

Religious rights and wrongdoings

Aucune traduction disponible

The law in the Land of Israel defends the freedom of religious rights for all faiths. Why then, in the small town of Arad, do the Messianic Jews face persecution because of their faith in Yeshua (Jesus)?

Arad, located about 2 hours south of Jerusalem and home to 25,000 residents would be considered a fairly quiet community except for the abusive harassments which Messianic Jews receive from the ultra orthodox group called the Gur Hasidim. Yakim Figueros, who is a Messianic pastor in Arad, explains the kind of harassment his congregants receive when going to their congregation. "There's a narrow way to go in. So they have two of their people standing on either side and reading curses against everyone that walks in: 'May his children be orphans. May their wives be widows.' and so on. You know it's not nice for the simple people to come in and go through this."

Besides the congregation itself, there is another place where the Gur Hasidim have been harassing Messianic Jews. Eddie and Laura Beckford established a chess club in the centre of Arad, to serve Jewish immigrants, to provide for their physical necessities and to encourage their spiritual awakening. These chess players are primarily retired senior citizens from the former Soviet Union. "We have books and Bibles in all the languages," Eddie Beckford said. "We always keep a stock of Russian Bibles - Old Testament, New Testament. They have a hunger for knowledge and reading because, I guess, books...were abandoned behind the Iron Curtain." The chess club has been vandalized and firebombed, and many believe the ultra orthodox Gur sect was behind the violent attacks. Some of the harassment which the Beckfords have received over the last few years include the vandalizing and spray painting of their van (on several occasions), being shouted at and physically harassed and having their shop burned by fire. At last reporting in November 2007, there were still ultra orthodox Gur demonstrations going on in Arad.

Who are the Gur Hasidim?

The Gur Hasidim found its roots in the small Polish town of Góra Kalwaria, and was before the Holocaust, the largest and most important Hasidic group in Poland. Around 200,000 of these Ger Hasidim perished in the Holocaust. Today this group is regarded as possibly the largest Hasidic dynasty in the world. It is now based in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak, Israel. They dominate the Agudat Israel religious movement and political party. They have a very well-developed educational network in Israel and internationally.

The Yad L'Achim (a Hebrew phrase meaning "Hand for the Brothers") is an Israeli organization, which has been dedicated to fighting what they call "Christian proselytization" in Israel since 1950. It is also responsible for many attacks and harassments against Messianic Jews in Israel. Yakim Figueras said that this organization had stones thrown through the windows of his house, but that the police are reluctant to protect them. Some messianic congregations are going to court over these harassments. When Figueras was asked if he would follow suit, he said, "At this moment we have decided not to take them to court. Even if we go to court, who is to say that the harassment will stop?"

There are reports that Anti-Christian groups regularly vandalize billboards rented by the church Meno Kalisher leads. "Whenever we buy or rent a billboard from the municipality, they will send people with spray-paint, and they will spray it all over although we have a license to put it up," Kalisher said. "If you do that, you should go to jail for three months. That's the law. But they do it on a regular basis, and we really have no one even to call. The police will hear that and basically look at us like we are stupid to have called them." Efforts to legally fight against these harassments meet great resistance. "Yad L'Achim enjoys cooperation from many government officials," Kalisher said. "Israeli politicians rarely lend assistance to persecuted believers because to do so would represent political suicide." For Kalisher and the Jerusalem Assembly House of Redemption, the main source of persecution is the Yad L'Achim. "Yad L'Achim, which operates from a combination of private and government funds, sees its mission as preserving the spiritual purity of the Jewish people by fending off the advance of Christianity," Kalisher said. "Yad L'Achim believes that when Jewish people place their faith in Jesus, they are effectively "killing the Jewish nation. They believe that ...they are keeping the purity of the nation." The views of Yad L'Achim are incorrect, Kalisher noted, because a Jewish person who studies the Old Testament should realize that Jesus is the culmination and the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures. "Rather than killing the Jewish religion, belief in Christ takes Jewish faith to its logical extension," he said. Nevertheless, Yad L'Achim activists "will come and demonstrate next to your home. They will put pressure at your work against you. They will speak with your neighbors and distort your testimony to make it seem as if you are a bad or dirty person. If you go to do something for the Lord, even if it is in accordance with Israeli law, they will be there to bother you or do something physically to destroy your material," Kalisher explained.

Despite the persecution felt by Messianic believers, the Israeli government generally protects freedom of religion. "We really enjoy freedom of faith [in Israel]," Kalisher adds. "As a citizen, I enjoy that I can say that I'm a believer. I thank God that I'm living in Israel. My problem is people who do not give us the rights that the law grants us.... We do enjoy good democracy and freedom of faith."

How can we help?

"Christians can take several actions to help persecuted Jewish believers in Israel," Kalisher explains. "First, they can pray for their brothers and sisters in Christ who live in Israel. If all the born-again, believing churches were focused on this area in prayer, I believe it would be magnificent," Kalisher said. "Second, American Christians should make sure that any funding they send to Israel is not being used to advance causes that are antithetical to the Gospel. Sometimes I'm amazed that Christian groups... will donate money to build synagogues," Kalisher said. "I really... cannot understand that. I'm not saying they should hate these [Jewish] people. They should pray for them to be saved. But their spiritual brothers need to be supported. And sometimes their support is being given without really examining where it goes". Dr. Fruchtenbaum echoes the same sentiments when he had this to say concerning help for our brothers and sisters in Israel: "Help will have to come from the messianic community and the evangelical community by means of writing letters of protest to Israeli embassies, support local messianic centers to provide funds for them to purchase their own centers so that they cannot be forced to move."

"Because we put the cross straightforwardly, we are persecuted," Kalisher concluded. "It is a spiritual war, and we are being persecuted because we love the Lord and we share the Gospel. And they don't like us. If we would be quiet and not speak, they would be friends with us."