

## MESSIANIC JEWS IN OTTOMAN JERUSALEM

The story of Messianic Jews in Ottoman Jerusalem is a story of beginnings, with all the intrigue and messiness that usually accompanies beginnings of any sort. Yet it is a story of tremendous significance.

Allow me to comment on terminology and limitations. By “messianic Jews,” I mean Jewish people who had come to believe that Jesus was/is the Jewish Messiah. At the time, there were other terms that were used, but I have adopted current terminology. Secondly, although Jesus’ name in Hebrew is Yeshua, for this presentation, I will use the name by which most English speakers know Him. Due to the limitation of time, I will only be able to address the period until 1905 and I must restrict attention to Jerusalem. Although I must be selective, I hope you will find this information both interesting and helpful.

There would likely not have been any Messianic Jews in the Land of Israel during the Ottoman period without the “rediscovery” of the Bible in England.<sup>1</sup> In the late 1500s and throughout the 1600s, England was saturated with the Word of God. John Richard Green says, “England became the people of a book and that book was the Bible. . . . What the revival of classical learning had done on the Continent was done in England in a far profounder fashion by the translation of the Scriptures.”<sup>2</sup> Another historian, H. Hensley Henson, adds: “It would appear that the Old Testament was more widely read than the New, certainly its spirit . . . coloured the religious thought of the nation.”<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, there was a spiritual awakening in England, especially in the 1700s, and along with this awakening, there was also the growing awareness of God’s love for the Jewish people and His intention that they be restored, both spiritually to their Messiah and physically to the Land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This gave rise to the British Restorationist Movement, which later would be known as Christian Zionism.



The natural result was a deep desire to bring this good news of salvation back to the very city and people from whom they themselves had received the Bible and the message of salvation. In 1809, the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, known simply as the London Jews Society (LJS), was founded, perhaps unexpectedly, by a

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<sup>1</sup>For an article describing the role of two earlier Messianic Jews in the establishment of the text of the Hebrew Bible and the *Mikraot Gedolot*, see Jim R. Sibley, “How Two 16th Century Messianic Jews Impacted Rabbinic Bible Study,” at: <https://www.oneforisrael.org/bible-based-teaching-from-israel/messianic-perspective/how-two-16th-century-messianic-jews-impacted-rabbinic-bible-study/>.

<sup>2</sup>John Richard Green, *Short History of the English People*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1893), 933.

<sup>3</sup>H. Hensley Henson, *Puritanism in England* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), 116.

Messianic Jew, Joseph Samuel Levi (1771–1850). He had been born and raised in an Orthodox Jewish home in Germany but had become convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. He would be known as Joseph S. C. F. Frey. He lived and died for the Hope of Israel, and many of the missionaries who would follow would also be Messianic Jews with a similar compassion for their own people. It should be emphasized that the beginnings of Messianic Jewish work in the Land of Israel in modern times must be traced to the service of these workers who had a love for the Jewish people and a burden for their salvation.

Christianity had only been represented in Jerusalem by the traditional churches for most of the Ottoman Period. They had become almost devoid of spiritual life.<sup>4</sup> Saul P. Colbi, who was an official in the Ministry of Religious Affairs in the 1960s, sums it up nicely when he says, “The history of Christianity in the Holy Land under the Ottomans is mainly a catalogue of struggles for possession of the Holy Places; the Christian population was so impoverished, its numbers were so exiguous, that all other aspects had little significance.”<sup>5</sup>

While this was certainly true for most of the Ottoman Period, in its last century, the inauguration of Protestant activity provided a welcomed change. Because of their compassion for the Jewish people, it was these evangelicals who were responsible for the introduction of the first schools, hospitals, and other benevolent institutions in the Land.<sup>6</sup> So while the focus of this study will be on Messianic Jews in Jerusalem, the story could not be told without reference to the labors of these expatriate Jewish and Gentile Christians.

## **The Pioneering Efforts**

### **Early Protestant Interest**

The beginning of interest in Ottoman Jerusalem on the part of Western evangelicals came from a report published in London’s *The Missionary Register* in May 1818 and republished in a number of other missions periodicals, indicating that the time was ripe for the Church Missionary Society to begin an established work in Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> This report also led the Prudential Committee of the American Board of Missions to adopt a resolution, “That a mission be established forthwith in Palestine.”<sup>8</sup> For the next 35 years, the focus of attention would be on Jerusalem.

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas Stransky, “Origins of Western Christian Missions in Jerusalem and the Holy Land” in *Jerusalem in the Mind of the Western World, 1800–1948, With Eyes Toward Zion*, vol. 5, edited by Yehoshua Ben-Arieh and Moshe Davis (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 138–45.

<sup>5</sup>Saul P. Colbi, *Christianity in the Holy Land, Past and Present* (Tel Aviv: A Hassefer, 1969), 65.

<sup>6</sup>For a comprehensive study of the schools, see Rebecca Nessim, “The Schools of the London Jews Society in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Jerusalem,” for the degree M.Teach; Kibbutzim College of Education, Technology & the Arts; Tel Aviv, 2014.

<sup>7</sup>“Church Missionary Society,” in *The Missionary Register for MDCCCXVIII* [1818] (London: L. B. Seeley, 1818), 248. This report made a tremendous impact upon the plans of Pliny Fisk [see, Alvan Bond, “Preface” in *Memoir of the Rev. Pliny Fisk, A. M., Late Missionary to Palestine* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1828), iii.

<sup>8</sup>Bond, iv.

Among the earliest ministers to come were Christopher Burckhardt (1818); James Conner (1820); Levi Parsons and Melchior Tschoudy (1821); Joseph Wolff (1822), Pliny Fisk, William Jowett, William B. Lewis, and Jonas King (1823); Isaac Bird and Benjamin Barker (1824); and George Edward Dalton (1825). These efforts were often sealed with the death of the minister or his family, frequently due to disease or the lack of hygiene in the country.<sup>9</sup> They came with a full awareness of the dangers, indeed with the probability that they would not survive.

These pioneers were often called “Bible-men”; not merely because they distributed Bibles and Scripture portions, but because in their preaching, teaching, and conversations, they were promoting biblical teachings, not the creeds or liturgies of the established churches or the traditions of the rabbis.<sup>10</sup> This history reveals the commitment and piety of these pioneers and the tremendous personal price they were willing to pay.

In April 1822, Wolff writes in his journal concerning a certain Abraham son of David Izkowish Shlifro (afterward, Abraham ben David), a Jewish man originally from Belarus.<sup>11</sup> This man visited with Wolff frequently. In his journal, Wolff reported that Ben-David, “confessed today with tears in his eyes, that he is convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”<sup>12</sup> In the days that followed, Wolff read the Scripture with him and prayed with him.<sup>13</sup> He also refers to him as “the young rabbi,” and as having been “converted.”<sup>14</sup> At the time, of course, this did not suggest any loss of Jewish identity. At this time, and with Jewish believers such as Wolff, the Jewishness of the new believer was a source of great joy and something to be cherished and preserved.

He also writes about Joseph Maimoron, a Jewish man in Jerusalem, who is convinced of the truth of the gospel, prays with Wolff, and is later baptized by Wolff in Jaffa. In addition to these two, Wolff mentions two Jewish rabbis (he also calls them his “friends”), who expressed their wish of being baptized.<sup>15</sup> A. E. Thompson says that in 1839, only five Messianic Jews had been baptized in Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup> So we mark the beginning of a presence of local Messianic Jews in Jerusalem with Abraham ben David in the year 1822.

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<sup>9</sup>Re the further work of Fisk, together with Joseph Wolff and Jonas King, see Kai Kjaer-Hansen, “First ‘Organized’ Bible-work in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Jerusalem, Part VI: Wolff, Fisk and King in Jerusalem (1823),” *Mishkan* 54 (2008): 64–79. See also Jim R. Sibley, “‘For Zion’s Sake’: The Palestine Mission of Parsons and Fisk,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism, North American chapter, Boston, Massachusetts, April 2008.

<sup>10</sup>An excellent account and analysis of these efforts may be found in the series of ten articles by Kai Kjaer-Hansen, “First ‘Organized’ Bible-work in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Jerusalem (1816–1831),” *Mishkan* 41, 42, 44, 48, 49, 54, 55, 57, 58, and 59 (2004–09).

<sup>11</sup>His name appears with several different spellings: Shlifro, Shliffro, or Stifro. Perhaps it was originally Schleifer, i.e., one who sharpens knives. Wolff also mentions two Messianic Jews in Akko in January 1822. See Wolff, 185–86.

<sup>12</sup>Joseph Wolff, *Missionary Journal and Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Wolff, Missionary to the Jews*, revised and edited by John Bayford (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1824), 270.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 272–73.

<sup>15</sup>“Extracts of Letters from Joseph Wolff,” *The Jewish Expositor and Friend of Israel* (1829): 439.

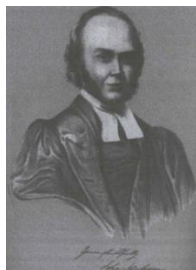
<sup>16</sup>A. E. Thompson, *A Century of Jewish Missions* [sic] (Chicago, IL: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1902), 177.

## Early Communities of Messianic Jews

After the Egyptian General Ibrahim Pasha's occupation of Syria in 1832, changes were made, and foreign consulates were established that, upon the Ottoman re-occupation, proved impossible to reverse or remove.<sup>17</sup> Until this time, while there may have been a few individual believers, there does not seem to have been any sort of group or congregational activity. Colbi claims that “it was only in 1833, when Rev. John Nicolayson, a Dane from Schleswig, secured a vantage in the Holy City, that work of a permanent nature was made possible.”<sup>18</sup> Even so, he was able to build on the work of those who had gone before him. He used the relationships they had established and the methods they had pioneered.

### Christ Church

It was John Nicolayson who was responsible for the construction of Christ Church, just inside Jaffa Gate. He left England with his pregnant wife and six children and arrived in Jerusalem in January 1826.<sup>19</sup> Nicolayson had begun holding daily services in Hebrew by November 1838,<sup>20</sup> but the Anglican bishopric was not established until 1842,<sup>21</sup> when Michael Solomon Alexander, a former rabbi, arrived with his chaplain, F. C. Ewald, who was also a Messianic Jewish believer.



Previously, however, in 1839, Nicolayson reports the baptism of Simon Rosenthal and his family as “the first Jewish family received into the Church at Jerusalem since early Christian times.”<sup>22</sup> A few years later, Ewald reports he and his family “had gained the esteem of all who know him, and is also highly beloved by his brethren according to the flesh, who often call upon him when in difficulties for assistance.”<sup>23</sup> Also baptized in 1839 was Paul Bergheim, a Jewish man from Germany, who had become a believer in Jesus and worked on the L. J. S. medical staff as a pharmacist.<sup>24</sup> Bergheim and his family figure prominently in the

<sup>17</sup>Stransky, 141–44, 45.

<sup>18</sup>Colbi, 86. See also Thompson, 177.

<sup>19</sup>Kelvin Crombie, *For the Love of Zion: Christian Witness and the Restoration of Israel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 20, 46.

<sup>20</sup>*Jewish Intelligence and Monthly Account of the Proceedings of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews [JI]* 7 (1838): 271.

<sup>21</sup>See H. R. A. Jones, “The Anglican Bishopric of Jerusalem,” in *Christians In Israel: A Survey*, ed. Ch. Wardi (Jerusalem: Ministry of Religious Affairs, Government of Israel, 1950), 50–53.

<sup>22</sup>W. T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, from 1809 to 1908* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, 1908), 181.

<sup>23</sup>Ferdinand Christian Ewald, *Journal of Missionary Labours in the City of Jerusalem during the Years 1842–3–4* (London: B. Wertheim, Aldine Chambers, 1846), 77.

<sup>24</sup>Yeshayahu Nir, *The Bible and the Image: The History of Photography in the Holy Land, 1839-1899* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 114.

community of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem for years to come.<sup>25</sup> His son will be mentioned again later.

The major publication of the LJS was simply called, “*Jewish Intelligence*,” and in the report published in late February 1842, Alexander reports that daily Hebrew services were inaugurated in Jerusalem as believers met in a temporary chapel.<sup>26</sup> So, at some point, the daily services that Nicolayson had begun must have ended previously. In March of this year (i.e., 1842), he reported on the Jerusalem Hebrew Christian Church as follows: “Our small congregation of believing Jews on Mount Zion consists at present of twenty-five souls. May the Lord soon add many, many more! Zion, with its small number of believing Jews, will still become a place of attraction to many sons of Abraham.”<sup>27</sup> Thompson reports that later in 1842 there were ten more new Messianic Jews, including two rabbis. The next year a Hebrew school, a House of Industry and an Inquirer’s Home were instituted, while the following year was marked by the opening of a Bible depot and a hospital.<sup>28</sup> In addition to those who attended services, there were also a significant number of secret believers. Ewald mentions them throughout his journal.<sup>29</sup>

From the first, rabbis were among those who came to know the Lord. On May 21, 1843, along with other new Jewish believers, two of three rabbis who had come to faith in Jesus were baptized, Isaac Paul Hirsch and Simon Peter Fraenkel.<sup>30</sup> The remaining rabbi found it too difficult to leave his wife, and he returned to rabbinic Judaism. Only the Lord knows his heart.

On June 18, 1843, E. M. Tartakover became the first Messianic Jew to be set apart for gospel ministry in Israel since apostolic times.<sup>31</sup> Gidney was thrilled: “There were now a bishop, a priest, and a deacon, all ‘Hebrews of the Hebrews,’ ministering on Mount Sion.”<sup>32</sup> At this time, the Jewishness of the new believers was celebrated. Although the Ottoman Turks, with their millet system, legislated that when a Jew became a Christian, he or she was no longer Jewish, and although the rabbinic authorities made the same pronouncements with their excommunications, this was not the case with the believers in Jerusalem. In their baptismal records, they were listed as “Israelites.” In fact, years later, following the Balfour Declaration in 1918, an LJS editorial said, “We are most anxious . . . to be in such a position in Jerusalem and Palestine to prove to the Jew that the converted Jew need not necessarily be denationalized.”<sup>33</sup>

Medical work had begun in 1839, and in December of 1848, a House of Industry was re-opened to train believers in “carpentry and joinery. . . and printing and bookbinding”<sup>34</sup> to provide work and training for those who had been cut off from families and who needed a way to

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<sup>25</sup>Ewald, 83, 137, 223. See also *Jl* 13 (1847): 224.

<sup>26</sup>*Jl* 8 (1842): 161.

<sup>27</sup>Ewald, 92.

<sup>28</sup>Thompson, 177.

<sup>29</sup>For example, see Ewald, 103, 177, 178, 190, 192, 212, 216, and 250.

<sup>30</sup>Ewald, 176, 191. For other examples, see also Ewald, 82–83.

<sup>31</sup>Ewald, 194. Bernstein, however, following Gidney, says this took place on October 30, 1842. See, Bernstein, 504, and Gidney, 235.

<sup>32</sup>Gidney, 235.

<sup>33</sup>Quoted in Crombie, 165.

<sup>34</sup>Gidney, 237–38.

support themselves.<sup>35</sup> On its fiftieth anniversary in 1898, it was reported that the institution had served 460 Jewish people, of whom 200 had become Messianic Jews and been baptized, either prior to admittance, while in association with it, or after leaving it.<sup>36</sup> By 1905, the number of local Messianic Jews associated with this institution had grown to 237.<sup>37</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to use these numbers from the House of Industry to gauge the size of the Messianic Jewish community in Jerusalem at that time, for some of these individuals had died and others had emigrated. One of the more prominent names associated with the House of Industry was that of Conrad Schick (1822–1901). Incidentally, in 1880, one of Schick’s disciples, the teen-aged Messianic Jew, Jacob Eliahu, discovered the Siloam Inscription.<sup>38</sup> He was later adopted by the Spaffords and his name then became Jacob Eliahu Spafford (1864–1932). He had been born in Ramallah into a Turkish Jewish family.<sup>39</sup>



Establishing the number of Messianic Jews at any particular period is difficult. First, with restrictions placed on them by the Jewish community, Messianic Jews frequently emigrated in order to find work. Second, since the only evangelical congregation was Christ Church, and since they practiced infant baptism, when families joined the church their infants and children were considered members, as well. For example, by the end of 1845 there were approximately 35 Messianic Jews.<sup>40</sup> In the *Jewish Intelligence* of 1848 we read, “Since the year 1839, thirty-one adult Jews have been baptized at Jerusalem and twenty-six children of the same people.”<sup>41</sup> by 1850 their numbers had reached forty-six,<sup>42</sup> and by 1865 Joseph Barclay reports that the number of Messianic Jews in the Anglican Congregation in Jerusalem had grown to 144, but, he adds, the number “would be larger, if the converts were not in so many cases obliged to leave Jerusalem in search of employment.”<sup>43</sup>

In a list of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem published in 1858, and reflecting the years 1857–58, Ludwig A. Frankl reports fifty-five adults and sixty-eight children.<sup>44</sup> Since several

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 237.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 551.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 607.

<sup>38</sup>Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem. The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2011), 42.

<sup>39</sup>Mary Gale Rogers, “Jacob Eliahu Spafford,” Find A Grave [online]; accessed 29 September 2020; available from <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/64537112/jacob-eliahu-spafford>; Internet. See also, “The Bertha Vester Diaries,” American Colony in Jerusalem, 1870 to 2006, Digital Collections, Library of Congress [online]; accessed 29 September 2020; available from <https://www.loc.gov/collections/american-colony-in-jerusalem/articles-and-essays/the-bertha-vester-diaries/>

<sup>40</sup>Nerel claims that Alexander “managed to gather a small group of thirty-one” Messianic Jews by 1845. Gershon Nerel, “Hebrew Christian Associations in Ottoman Jerusalem: Jewish Yeshua-Believers Facing Church and Synagogue,” *Revue des Études Juives* 161 (2002), 438. However, this seems to be based on the number who signed a letter of condolence to Mrs. Alexander, following the death of her husband. See Bernstein, 89.

<sup>41</sup>*JJ* 14 (1848): 26.

<sup>42</sup>*JJ* 16 (1850): 208.

<sup>43</sup>Gidney, 377. It is difficult to know how many from this number were adults and how many were children.

<sup>44</sup>Ludwig August Frankl, *Nach Jerusalem!* Vol. 2, Palästina [German] (Leipzig: Nies’sche Buchdruckerei, 1858), 499–500. Incidentally, this list does not include Christian Hauser or Moses Hornstein, whose absence is inexplicable.

differing numbers are reported throughout this period, there was evidently quite a bit of fluctuation in the size of the Messianic Jewish community.

Sometimes, it is possible to trace the progression of individuals or even families in the historical records. For example, for his entry on January 24, 1842, Ewald writes: “I have made the acquaintance of two Jews favourably inclined to Christianity, one a watchmaker, who knows Mr. Nicolayson, whom he had seen at Smyrna; he is about to proceed to Jerusalem, where he for the first time heard the Gospel of Christ from Mr. Pieritz [George Wildon Pieritz, a Messianic Jewish staff member of LJS]. . . . His wife is of the same opinion, and I trust the Lord will make clear his way, and receive him into his Church.”<sup>45</sup> On Sunday, March 13, 1842, he names them: “Ducat and his wife, whose acquaintance I made at Jaffa, when they expressed their desire of being further instructed in the doctrines of our most holy religion, arrived today.”<sup>46</sup> Just four days later, he met with them and offered a prayer that the Lord would be pleased “to open the eyes and hearts of this son and daughter of Abraham to the truth of Christ Jesus our Redeemer!”<sup>47</sup> This prayer was apparently answered, for on May 15, they were baptized at Christ Church, and Ewald says, “This is the first Jewish family which has been brought to a knowledge of Christ Jesus since our arrival.”<sup>48</sup> Their daughter was baptized on December 25, 1843, and she was confirmed on May 26, 1844.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the Rosenthal family, mentioned earlier, and the Ducat family, we also know something about the Meshullam family. Ewald had apparently led the parents to faith while in Tunis. Later, in Malta, Gobat met them, continued their instruction, and baptized them. Finally, on March 21, 1842, they arrived in Jerusalem with their two infants and joined Christ Church.<sup>50</sup> A little more than a year later, however, in June 1843, both children died of smallpox.<sup>51</sup> Later, another family of Messianic Jews joined the group and were baptized by Alexander— Dr. and Mrs. Kiel and their daughter.<sup>52</sup>

In 1865, Gidney reported that the Anglican congregation in Jerusalem consisted of 144 Messianic Jews.<sup>53</sup> Kelvin Crombie claims that between 1900 and 1905, “there were about eighty-three Hebrew Christians, including children, living in Jerusalem, and these formed a part of the congregation at Christ Church.”<sup>54</sup> From the first local Messianic Jew in 1822, the number had grown significantly. Yet, when you get behind the statistics and study the individuals, it becomes even more interesting.

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<sup>45</sup>Ewald, 20–21.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 231, 254.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 90. For an interesting account of a journey to the Dead Sea on which he accompanied Albert A. Isaacs, see Albert Augustus Isaacs, *The Dead Sea: or, Notes and Observations Made during a Journey to Palestine in 1856–7* [etc.] (London: Hatchard and Son, 1857).

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 107–08, 210, 214, 227, 231.

<sup>53</sup>Gidney, 377.

<sup>54</sup>Crombie, 144. His source, unfortunately, is not supplied.



## Select Messianic Jews of Jerusalem

### Dr. John Benjamin Goldberg

Bernstein reports that Dr. John Benjamin Goldberg was “one of a number of rabbis and learned men,” who became followers of Jesus in Jerusalem during this period. He became a part of Christ Church in 1843, and he immediately underwent a good deal of persecution and sustained the loss of property. He studied theology and Bible and was ordained as a minister in 1856.<sup>55</sup> Over the next four years, he took the Good News of salvation to his Jewish brethren in Cairo, Salonica, Constantinople, and finally to Smyrna. In Smyrna in 1860, leadership of the Jewish community had persuaded local authorities to throw a new Jewish believer into prison. When Goldberg obtained his release, it resulted in tremendous opportunities for witness to the Jewish community. He served in Smyrna until 1866, when his deteriorating health dictated his retirement.<sup>56</sup> Bernstein says, “Goldberg was a most spiritually-minded and lovable man.”<sup>57</sup>

### Samuel Wiseman

Most never sought or achieved notoriety. They simply lived out their lives in faithful service to their Messiah and Lord. For example, consider the story of Samuel Wiseman, who was born into an ultra-orthodox family in 1835, in Tiberias. We do not know the circumstances which led him to faith in Jesus, but he was baptized at Christ Church in Jerusalem by Samuel Gobat on January 21, 1857. He was 27 years old. Gershon Nerel says that he served for a long time as the official translator for the Protestants in Jerusalem. He was also known as “a specialist in Ottoman law and very skillfully administered the communication with the Turkish authorities.”<sup>58</sup> He served the residents of Jerusalem faithfully and with humility as a pharmacist and translator for over 40 years. Nerel says:



He helped them all and avoided prominence. During his long lifetime he was a teacher, a friend and a guide to three generations of Jews in Jerusalem who believed in Jesus. Due to his integrity and good relationships with all parts of society—Jews, Christians and Muslims—he won the appreciation and trust of all who knew him.

Others did find prominence—most were positive accomplishments that are applauded even by non-believing Israeli scholars to this day, and at least one, due either to misunderstanding or to moral lapses, brought shame on the community.

### Moses Wilhelm Shapira

<sup>55</sup>Gidney, 382, and Bernstein, 234–35.

<sup>56</sup>Gidney, 382–83.

<sup>57</sup>Bernstein, 235–36.

<sup>58</sup>Gershon Nerel, “Samuel Wiseman: A Disciple of Yeshua in the New Era Jerusalem,” *Zot Habrit* 5 (2003), 8.



A tragic, though intriguing, story is that of the Shapira Affair. Moses Wilhelm Shapira was born in 1830 in what is now Ukraine. At the age of 25, he immigrated to Palestine (i.e., in 1855). On his way, he became a believer in Yeshua. Within a few years of his arrival, he opened a shop at 74–76–78 Christian Street. Here, he sold tourist items, until 1871, when he began to sell antiquities.<sup>59</sup>

The Mesha Stele had been discovered in 1868, but had not been publicized until 1870, the year before he began to sell antiquities. His business prospered, and in time, he was selling antiquities to the major museums of Europe. The discovery of the Moabite Mesha Stele had stirred up quite an interest in antiquities, and especially anything related to Moab. By 1873, he had sold 1,700 such items to the Berlin museum.<sup>60</sup>

His problems began when the French scholar, Charles Clermont Ganneau declared these items to be fakes. By 1876, German scholars concurred with the judgment of Ganneau. Shapira defended himself by placing the blame on his partner, Salim al Kari.<sup>61</sup> This accusation was substantiated by further investigation.<sup>62</sup> Since Shapira was not directly implicated, Christian David Ginsburg, the leading expert on Semitic languages and consultant for the British Museum, had no problem approving the Museum's purchase of a number of medieval scrolls Shapira provided in 1881.<sup>63</sup>

In August 1883, Shapira offered the British Museum fifteen parchment scrolls that contained text from Deuteronomy, written in paleo-Hebrew script, for the princely sum of one million British pounds. A question was raised about the scrolls' authenticity. Without going into the details of the highly publicized controversy that ensued, it pitted one Messianic Jew, Wilhelm Shapira against another Messianic Jew, Christian David Ginsburg. When Ginsburg announced his judgment that they were indeed forgeries, Shapira continued to argue for the scrolls' authenticity, and at the very least of his innocence in the matter. In light of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some scholars today believe these scrolls may indeed have been legitimate antiquities and bemoan their destruction in the 1800s.

In the end, however, the public humiliation was too much for Shapira. He fled England for the Netherlands and wrote a letter to Ginsburg in which he said: "You have made a fool of me by publishing and exhibiting things you believe to be false. I do not think I shall be able to survive this shame."<sup>64</sup> John Allegro says, "For some weeks he wandered inconsolate

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<sup>59</sup>Shlomo Guil, "The Shapira Scroll Was an Authentic Dead Sea Scroll," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 149 (2017), 6; and by the same author, "In Search of the Shop of Moses Wilhelm Shapira, the Leading Figure of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Archaeological Enigma," unpublished but available at [https://www.academia.edu/2127379/In\\_Search\\_of\\_the\\_Shop\\_of\\_Moses\\_Wilhelm\\_Shapira\\_the\\_Leading\\_Figure\\_of\\_the\\_19TH\\_Century\\_Archaeological\\_Enigma](https://www.academia.edu/2127379/In_Search_of_the_Shop_of_Moses_Wilhelm_Shapira_the_Leading_Figure_of_the_19TH_Century_Archaeological_Enigma).

<sup>60</sup>Guil, "In Search of the Shop of Moses Wilhelm Shapira."

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Guil, "The Shapira Scroll Was an Authentic Dead Sea Scroll," 7.

<sup>63</sup>Michael Press, "The Lying Pen of the Scribes': A Nineteenth-Century Dead Sea Scroll," *The Appendix: Futures of the Past* 2 (2014), 8. See also Guil, "The Shapira Scroll Was an Authentic Dead Sea Scroll,"

<sup>64</sup>John Allegro, "The Shapira Affair, 1965," *John Marco Allegro*. Available at: <http://www.johnallegro.org/books/the-shapira-affair-1965/>.

through the Low Countries, leaving a trail of discarded clothing and unposted letters. At last, in the Hotel of the Valley of Flowers in Rotterdam, he put a pistol to his head.”<sup>65</sup> In this, he may have been the first Messianic Jew of Jerusalem to commit suicide.

### Messianic Jewish Photographers

Since Messianic Jewish believers could not find work in the Jewish community, many turned to the new wave of tourists who were beginning to visit Jerusalem. Pilgrims and visitors had certainly come in the past, but the modern tourism industry began in the mid-1800s in Jerusalem.<sup>66</sup> This provided Messianic Jews the ability not only to provide for themselves, but they made significant, if indirect, contributions to the growing Yishuv in Jerusalem. There were several possibilities.

#### Mendel John Diness

For example, a long-overlooked window, or perhaps aperture would be a more appropriate word, into the history of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem may be found in the history of photography. The 1800s were a century of unprecedented technological development, with startling advances in communication and transportation. With the biblical sites in the Land of Israel of tremendous interest to Christians around the world, perhaps it would not be surprising to find that the history of photography would reflect Christian involvement. The history of photography in Israel begins with the representatives of the churches of Scotland and England, who first introduced photography to the Land.<sup>67</sup>

Few Messianic Jews in Israel today, however, are aware that one of their spiritual forefathers from more than 175 years ago was the first local photographer in Jerusalem. Not only were the Christians from abroad taking photographs, but the first local photographer in Israel was Mendel John Diness<sup>68</sup> (January 1, 1827–December 1, 1900). Yeshayahu Nir, an Israeli photo-historian writing in 1985, concluded that he was most likely, “a converted Jew.”<sup>69</sup> However, following the publication of Nir’s work, further work was done by photo-historical researchers. The bonanza came in 1988, when in a garage sale in suburban St. Paul, Minnesota, a major collection of Diness material was recovered, including “134 glass plate negatives, along with eighty silver prints, stereoscopic views, notebooks and other photographic material.”<sup>70</sup> Dror Wahrman tells Diness’ story:

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>The first professional guidebook was published in 1858 and the first hotel was established in 1841. Dror Wahrman, Carney Gavin, and Nitza Rosovsky. *Capturing the Holy Land: M. J. Diness and the Beginnings of Photography in Jerusalem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), ix–x.

<sup>67</sup>Nir, 30; John S. Ross, *Time for Favour: The Scottish Mission to the Jews, 1838–1852* (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2011), 95–96.

<sup>68</sup>His name also appears as Mendenhall John Dennis or Johann Mendel Dinnis. Johann, or “John” was added to his name upon his baptism.

<sup>69</sup>Nir, 112.

<sup>70</sup>Wahrman, Gavin, and Rosovsky, 3. The story of the rediscovery of the man and of his work is a fascinating one in its own right. For more, see Lenny Ben-David, “Was a 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Preacher Really

The first act in the drama . . . had nothing to do with photography, though it was surely quite a scene. For two days in early April 1849, a multitude of infuriated Ashkenazi Jews in Jerusalem surrounded a house which belonged to the small Anglican community. “Jews’ tumult in the street,” recorded the English consul in his personal diary; “besieging, screaming and fighting.” In the besieged house a young couple with a small infant found refuge: Mendel Diness, a Jewish watchmaker who had arrived in Palestine from Odessa [Russia] the previous year, and his wife Sheindel Dreise. Diness had recently announced his intention to convert: “in consequence of my conviction of the truth of Christianity,” he had written a couple of months earlier, “I have resolved with all my heart to embrace that most holy and blessed Religion.” He added that he had “very strong hopes” that his wife would follow. But the enraged Jewish community thought otherwise: led by his wife’s father, the Habbadic [Hassidic] Jew, Shimeon Amsel, they demanded that she and their new-born son be separated from Diness and thus delivered from the injurious path of proselytism, into which—so they claimed—they were compelled by the actions of her husband.<sup>71</sup>

**Page 10**

**BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of *Christ Church, Jerusalem*  
in the County of *Benjamin in Palestine* in the Year 1849-50.**

When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Parent's Name.		Abode.	Quality, Trade, or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
		Christian.	Surname.			
1849. Aug: 5.	<i>Johann Ben-Zeeb Dobinsky</i> <i>an adult Jewelite.</i>			<i>Jerusalem</i>	—	<i>The L<sup>d</sup> Bp. Sam<sup>l</sup> Gobat.</i>
No. 73 Transcribed as above. Ed.						
1849. Aug: 5.	<i>Johann Mendel Diness</i> <i>an adult Jewelite.</i>			<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>Photographer (of A. Rosenthal)</i>	<i>The L<sup>d</sup> Bp. Sam<sup>l</sup> Gobat.</i>
No. 74 Transcribed as above. Ed.						

Diness had apparently been led to faith through the efforts of the Anglican Bishop Samuel Gobat, who baptized him on Sunday, August 5, 1849.<sup>72</sup> Unable to resolve their resulting marital tensions, Diness later agreed to divorce his wife in 1851, and remarried a Messianic Jew named Sophie Kiel.<sup>73</sup> Diness was the first to be trained in photography in the Land, the first resident photographer in the Land, the first to take stereoscopic views here, and the first to make a visual travelogue of the Land.<sup>74</sup> Diness eventually

emigrated from Jerusalem to the United States in 1861.<sup>75</sup> Let me just add here that there have been special exhibitions of Diness’ photography and his story at Harvard University, Yeshiva University, and at the Israel Museum—not bad for a Messianic Jewish young man from Jerusalem!

Watchmaker Mendel Deniss, Jerusalem’s 1<sup>st</sup> Photographer? [online]; accessed 11 September 2018; available at: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/who-was-the-19th-century-american-preacher-mendenhall-john-dennis-actually-he-was-a-jerusalem-watchmaker-named-mendel-deniss-jerusalem-first-photographer/>.

<sup>71</sup>Wahrman, Gavin, and Rosovsky, 10.

<sup>72</sup>Nir, 11.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>74</sup>Piney Kesting, “The Diness Discovery,” *Aramco World* 55 (2004), available at: <http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/200404/the.diness.discovery.htm>.

<sup>75</sup>Ben-David.

Although Diness was the first local photographer, he had immigrated to Jerusalem. The first native photographer, born in the Land, was Peter Bergheim (1844–1885), the son of Paul Bergheim, mentioned above.<sup>76</sup> He was the first of several other Messianic Jews from the Land to find their way into photography.<sup>77</sup>

### Charles A. Hornstein



Charles A. Hornstein (1870–1932) was the next. Nir says of him: “Hornstein’s intimate feeling toward the people and landscape of the country may be explained by the fact that he was born and raised there.” Charles Hornstein was born in February 1870 in Jerusalem to a “Hebrew-Christian” father and a “gentile” mother.<sup>78</sup> Nir further explains that his father was “a well-educated German convert and that his mother was a Scottish relative of the British Consul James Finn.”<sup>79</sup>

Not only were Diness and Hornstein involved in the early history of photography in the Land, but Nir reports that until the end of the century, among the local trade photographers, a “surprisingly high number [were] converted Jews.”<sup>80</sup> So Messianic Jews were the first locals to be photographers and the first native photographers.

### Messianic Jews in Other Occupations

Photography was not the only area in which Messianic Jews in Jerusalem played an early role. The first hotel was established by Antonio Zamit, a Roman Catholic, but the next four were established and operated by Messianic Jews: John Meshullam (1847–51), Simeon Rosenthal (1849–65), Christian Hauser (1849–66), and Moses Hornstein (1826–85).<sup>81</sup> One of the earliest banks was established by a Messianic Jew. Melville Peter Bergheim opened a bank in 1851 near the head of David Street inside Jaffa Gate.<sup>82</sup> Bergheim also introduced the first steam mill into the country.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Nir, 112.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 223.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

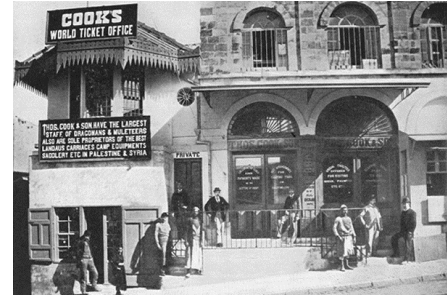
<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 260.

<sup>81</sup>Gibson, Shapira, and Chapman, 35, 247, contra Crombie, 50.

<sup>82</sup>Gibson, Shapira, and Chapman, 111, n. 95. See also Gibson and Chapman, 104. The earliest bank was established by Jacob Valero in 1848. See Joseph Glass and Ruth Kark, *Sephardi Entrepreneurs in Jerusalem: The Valero Family, 1800–1948* (Lynn Brook, NY: Gefen Books, 2007), 143.

<sup>83</sup>Charles Issawi, *The Fertile Crescent, 1800–1914: A Documentary Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 332.

The most prestigious travel agency of that time was Thomas Cook & Son. Their office was originally in a house outside of Jaffa Gate, but in 1875, it was moved to a building at the head of David Street in the Old City, which had previously housed the American Consulate.<sup>84</sup> Bernhard Heilpern was the Jerusalem manager of this travel agency, and he was also a Messianic Jewish believer in Jesus.<sup>85</sup> He built a house for his private residence at the corner of Agron and King George Streets—the building that now houses the center of Conservative Judaism.



### Conclusion

Messianic Jews constitute the believing remnant of Israel and their history is bound up with the story of Jewish Jerusalem as it entered the modern era. This story of new beginnings in Jerusalem is significant for Messianic Jews in Israel today, for it provides a legacy, a family history, as well as lessons to be learned.

Here are some of the more salient points:

1. The history of Messianic Jews in Israel goes back to 1822.
2. Messianic Jews have been entrepreneurs and businessmen, bankers, photographers, farmers, teachers, doctors, and pharmacists.
3. Messianic Jews have made vital contributions to the Jewish communities in the Land as long as they have been in it.
4. Far from forfeiting their Jewish identity, many have given their lives in order to take the message of redemption to their brethren.
5. Messianic Jews constitute the remnant of Israel that guarantees the future salvation of the nation.
6. The preservation of the remnant of Israel is a testimony to the faithfulness of God.

In all of this, we thank the Lord for preserving a remnant in Zion!

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<sup>84</sup>Gibson, Shapira, and Chapman, 25, n. 34, 26, n. 41.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 117, n. 260.