strong in the USA. American television is the great homogenizer. The children of the congregation are speaking more and more English, and are essentially becoming Americans. American Jewish believers have found that they must affirm more of Jewish tradition to keep their identity in this cultural environment. Nearly all the Israeli believers in the congregation are from a secular background and so do not affirm a high level of Jewish tradition. The challenge is how to ensure that the grandchildren of the present Israeli members will be Israeli and Jewish.

One factor that could help is the transience of the Israelis as they continue to come from Israel and go back again and keep the flow from Israel fresh.

#### *4) Israel and Shlomit Harel: Kehilat Or Yeshua:*

Israel and Shlomit Harel have led Kehilat Or Yeshua since September 1999. They led the congregation from their home in Lakeview Terrace until it began to outgrow the space. Tarzana Baptist Chapel, where **Fenton Ward** had pastored for years and had always had a burden to reach the Jewish people in the San Fernando Valley, seemed a good place for a meeting place. Arrangements were made, and Or Yeshua has been meeting there for nearly a year as of this writing. The congregation is thriving and growing. It now has about 25-30 meeting regularly, and up to 80 or 90 coming for the Jewish Holiday celebrations. They are moving toward non-profit (501c3) status and training leaders.

## **Israelis in America: A Theological Motif and Missiological Perspective**

Is there a biblical/theological theme that will put “yerida’ in perspective for us? Certainly such a theme is needed in that Israeli émigrés live with a level of guilt for having left Eretz Israel, and a level of disorientation and illegitimacy in having left the Land and the State founded by the blood, sweat and tears of their grandparents and fathers and mothers. Sabra Israelis have been taught since their earliest youth by their ideologically Zionist parents that Eretz Israel is the only place for them. They were taught, as Trumpledor said, “It is good to die for our country.” When Yitzchak Rabin first heard of the phenomenon of yerida, he publicly declared that the “yordim” were “nafolet she nemashot” (the droppings of maggots?). He called them cowards for deserting the battlefield of building the State of Israel.

Thus Israeli émigrés have a residual guilt for coming to the North America and leaving the struggle to their fellow Israelis back home. Are they really “stinking yordim”, as one Israeli émigré friend of mine said he and his fellow Israelis living in America call each other he often (in jest of course, but....).

I present below a piece I wrote at the request of Zhava Glaser in 1998 for the Chosen People Ministries publication Morning Star, a Special Edition for Israel’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. As such, it is written in a journalistic, conversational, and evangelistic style. It not only provides a strong biblical rationale and sense of purpose for Israeli believers living in the Diaspora, but also demonstrates that there is a message for the American Jewish community, and indeed for all of us, in the phenomenon of Israelis living in America. It is entitled Israelis in America: A Question of Identity. It follows on the next page:

## ISRAELIS IN AMERICA: A QUESTION OF DESTINY

*"This is my home. This is my country.  
These are my people. My flesh and blood.  
I know them by heart. I am at home.  
Home... Home. Let me out.  
Let me out of here!"*

(J. Lind, in The Trip to Jerusalem)

Have you heard any sabra Hebrew spoken on the streets lately? There is a new Jewish Diaspora today. It is not one caused by military invasion like the Babylonian Exile (586 BCE) or that following the Roman destruction of the Second Temple (70CE). Nor is it a forced expulsion like that from Spain in 1492. No. It is rather a voluntary Israeli Diaspora from Eretz Israel to the cities of North America.

Emigration from the State of Israel by native-born Israelis increased markedly after the Six Day War (1967), and even more dramatically after the Yom Kippur War (1973). They came by the thousands in the 1980's yuppie boom.-Though "yerida" (opposite of "aliyah") has slowed in the 1990's, there is nevertheless sufficient numbers of Israelis in major cities such that a critical mass exists, especially in New York (80,000+) and Los Angeles (50,000+). Many Israelis have "made it" here and have settled in for the long haul. Others will be drawn after them from Israel in years to come.

Why do they come? Migration is not a new activity for Jewish people. Sociologically, economically, it's not hard to understand; it's push-pull. The struggles of life in modern Israel have effectively pushed many out. The Intifada in the 80's, the Russian aliyah in the 90's, have produced intolerable conditions for many. On the other hand, the pull of the American Dream has lured many for whom the Zionist Dream had become a nightmare. Expanded career horizons for talented and energetic people in a small country. Security. Adventure. Forbidden fruit. Escape. Hey, Israelis are human too.

It is a diaspora the American Jewish community does not like to recognize. You can hear them, *"We send millions of dollars every year to the Jewish national homeland, and you come here?!"* To which challenge, the Diaspora Israeli is likely, and convincingly, to retort, *"Listen, I lived 25 years in Israel. Served in the army. I've paid my dues. Why don't you*

*Americans go pay yours while I stay here for a while and send money to Israel every year? Nu!"*

Even without such guilt tripping, Diaspora Israelis carry a residual guilt about leaving the Jewish national home. After all, they drank Zionist ideology with their mother's milk. Ask any Israeli here if he/she is going back to Israel someday, and they will inevitably say, "yes." Ask, "When?", and few will have set any concrete dates. The fact is many will live out their lives and die here.

But should they feel guilty? In the light of Jewish history and values need they?

Don't get me wrong. I am sympathetic to Zionism. I am committed to the existence and flourishing of the State of Israel. I rejoice in Israel's 50th anniversary. Being non-Jewish, I invested eight years of my life living and working in Israel. Could I have been granted citizenship, I may well have embraced it.

What are the real issues here? I will contend there is a message for us all in this phenomenon of the Israeli Diaspora.

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin tells the story,  
*"In 1939, a Viennese Jew enters a travel agent's office and says, 'I want to buy a steamship ticket.'  
'Where to?' the clerk asks.  
'Let me look at your globe, please.'  
The Jew starts examining the globe. Every time he suggests a country, the clerk raises an objection. 'This one requires a visa' . . . This one is not admitting any more Jews.... The waiting list to get into that one is ten years.'  
Finally the Jew looks up. 'Pardon me, do you have another globe?'"*

Right. Anti-Semitism is tragic. But there is a profound truth herein with which Jewish experience resonates: ultimately this world is not our true home. We are destined for a home more grand than anything this world can offer in the short span of threescore and ten years we are allotted in it. We are sojourners; merely passing through this world. We need reminders of this so that we live our lives in the light of it, and make decisions that will ensure that we secure our true destiny. Israelis in America remind us of this.

I learn from my Israeli émigré friends, who realize that New York or Los Angeles is not their true home. They live somewhat lightly invested while sojourning here, knowing that someday they intend to return to their true home. I learn from them that this is also not my true home. I am a

sojourner. I will not invest too deeply in the systems of this world for it is passing away, and I shall pass away from it.

### The Greatest of Jewish Heroes Testify

Is this idea foreign to Jewish thought? Not at all. Let's look at some of the greatest Jewish heroes:

*Avraham Avinu*, our Father Abraham; the father of the Jewish people. He was called "*Avram ha Ivri*" (Abram the Hebrew) (Genesis 14:13) because he left Ur of the Chaldees and crossed over (from the root '*avar*' in Hebrew, "crossed over.") rivers and deserts in response to the call of God. The Torah says the people of Israel were to recite at the festive assemblies, "*A wandering Aramean was my father ... and he went down to Egypt.*" (Deuteronomy 26:5) Abraham "made yeridah" and went down to Egypt. He traversed the Land from north to south, and for economic reasons, sojourned in Egypt. He spent more time outside the Land of Promise than within it. The only land he ever owned there was a burial plot for his wife Sarah in Hebron. The father of the Jewish people lived as a resident alien. Many Israeli émigrés live as such today in America.

Yet Abraham was a man of hope, great expectation, and a destiny which transcended the earthly Land of Canaan. God had promised him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Abraham and his family were not rooted in the land, but lived in confident expectation that God would fulfill His promise of the land. He trusted toward a land not yet possessed. But because the promise was not fulfilled in his lifetime, he concluded God would fulfill it afterward.

He looked beyond the earthly Promised Land. He never sank his tent pegs down too deeply, knowing that where he sojourned was not permanent. Though he would not have used these terms, he was yearning for the "Jerusalem Above", the "Heavenly Zion."

And Abraham believed the promise of God that through his seed ("zerah" in Hebrew, in the singular number), "*all the families of the earth will be blessed.*" (Genesis 12:3).

Have the Jewish people in their long Diaspora or in the modern State of Israel really fulfilled this destiny of blessing "*all the families of the earth*"? Or in later language, being a "*light to the Gentiles*"? Or was it to be through one singular seed from out of the descendants of Abraham who would fulfill this?

After the Akedah, when Abraham passed the test of being willing to sacrifice his son, The Almighty indeed implies exactly this, saying, "*In your seed (zarah) shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*" (Genesis 22:18).

Father Abraham would definitely be thinking of his son who was intended for sacrifice at this point. Abraham knew God had a plan much bigger than that of his descendants merely possessing the Land of Canaan.

*How about Moses? Moshe Rabeinu.* This great Deliverer and Lawgiver of the Jewish people; one of the greatest men of all time. In Midian, Moses identified himself as a "ger" (sojourner) in that he named his son "Gershom", because he said, "*I have been a stranger ("ger" in a strange land.* " Moses had the burning bush encounter outside the Land of Israel. This encounter was destiny for Moses. It is *chutz la aretz* (outside the Land) where Moses lived out his dramatic career as one of the greatest men of faith of all times. All of western civilization is his debtor.

Yet he died, never having set foot in the Land of Promise. God's intended destiny for him was something far better. And it was he who solemnly announced to the people of Israel that God had told *him*, "*I will raise up a Prophet from among your countrymen like you, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all I command him...*" (Deuteronomy 18:18). Who is this Prophet? Only the promised Messiah could fulfill this role of being like Moses in his role as Deliverer and Lawgiver for Israel and impacting all of civilization, a "Light to the Gentiles".

Some of the greatest leaders of this and the coming generation of Jewish people may be emerging among them here in *chutz la aretz*. Israeli sojourners in America today are also having divine encounters and realizing their true destiny as they receive this Prophet, the Messiah.

Consider Naomi. During the period of the judges (12th-11th cent. BCE), "push and pull" caused the Israeli couple Elimelech and Naomi to "make yeridah" to Moab. After a ten-year sojourn in the Diaspora she became a "returnee." The deaths in her family in the Diaspora had embittered her, but it was there that she also met the gentile Ruth, who became her daughter-in-law. This was destiny for Naomi. It was through Ruth that the "*goel*" (kinsman redeemer) was born. The women of Naomi's hometown, Bethlehem, exclaimed, "*May he be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age.* (Book of Ruth 4:15). They named him Obed and he became the grandfather of King David, from whose seed the Messiah would come.

The Israeli, Naomi, found spiritual renewal there in the Diaspora. She found *Geulah* in the *Gola*. She discovered that her true center of identity, her true destiny, her true home, if you will, was ultimately spiritual.

And it was wrapped up in being associated with the line of the Jewish Messiah. The Greater Seed of Abraham. The Prophet of whom Moses spoke.

Then there is *Queen Esther*. It is in the Diaspora that her moment of destiny emerges. As genocide hangs, like the "Sword of Damocles" over the heads of the Jewish people, she steps forth and risks her life for the salvation of her people. She is successful and is forever celebrated, a true Jewish heroine. Yet the salvation for which she was instrumental was but temporal. Tragically, other near genocides would follow.

It is only the Messiah of Israel, whom she foreshadowed, who would accomplish an eternal salvation for Israel and the nations.

### Do You Have Another Globe?

The Messiah would come and make atonement for sin by actually going through with the sacrificial death which Isaac foreshadowed in the Akedah. He is the Lamb of God. The Death Angel passes over all who have availed themselves of the atonement he wrought in his death and resurrection. He has conquered death for all who trust in Him. All who perceive the identity of this Greater Seed of Abraham; all who listen to this Prophet of whom Moses spoke, the Jewish Messiah, indeed inherit eternal life and enter in to their true destiny of being citizens of the "Jerusalem Above."

This is not an escape; this is God's offer and intended destiny for us. The question of the Viennese Jewish man from 1939 is answered in the affirmative by the Messiah- Yes, there is another globe. It is the eternal Kingdom of God, which is the destiny of all who repent of their sins and trust in the Messiah. They are justified before God, spiritually renewed and heirs of the "Heavenly Zion."

*"Glorious things are spoken of you, O City of God.... But of Zion it shall be said, 'This one and that one were born in her'; and the Most High Himself will establish her. The LORD shall count when He registers the peoples, 'This one was born there.'*

*"Then those who sing as well as those who play the flutes shall say, "All my springs of joy are in you. "' (Psalm 87:3,5-7).*

## True Jewish Destiny

Eretz Israel is the religion of many American Jews. But Israel is for many of us a faith before it is a place. A transcendental view of Eretz Israel fares much better here in America than it does in the sweaty facts of the daily grind in Tel Aviv and Haifa. If the presence of Israeli sojourners here in America causes American Jews to ponder the question of the true center of their identity and their divinely intended destiny, thank God they are here.

Zionism or Eretz Israel as a faith is a temporal and inadequate identity center for Jewish people. Abraham looked beyond it. Moses reached his destiny never having entered it. Naomi found spiritual renewal while sojourning outside it. Esther was an instrument for the salvation of her Jewish people while living in the Diaspora. The center of identity for these Jewish greats was the God of Israel, trusting and anticipating toward the Messiah of Israel, not primarily in the Land of Israel.

So who is the real Jewish Messiah and Savior of the world? The weight of evidence from the Hebrew Scriptures points to only one figure in history. Tracing through biblical history we see He is the Seed of the Woman (Genesis 3:15), the Seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:3), Shiloh, from the tribe of Judah, from whom the scepter shall not depart, and to whom shall be the obedience of the peoples (Genesis 49:10), the Seed of David, to whom God promised a throne and whose Kingdom He would establish forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13), the Shepherd of Israel destined to be born in Naomi's and David's city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), the Suffering Servant of the LORD who would die "for the sins of my people" (Isaiah 53:8), the Messiah who was to die before the destruction of the Second Temple (Daniel 9: 2 6).

He is the greatest Jew who has ever lived. He has made the God of Israel known to millions of gentiles. Having emerged from the midst of the chosen people, He is the true "Light to the Gentiles". He is Jesus of Nazareth.

Realize your true destiny through Him. Come to your true home in and through Him. Thousands of Jewish people today are doing just that. The decision you make regarding Him now will determine your eternal destiny.

And next time you hear sabra Hebrew spoken in the streets, let it remind you of your true destiny.

