PRELIMINARY STUDY TO DETERMINE THE FEASIBILITY OF CHURCH PLANTING AMONG THE ISRAELI JEWISH MIGRANTS OF THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

BY WILLIAM BJORAKER

627 North Mentor Ave. #203 Pasadena, CA 91106 Tel.# (818) 577-6981

Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the feasibility (potential for success) of planting a church/churches among the Israeli Jewish migrants residing in the San Fernando Valley region of Greater Los Angeles. This will include a description of the people group, assessment of the need for a church of and for this specific cultural group, indicators as to their receptivity to the gospel, and assessment of what is presently being done to reach them by Christian organizations, churches or mission structures. The author believes the project to be feasible and will propose a strategy for its accomplishment. The study will be preliminary and not intended to be definitive, but rather a catalyst for further research and strategizing.

As a result of the study, the author hopes to raise the awareness level of those involved in Jewish missions of the opportunity to reach this people group in the 1990's through an effective strategy of evangelism and church planting.

Description of the Target People Group

Geographical and Historical Data- There has been an increasing number of Israeli Jews migrating to the United States since 1973. This has been a continuing trend through the 1970's and 80's because of the difficult economic, social and political conditions in the State of Israel. There is also the pull of expected opportunity in America. Many for whom the Zionist Dream has not materialized are lured by the American Dream. The actual number of Israelis residing in the USA is difficult to determine because there is a stock population (those who are more settles and long term) and a flow population (those who are temporary or transit). Estimates run from the high of between 300,000 to 500,000, the figure given in 1980 by the then Director of the Jewish Agency for Israel (quoted in Herman 1983:51), to the lows of 180,00 in an M. A. thesis done in 1983 by Herman and LaFontaine for the Sociology Department of the University of Southern California in (Herman: 1983: 54). The 1990 Jewish Population Survey, conducted by the Council of Jewish Federations to coincide with the U.S. Census, recently gave the low figure of 63,000 naturalized Israeli immigrants (News Release, Nov. 15, 1990). This figure, however, does not include the non-immigrant Israeli migrants.

According to the U.S.C. sociologist, Pini Herman, 70 % of all Israeli migrants to the USA reside in three states; New York, New Jersey, and California (1983:59). Roughly, one third of these are in California. The majority of those in California are in the Greater Los Angeles area. Herman also noted a trend of an internal

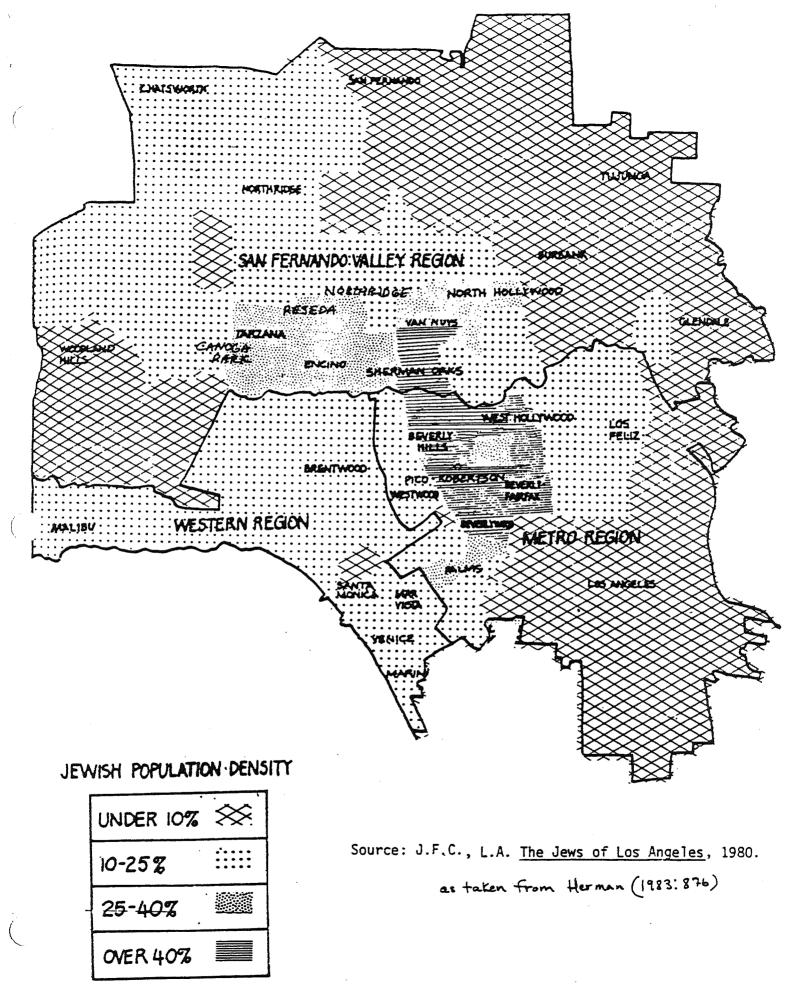
I use the term "migrant" throughout to refer to all Israeli born persons now residing in the USA, whatever their legal status e. g. immigrants who are now naturalized American citizens, permanent residents ("green card" holders), students, on various work visas, tourists overstaying their visas, undocumented or otherwise illegal aliens.

migration of Israelis from New York, the majority of these coming to L.A. Herman told me in an interview in 1990 that he has followed the trends through to the present and he believes that the numbers have remained "much the same" (Herman:1990). Based on the above calculations there are approximately 30,000 to 40,000 Israelis in Greater L. A. on a more settled basis. This number swells during the high tourist months (May-September) in a given year. There are over 100,000 Israelis entering the country each year, and most frequent the same areas (Herman 1990). Thus it often appears to the casual observer, as they flow through, that there are more Israelis present than there in fact are on a more settled basis. There is definitely a thriving Israeli community in L. A., as evidenced by the three regular Hebrew language newspapers, and the two Hebrew radio stations.

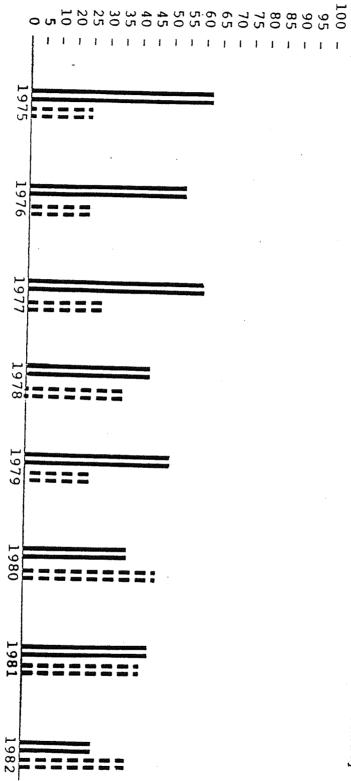
My target area is the San Fernando Valley area. According to Fenton Ward, D. Min. Fuller Seminary, in a recent paper demographic data on the Jewish people, using primarily The American Jewish Yearbook, 1987, and an unpublished 1986 demographic study of the Los Angeles Jewish Federation as his sources, 40% of all Jewish people in L. A. live in the San Fernando Valley (Ward 1990). This means 300,000 to 325,000, or about one in five of its total population. It is clear that Israelis do migrate to areas where American Jewish communities already exist. The oldest community is in the Metro L. A. area of Fairfax, West Hollywood and Beverly Hills. It would appear that many Israelis go there upon arrival because it is familiar, but then migrate to the Valley later where housing is less expensive and opportunities are greater. American Jewish families with young children are predominantly in the S. F. Valley. The trend appears to be more and more for Israelis to go to the Central and Western Valley area. Herman tracked a trend of Israeli born immigrants residing more in the Valley and less in the Metro region, beginning in the early 1980's. (See graph taken from Herman, Table 1). Thus the map from 1980 herein included by the Jewish Federation Council on Jewish population density should be updated showing an increasing density in the Central and Western Valley regions for 1990. There has been a general westward migration. The major municipalities we are talking about are Van Nuys and Sherman Oaks in the East and Central areas, and Encino, Tarzana, Reseda, Northridge and Canoga Park in the West.

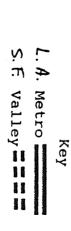
Ward estimates that there are 25,000 Israeli migrants in the S.F. Valley (1990:6). This would seem to be as accurate of a figure as can be ascertained, though the number could be somewhat higher. The number may fluctuate some and swell with the ebb and flow of migration. The ongoing Intifada (Palestinian Uprising) in Israel as well as the extreme pressure on the infrastructure (housing and jobs shortage) due to the influx of 200,000 Russian Jewish immigrants since the Gorbachev era, with an expected total of 1.5 million is likely to mean that there will be an increasing number of Israelis coming here. There is a "critical mass" here, and Israelis with relatives and connections here will continue to come. This, however, is speculation and cannot be borne out with hard data.

Approximately two- thirds of the Israelis who come to the USA will stay in the USA, while one-third will emigrate from the USA,



Residential Patterns of Israeli-born Immigrants By Region and by Year of Naturalization TABLE as taken from Herman (1983: 94)





the majority returning to Israel.

Demographic Data- The highest percentage of the Israelis in the Valley are young adults, in the 20 to 39 age range, singles and young couples with children. They are primarily two-generational families of parents and children, the broader extended family remaining in Israel. Herman found a higher percentage (ratio of 61% to 39%) of males than females among them (1983:98). Many are young men who have just finished their military service in the Israel Defence Forces, and have come to seek adventure and opportunity. From a representative sample of 910 Israelis who responded to a mail survey, among those married, 48% are married to Israelis, 35% are married to American Jews, 8% to Jews from other countries of origin, and 8% to non-Jews (Herman:1983:103).

In terms of ethnic sub-groupings, the only data available is that from the mail survey of 910 respondents. Of these, 57.5% are Ahkenazi, 37.5% are Sephardic and 2% were a mixture of both (Herman 1983:102).

is evidence that the older naturalized immigrants (primarily those who came in the 1960's and early 70's), are more highly represented in the professional, technical, and white collar occupations than in any others and that they have a relatively high level of income (Herman 1983:101). This would not necessarily be true of the sojourners and "green card holders". An M. A. thesis done in 1979 for Hebrew Union College, recognized then that there is a group of Israelis who are very rich and live a "Savyon lifestyle" (Savyon is a very affluent enclave in sub-urban Tel Aviv). This group is not interested in contact with American Jews, and is very exclusive. You must be "good material" to be accepted (Genstil 1979:71). These are the ones who realized the American Dream. These people will obviously not be the most gospel receptive segment of the population. This is, however, a minority of the Israeli population.

The same study observed another sizable group who are involved in Scientolgy and that the number was increasing (Genstil 1979:68-70). Classes in Scientolgy are offered in Hebrew, and Passover Seders and Purim parties with a scientological spiritual flavor are also offered. The Israelis interviewed said that the Scientology people are friendly and caring, they try to understand and to help newcomers. Those Israelis involved said that they gain a sense of being O.K. through the group. These interviews were done in 1979, and with the rise of the New Age movement in the 1980's in various forms, it is safe to assume that there is increased Israeli involvement. Those Israelis that are alienated from Judaism, or perhaps from felt need to supplement their Judaism, are attracted to the New Age.

Jewish Identity and Identification— In modern Israeli society, 80% of the people are thoroughly secular (humanistic) in terms of their religious beliefs. Their Judaism consists primarily in their identity as Israelis and their ties with "Eretz Israel", and not to Rabbinic Law. It is generally more nationalistic/Zionist than religious. Identification is acting on one's identity. While in Israel, this was natural and implicit because the Jewish Holidays are part of the civic calendar, they were in "the Land" and Hebrew was the first language. They were Israeli Jews; no need to prove

it. But now, here, in this new diaspora, not only are they effected by the normal culture shock that any people would face, but they are also effected by the deeply inculcated value that to live in the Land of Israel is the realization of the age-old longings of the Jews. Immigrating to Israel is "to go up" (aliyah) and to emigrate from Israeli is to "go down" (yerida). Having left the State that their Zionist forebears suffered and died for and for which their compatriots in the country are still suffering and dying for, most of them carry a guilt to the effect that they are deserters, cowards, traitors, or weak and selfish, having left the Promised Land for the "fleshpots of Egypt", or the "Land of milk and honey " for the "Land of milk and money. The Israeli Prime Minister in 1977, Yitzhak Rabin, referred to the "yordim" (those who go down) as "napolet shel nemoshot" (dregs or dropping of an idiot), and "halahashim shebalahashim" (weakest of the weak), and said "I see no justification, come what may, for anyone born in this country, or living here, to get up and say, 'I'm deserting the battlefield'"2.

This guilt, together with fact of living "in exile" in a Gentile environment, produces a compensatory effect of causing a greater Jewish identification here than they were accustomed to while living in Israel. Many who were less observant in Israel become more Jewishly observant in the USA. This is true for a majority, though not all. (See Table 2 and Table 3 for results of Herman's mail survey among naturalized Israeli-born immigrants as to their observance and feelings about being Jewish). A prime way this is expressed is in their concern that their children receive a Jewish education. According to Herman's survey, again only of the naturalized ones, 82% of Israeli parents are giving their children some type of Jewish education, 50% to some form of Jewish Day schools, while the other 32% supplement the public schools with after school activities and/or summer camps (1983:106-107). This, while only 42% of American born Jewish parents of L.A. give their children some form of Jewish education.

Israeli Jewish identification, however, is different than American Jewish identification. Israeli Jews are definitely a distinct homogeneous sub-grouping within the Jewish people. They tend to live in the areas where American Jews live, so there is not a geographical distance, but there a socio-cultural distance. The majority do not belong to American synagogues, emphasizing more so the home rituals. Israelis are fiercely individualistic and self-sufficient. For them to call a social worker with one of the Jewish community service agencies would be an embarrassment for most of them. When they have called for help many times they are treated with coolness and unwillingness to help (contrary to the attitude of the Scientologists)(Genstil 1979:1-4). Through the 1970's, and from what I gather, most of the 80's, the American Jewish community, to a large degree, disdained and held Israeli migrant needs at a low priority. There has been a general feeling "Why are you here? Israel needs you". The American Jewish community

James Feron, "the Israelis of New York", New York Times Magazine, January 16, 1977. (as quoted in Genstil 1979:20)

TABLE 2 as taken from Herman (1983: 104)

NATURALIZED ISRAELI-BORN RESPONDENTS FEELINGS ABOUT THE PERSONAL IMPORTANCE OF BEING JEWISH

Response	% Respondents (n=40)
One of the most important things in my life	37.5
Very important	47.5
Somewhat important	12.5
Marginally important	· -
Meaningless	2.5
Total	100.0

TABLE 3

NATURALIZED ISRAELI-BORN RESPONDENTS OBSERVANCE OF JEWISH CUSTOMS IN ISRAEL AND THE U.S.

	% Lighting Shabbat Candles		Cha	% Lighting Channukah Candles		% Attending Synagogue on Holidays		% Attending Synagogue on Shabbat		% Fasting on YomKippur	
Frequency	U.S.	Isr	<u>u.s</u>	. Isr.	<u>U.S</u>	. Isr.	U.S.	. Isr	<u>u.s.</u>	Isr.	
Always Sometimes Seldom Never	30.0 22.5 32.5 15.0	30.0 20.0 22.5 27.5	75.0 15.0 10.0	72.5 17.5 5.0 5.0	22.5 40.0 20.0 17.5	27.5 25.0 27.5 20.0	15.0 30.0 55.0	2.5 17.5 22.5 57.5	60.0 12.5 12.5 15.0	57.5 7.5 5.0 30.0	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	

sends huge sums of money to Israel each year and consequently are not so ready to give them help here when they perceive them as having deserted the Zionist cause. Add to this negative attitude they have encountered, the stereotype that many sabras have of "Galut Jews" (Diaspora Jews), and you have a level of antagonism between the two groups. There has been some warming by the American Jewish community recently toward the Israelis, as evidenced by an outreach project to Israelis by the Council on Jewish Life (Herman 1990), and Israelis do frequent Jewish community centers, but to what degree I do not know.

<u>Israeli Migrants Behavior as an Ethnic Group-</u> C. Peter Wagner defines a five type typology of ethnic identity as follows:

 $\underline{1)$ nuclear ethnics- all of life is revolving around their homogeneous unit

<u>2)fellow travelers</u>- living in two worlds, working in the broader society, but primary social group is their own ethnic group

3)marginal ethnics- leaving the homogeneous unit, but looking back nostalgically. They want their children to marry within the group

4)alienated ethnics- leaving the group, prefer to assimilate 5)affiliate ethnics- left the group, wanting to join another ethnic group

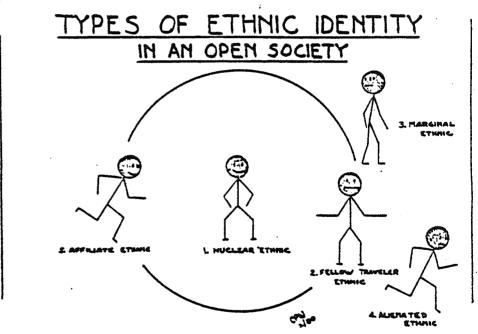


Table 4 (Wagner 1990:4)

According to Wagner's typology, I would estimate the Israeli migrants behavior to be: $\underline{\text{nuclear}}$ - 60%

fellow travelers- 25% marginal- 10%

Assimilation Factors among Israeli migrants

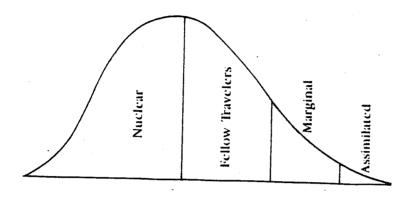


Table 5 (Adapted from Chaney 1982:137)

The Israelis tend to cluster together, in their own little colonies, and eat at several Israeli restaurants, shop in Israeli shops, and gather at Israeli night places. They speak Hebrew and read their Hebrew language newspapers and keep in close touch with what is happening in Israel. Most of them resist assimilation to the general American culture. Many still identify themselves as Israelis even after living here for twenty years. They are perpetually uprooted, the "living out of the suitcase syndrome". Most say they will go back some day, but they don't set a definite date and so the months turn into years and the years to decades. For many, their hearts are in the East but they dwell in the West. Many will avoid the inevitable questions, "How long have you been here? " and "When will you go back?". They are united by their common fate of "yerida". Some internalize the negative attitudes toward them as "Yordim", and view themselves as abnormal. live with a level of guilt, shame, and low self-esteem. Some of these see these negative things reflecting on themselves through the other yordim, and hence as an escape, prefer to relate to primarily Gentile Americans, to become a normal American (the alienated ethnics). Many have come here because they were economic or social failures in Israel. Many are suffering emotional and psychological losses, hurts, and needs. There is social disruption, identity conflict, and culture shock. A description of ethnic group behavior and social interaction among the naturalized Israeli immigrants is given by Herman from his survey, showing that the majority consider their best friends to be other Israelis. It also indicates that they do make friends with American Jews more readily than non-Jews, despite the differences. This indicates that their common bond as Jews is still a stronger force than that which separates them and that it is stronger than what common bonds exist with non-Jews, at least from this survey.

NATURALIZED ISRAELI-BORN RESPONDENTS STATEMENTS OF TWO BEST FRIENDS

Two Best Friends	Respondents	(n=40)
Both American Jews American Jew and Israeli Jew American Jew and non-Jew Both Israeli Jews Israeli and non-Jew Both non-Jew	7.5 32.5 10.0 37.5 10.0 2.5	
Total	100.0	

Table 6 Herman(1983:107)

Resistance or Receptivity to the Gospel

There is definitely a diversity among the Israeli migrants in terms of their receptivity or resistance to the gospel. There are some factors that make for a general receptivity, and some factors will indicate that certain sub-groups or pockets within the population will be more receptive than others. There are also some factors which indicate resistance. It will be helpful to consider the "Resistance/Receptivity Scale":

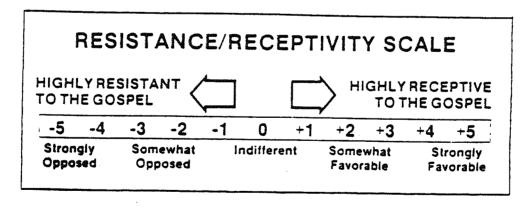


Table 7- Dayton (1980:47)

Several general indicators of receptivity have been observed from field experience by Church Growth thinkers following McGavran (1990:179-192). A number of these factors are characteristics of the Israeli migrants in the USA. They are clearly not as receptive as the Russian Jewish immigrants now streaming out of the Soviet Union. But the element of migration, uprooting, a people in transition, changing and looking for change, generally will produce more receptivity to the gospel than would be found among Israelis living in Israel. Those who are the newest arrivals will be more receptive than the older more established ones. Those willing to

make the change of leaving Israel and seeking American citizenship, may be willing to make the big change of giving allegiance to Jesus the Messiah.

Those who have recently lost faith (in anything) are usually more receptive to a new faith. Many of these Israelis have lost faith in the State of Israel. They are disillusioned with the Zionist Dream. Some have also lost faith in Judaism. Often, whoever reaches them first with a new faith, will win them. This is evidenced by the large number of Israelis reached by Scientology, and the New Age movement. Secular Israelis who have never been Jewishly religious, are reached by Kabbalah and the Habad movement (Lubavitcher Orthodoxy). A good number of those who are winnable by the New Age mysticisms and by the Orthodox groups are also winnable to Jesus.

People who score highly on the stress scale (experiencing several stress producing personal/family transition conditions), are more open to the gospel. They are open to solutions and answers. As described above, this is certainly true of many of these Israelis. This would especially be so for those who left Israel to escape something or out of failure, and possibly those experiencing guilt for leaving. They might well be open to One who can relieve their guilt and whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.

Young people are generally more receptive than older ones. As shown above, their is a predominance of young families and singles among these people who are moving into the West San Fernando Valley. Those singles who just finished their Army service and are looking for adventure and searching for a way of life may well be receptive if approached by the right evangelist in the right manner.

In my assessment, the nuclear ethnics (approximately 60%) are the most resistant. They would range from -5 through -2 on the scale. Those seeking greater Jewish identification and/or feeling some guilt for leaving, may well reason, "I have already deserted, I don't want to go even farther in betraying my peoplehood by becoming a Christian". They may put their barriers up and have a siege mentality, especially to the wrong kind of people approaching them in the wrong way. But because of the receptivity factors described above, some would be truly open especially to other Israelis, their own kind of people, whose lives have been truly changed by regeneration through faith in the Jewish Messiah, and who remain Jews and identify ethnically.

The marginal and alienated ethnics (approximately 15%) would be the most receptive. These would range from -1 through +3 on the scale. It is commonly rumored that there are approximately 500 Jewish believers in the Church on the Way in Van Nuys. The large majority of these are American born Jews, but marginal and alienated ethnics. I, however, met two Israelis who came to faith and are in fellowship there. So some may be won even through an non-contextualized American Gentile Christian church approach. But these would be very few in my assessment.

Assessment of Present Evangelistic Efforts Specifically Targeting Israeli Migrants in Los Angeles

To my knowledge, there is only one Jewish Mission which is targeting these people in the Hebrew language, the Rock of Israel, Inc. based in Van Nuys. The author, Bill Bjoraker, spent eight years in pastoral teaching ministries in Tel Aviv, speaks fluent Hebrew, and successfully led a congregation in a "mother-daughter" church plant plan in 1988-89. I have been received on staff with the specific assignment to develop an evangelism and discipling ministry Israelis here. among the With my networking relationships with the Israeli leaders of messianic congregations in Israel, I will have ability to link new Israeli believers who want to return to Israel with fitting congregations there.

There is much greater freedom legally to evangelize them here in the USA, than in the State of Israel where there are legal complications and definite harassment of the efforts.

I believe there is a tremendous opportunity to reach these people, and the need is great. I believe it is definitely feasible to plant a church/churches among these people. The nuclear ethnic segment will require a Hebrew language, homogeneous unit church. There is presently none. Here is an unreached people group of 25,000-30,000. It will require, however, sufficient and adequate resources and the right strategy and tactics to be effective.

Preliminary Efforts and Projected Strategy

As McGavran said, "In the mid-ranges of the (resistance/receptivity) axis, methods are of supreme importance. Winnable men and women may be lost by one method and gained by another" (1990:188). On the right end of the axis, methods are unimportant, because almost anything works. On the left end, methods are unimportant, because nothing works. In the middle range, methods are extremely important. At least the marginal and alienated ethnic segments of the Israeli migrants are in the middle ranges.

The task of planting churches among these people will require "the right stuff". It will require a concentrated "laser approach" which will focus on evangelizing persons in the group who have leadership potential (Shenk and Stutzman 1988:139). When opinion setters or influencers come to faith, they will be catalytic in winning their own people and starting a people movement to the Messiah. The faith can then flow along the interlocking webs of relationships among the Israeli community in the S. F. Valley. The alternative to winning the right stuff would be to import an Israeli believing couple or a team of singles from a congregation in Israel, who have the call of God, the right gifting, equipping, and spiritual maturity to be catalytic in winning several to faith. They could work with me for a 12-24 month period until a nucleus is formed. Leaders could then be recognized and trained to continue evangelizing and discipling.

The Rock of Israel presently does not have the financial means to bring an Israeli team here. What we do have is a weekly Bible study/home group meeting in the home of a Jewish believing couple in Tarzana (West S.F. Valley). The home feels quite Israeli. There is room for 30 people to meet there. The core group is three Hebrew speakers and four or five others who come periodically.

There are many attractive, thought provoking, well contextualized Hebrew tracts written by Israeli believers, which we now have at the Rock of Israel offices as well as the means to print more of them in large quantities.

Beginning in January, 1991, I will be implementing the Evangelism Explosion (EE) with one team, myself as trainer and two Israeli believers as trainees. They are not really opinion setters or influential people in the Israeli community here. They are, however, loyal and committed, and they are all I have. We will be going out weekly to evangelize, mostly Israeli contacts with whom we have pre-arranged meetings. Failing these, we will go to the streets or the Israeli restaurants in the Valley. Those whom we win to the Lord will be invited to the home Bible study.

The real need however, is to develop a strategy which will reach people and communicate pre-evangelistically, and move them along the continuum: ignorance of the gospel-understanding the gospel and its implications-decision to act- repentance and regeneration-incorporation into cells of the Body- reproducing evangelists. More research into the felt needs of the people and how they actually make decisions will be helpful.

If we estimate that there are 30,000 Israelis in the Valley, even if only 1% are winnable, and I am sure the percentage is much higher, this will result in 300 Israeli believers. If these 300 were gathering in home groups of 15 people, this would mean 20 home groups. If a workable reproducible model can be developed, birthed by the Holy Spirit, the whole people group can be evangelized, and the responsive among then discipled. This model could then be implemented in New York where there is an even larger community of Israeli migrants. People trained in the model will be able to go back to Israel and implement it there. The emerging Israeli churches definitely need a working model to evangelize their people. Thus, the model developed here may have implications for Israeli evangelism worldwide.

I hope to convene a Consultation on Israeli Jewish Evangelism under the auspices of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE) sometime in 1991, which will bring together other missionaries and resource people who have a similar burden and concern for the Israelis of the USA, specifically of Los Angeles. This can provide networking power and resources, which could result in a more effective strategy implementation.

Lastly, I am convinced of the great need to catalyze serious, committed prayer support. I pray for and will seek to recruit teams of intercessors to do spiritual warfare against the clever and ageold effective Satanic strategy which keeps the Jewish people from believing in Jesus, their own promised Messiah.

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