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THE MESSIANIC JEW AND HEBREW CHRISTIAN

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Rachel Bar-David: Mother of a Modern Israeli Messianic Jewish "Tribe"



by
Gershon
Nerel

The story of Rachel Bar-David (Haimoff) was recorded in her flat in Ramat-Gan, in the Greater Tel-Aviv area in Israel in July 1994. Mrs. Bar-David's apartment has served as the permanent meeting place of a growing local congregation since 1957.

In the autumn of this year, Rachel Bar-David, affectionately known as "Schelly", is due to be a grandmother for the thirty-third time. As the daughter of Messianic Jews, Rachel has been privileged to see a succession of four generations walking in the steps of Yeshua the Messiah, for more than half-a-century. In the modern Israeli Messianic Jewish scene this is an unprecedented privilege.

I asked Rachel to tell her unique story as a member of one of the very few pioneer Messianic Jewish families, who have continuously lived in the Land since the time of the British Mandate in Palestine. There is also another reason for this interview:

Rachel's first-hand reminiscences are also an important source of information concerning the founders of a significant indigenous Israeli Messianic Jewish congregation.

☆☆☆

Q: When and where does your family story begin, "Schelly"?

A: My late husband Hayim and I were married in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria in 1942. Before this, for about fifteen years, Hayim was already living in Palestine. He came to Sofia for a short visit to meet his relatives, and during this time we met and were married. In January 1944 we left Bulgaria and travelled to Palestine via Turkey and Lebanon. As my husband already had some friends in Jerusalem we settled there and our first son Joseph was born there at the English Hospital.

Q: What do you recall about your years in the Land?

A: Hayim was offered the position of librarian for the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C. & M.A.) theological library, located on Prophets Street, where the Messianic Assembly of Israel is now located. Our family lived in a small apartment in this compound. David, our second son, was born two years later. In the early months of 1947 we moved to Katamon, a neighbourhood very close to the Arab Moslem population. In November 1947 severe hostilities broke out between Arabs and Jews, following the United Nations approval of the Partition Plan for Palestine. So we had to leave for a zone controlled by Jewish forces. Arie, our third son, was then about three months old. On the same day that we

had to move to the massive building of the American Church down the street from the C. & M.A. library, my husband was shot by a Moslem terrorist. It was only a superficial skin wound in his forehead; no doubt it was a miracle that he was not seriously injured. After he was bandaged, he continued to work.

Q: Where was your family in May 1948 when the State of Israel was proclaimed?

A: We remained at the basement of the American Church. In fact, during the Israeli War of Independence this place became the main shelter for our neighbours. Some months earlier, together with about four dozen



Rachel Bar-David (Shelly) with only a part of her complement of grandchildren.

Messianic Jews in Jerusalem, we were offered free transportation to England. The Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem and the International Hebrew Christian Alliance, together with the British High Commissioner, were cooperating to evacuate the Jewish believers from Palestine. There were all kinds of fears and anxieties circulating. We, however, felt that our family must stay and not leave Israel during such critical days. We wanted especially to testify to our faith in Yeshua and to the promised restoration of Israel during those uncertain times. So our family remained in this large Church building with only one C. & M.A. missionary, Miss Bernice Gibson. Although the building suffered direct hits from shelling, we were miraculously preserved from harm.

Q: What happened to your family after the State of Israel was established?

A: We remained in Jerusalem until 1955. During these years four more children were born, two were twins — a boy and a girl. Those years were called “Tzena Days”, times of drastic austerity rations. Even one apple was divided among three or four children. I do not remember exactly what happened to the few other believers who had remained in Jerusalem. Those were difficult days, and I had to concentrate my efforts on my family. My responsibility was to take care of the children and our home.

Q: Is there still anything extraordinary that you recall from those very formative and unique days?

A: I remember especially the polio epidemic which broke out among babies after the State of Israel was established — mainly during 1949. The polio microbe paralysed many babies and even caused deaths. The fear of infantile paralysis was everywhere. I felt then as if the angel of death was passing over our heads. I recall gathering the children for prayer, and asking the Lord to protect them from this epidemic. Praise God, our prayers were answered and they all grew up healthy!

Q: When did your family move to Ramat-Gan?

A: In 1955 we moved from Jerusalem to Haifa in the north of Israel. We lived in Haifa for the next two years and then in 1957 we bought our present flat in Ramat-Gan and ever since have lived here.

Q: How did you raise your children so that they all believe in Yeshua and follow His way?

A: Daily we devoted time to prayer and teaching from Scripture. Usually my husband took the responsibility to explain Scripture passages to the children in the evenings before bedtime. I would teach them new songs and we would sing them at home together. Hayim used to ask the

children according to their age to pray openly. Now my children want to transmit the same habits to our grandchildren. We also used to pray and give thanks before every meal we had together.

Q Where were your children educated?

A: It was important for us not to separate the children from their surroundings. We as parents wanted them to be raised as normally as possible and integrated into Israeli society, yet difficulties were not absent. Sometimes our children were mocked by other children and nicknamed "Gentiles" or "Christians". We prayed with the children on such occasions and always encouraged them to trust the Lord for His help and guidance. When other children refused to become friends with ours we explained to them why we are not like the main-stream of society. Together we asked for God's wisdom and mercy. I recall once I was even asked by a school secretary: "Why do you not send your children to a separate Christian school"? I replied: "I myself was educated in Bulgaria in a Jewish school, so in our Jewish State shall I send my "sabara" children to a non-Jewish and non-Israeli school? We insisted that our children should attend a Hebrew school within a Jewish context.

Q: What role did your family life play in relation to the school education?

A: No doubt a major role. We as parents felt that we must fulfil our responsibilities, and the Lord would do for us what is beyond our capabilities. We wanted the children to learn from their infancy what are the demands of the Lord God as reflected in His Word. The children had to be taught by us parents about sin and everything which would displease the Lord. I realised that Satan wanted to destroy the children, but God was merciful, especially during their adolescence. They had to face all the temptations of teenagers, especially in their class weekend parties. Their home education to fear the Lord and remember Him everywhere was deeply rooted in the children and gave them a deep consciousness about sin. Quite naturally, they themselves did not want to participate in such happenings. The children also realised that the Lord always listens to our prayers and protects us from evil. These habits gave the children much encouragement and the strength to continue in the path of faith. Often we knelt together with the children during our prayer time. Yet we also emphasised to the children that they will need to make their own personal decision, as adults, concerning faith in Yeshua and becoming His disciples. Meanwhile, as they were still children, we could not neglect our responsibilities as parents to instruct them in the Scriptures daily.

Q: Did your children serve in the Israeli Army (I.D.F.)?

A: Yes, all seven of them, including our daughter. Actually during two wars, the Six-Day-War and the Yom-Kippur War, three of them were serving in the military forces as paratroopers at the same time in the front lines. Two are now I.D.F. Reserve officers. Every year they still go to military reserve duty.

Q: How would you maintain a Jewish identity within your family?

A: We never lost our Jewish identity. The children, from childhood, were always instructed that as believers in Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah, we are completed Jews, and nothing less than that. The children understood that except for our belief in Yeshua and the New Testament, we are no different from our Jewish neighbours. We continue to keep the Sabbath and the

Jewish Feasts according to the biblical calendar and commandments. We always explained to our children that Yeshua did not abolish the Torah, and that He Himself kept it. We have seen that such an approach gave a special vitality to our children to witness everywhere about the Jewish Messiah without any fear but rather with much boldness.

Q: How would you summarise your child-raising experiences?

A: It is a matter of much grace from Heaven that the Lord — today as in the past — is still guiding and blessing us. God answered our constant prayers — day and night. He who protected us in all difficulties and persecutions then is also helping us now. Satan is mighty, but God is Almighty; to God be the glory!

QUOTE — UNQUOTE

“Don’t petition God to change natural laws for your sake.”

— The Sassover Rabbi

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