

From the First Days in the Land of Israel

“Kerem Avraham Avinu” – A Vision Destroyed – An Inheritance Lost

Gershon Nerel

“Kerem Avraham Avinu” (The Vineyard of Abraham our Father), is the name given to a 12.5-acre parcel of land in the center of today’s Mea Shearim neighborhood in Jerusalem. In 1851, Elizabeth Finn, wife of the British consul in Israel, purchased the proper-

workers as a fringe benefit, along with their wages. In its heyday at the turn of the last century, there were about 200 workers employed there. “The Welfare Society for Needy Jews” managed the assets of the property.

After the death of Mrs. Finn and her heirs, and in the wake of the First World War, the activity at the Vineyard

family, plus a spacious home for the gardener, in addition to storage rooms and stables. Many trees, among them 64 fruit-bearing olive trees and 239 pine trees of various kinds flourished on the property.

In 1929, a significant change took place in Abraham’s Vineyard. Its ownership and management were transferred to a society of trustees in England, chosen from among the managing members of the *International Hebrew Christian Alliance*, headquartered in London since its establishment in 1925.

In 1930 and 31, Alfred Carmosh, a Messianic Jew who immigrated to Israel from Iraq and served as the representative of the International Alliance in Jerusalem, voluntarily supervised the work in the Vineyard. But the key members from abroad who were responsible for the property didn’t see their main destiny in the Land of Israel or in Zionism. Accordingly, they didn’t invest the effort needed to manage its resources.

With no personal dedication to the original vision, they failed to grasp the long-term strategic potential intrinsic to the property. In the end, the Alliance determined that maintaining the assets

One of the seven water holes in ‘Abraham’s Vineyard’



ty for use as a multi-faceted production facility where Jewish residents of the city could find work. From its inception, the infrastructure was designated for all needy Jews — not only for Jews who believe in Yeshua — without discrimination or conditions.

The work in the “Vineyard of Abraham” included quarrying and transporting building rocks, preparing burnt lime, and manufacturing soap from olive oil, most of which was exported to England because of the demand for pure soap from the Holy Land. Seven large water cisterns were built on the sites where the building stones were quarried, and the abundant water collected during the winter rainy season was distributed for free among the city’s poor.

Where the land was less rocky, grapevines and fruit trees were planted, and the produce distributed to the

gradually waned. At that time, the grounds included a grand, centrally located two-story residential building designated for the manager and his



Entrance Gate to ‘Ábraham’s Vineyard’

Michaela Lazarus' Story

from the administrative headquarters in England was not worthwhile.

After much debate, the leadership of the International Alliance, headed by its president, Sir **Leon Levison**, decided to sell their valuable tree-filled plot in the heart of Jerusalem. In 1932, after managing the Vineyard for just three years, the Alliance sold the entire property for 15,000 sterling liras. Proceeds from the sale were transferred to England and invested in a special charity fund called "The Abraham Fund Ltd." The trustee society for the Alliance continued to manage the new philanthropic fund. Simultaneously, in October 1933, a local Israeli society named "Abraham's Vineyard Ltd.," which exists to this day, was organized under the British Mandate. Though registered in the Land as a foreign society, it bought and sold various assets over the years. The same London-based trustees also managed it.

Leon Levison and his partners in the International Alliance visited Israel a number of times in an effort to buy another piece of agricultural property to found a settlement of Messianic Jews. But reality slapped them in the face — by then, property acquisition was more complicated throughout the country. In fact, all their subsequent attempts to buy property, even in the Jezreel Valley, Acre and the Gaza Strip, met with failure.

Meanwhile, what became of the trust? Over the years it was distributed as grants to the needy. Gradually most of the money in the Abraham Fund was exploited for welfare aid and ongoing administrative expenses. Over time, the value of the property sold in Jerusalem increased steadily, while the balance of the monetary fund decreased.

Though the money helped many people, it didn't compare to the permanent asset that could have served as a basis for a recognized legal status in the Land. Today, the bank account of the "Abraham's Vineyard Fund" is on the verge of liquidation. At least one clear conclusion stands out from this affair: *don't sell land before you've obtained a worthwhile alternative property.* □

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In September 1969, when Michaela told her boyfriend that she was pregnant, he gave her an ultimatum: abort the baby or forfeit him. In vain she sought to convince him that abortion is murder, reminding him that they'd loved each other for seven long years.

How could she even entertain the thought of destroying the child conceived by two people who love each other? But her pleading fell on deaf ears. He ridiculed her, urging her to pursue an abortion quickly while she could still hide her pregnancy. When she refused, he walked out, never to return.

Her whole world seemed to cave in on her. Her father had passed away a month before and her mother was immersed in grief. Her sister had just been divorced and was taking care of her two small children. She had no one to turn to. How could she keep her baby?

She found shelter in a home for unwed mothers. Here she struggled with the heart-wrenching decision of whether to raise her child or give it up for adoption. Day and night, she wrestled with the difficult choice until she broke down emotionally.

One night, Michaela poured out her heart to one of the nurses. Taking her hand and squeezing it into a fist, the nurse said: "Try to see it this way. If you hold onto something tightly, it will slip out between your fingers. But if you hold it freely," and she opened Michaela's clenched fingers, "it will always stay there. It's as if you were handing over a great work of art to a museum. You created it, but everyone can enjoy it."

Strengthened by these tender words, Michaela unselfishly decided to place her baby with a family who would love and raise her. **Naming her Mona Lisa Christina, she relinquished her tiny bundle, her heart seeming to shatter as she kissed her goodbye, knowing she would never see her again.**

Two years passed. Broken hearted, void of hope, she despaired even of life. She thought often of her daughter, wondering what she looked like and how she was doing. The emptiness that filled her was unbearable and consummate.

By the grace of God, she instinctively sought comfort by going back to a church she'd belonged to as a child. One evening, after listening to a woman share about how Jesus helped her, she prayed silently, "Lord Jesus, please come and save me." To her great amazement, He did!

After some time, Michaela felt the Lord calling her to Israel, where several years later, she met her future husband, David. She knew she had to tell him about her daughter. To her great relief, he responded with acceptance and forgiveness.

But the story doesn't end here. One day, Michaela received a phone call from the US. The voice on the other end asked if she would like to meet her daughter. "Yes, of course," was her excited answer. Before long, Mona Lisa Christina arrived in Israel for a two-week visit. And what a reunion in the Lord they had! Mona Lisa Christina is also a believer, filled with the Holy Spirit. Her adoptive father is a pilot for Delta Airlines, and her adoptive mother a professional nurse. Michaela listened as her daughter shared the highlights of her life. In high school, she had performed with her school orchestra in the former Soviet Union, in a cultural exchange program initiated by President Reagan.

After this, she was the only pianist chosen for a program sponsored by the governor of Georgia, in which she studied piano, conducting and the Japanese language.

At one point, her studies took her to Japan, where she met her future husband — a doctor working on a research project in microbiology, sponsored by NASA. Today, Mona Lisa Christina works as a financial consultant for the Ford Motor Company, which is grooming her for senior management.

If Michaela had aborted her child, the world would never have known this talented and gracious young woman, and the Body of Messiah would have been deprived of the unique gifts she brings to the family of God. What an awesome and merciful God we serve! □