

Meet Me at the Olive Tree



# MEET ME AT THE OLIVE TREE

*Stories of Jews and Arabs  
reconciled to the Messiah*

Julia Fisher

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*This book is dedicated to our  
grandchildren, that they may grow  
up to understand God's mysterious  
plan of salvation for all mankind  
and carry His heart for the believers  
living in Israel and the wider  
Middle East at this time.*

## **By the same author**

*Israel, the Mystery of Peace* (True Potential Publishing)

*Future for Israel* (True Potential Publishing)

*Israel's New Disciples* (Monarch)

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A book of true stories depends entirely on the co-operation of the people featured. It is a brave decision to allow somebody else to write your story, especially when that story is costly. So, I would like to acknowledge everybody who has willingly allowed their story to be included in this book in order that you, the reader, can enter their world to gain some insight into what God is doing in Israel and the wider Middle East at this time in world history.



# Introduction: A Journey with Labib Madanat

**T**here is nothing like putting yourself into somebody else's shoes and taking a walk with them and listening as they talk along the way to bring a fresh perspective on a situation – even revelation! This is what happened to me one day in November 2010.

I had asked Labib Madanat, a prominent Arab Christian leader in Israel and the wider Middle East, to take me into the heart of the West Bank. I wanted to see for myself what it is really like for the people living there and why he invests so much of his time working with the Palestinian people who live there, the majority of whom are Muslims.

Labib has lived in Jerusalem all his life. He was born there. His father, originally from Jordan, was a pastor there. Labib knows the ancient cobbled streets like the back of his hand. He speaks Arabic, Hebrew and English effortlessly. He understands the Arab culture as well as the Jewish culture as well as the English culture. He is married to an English lady called Carolyn and his dream is to retire to Tunbridge Wells in the UK!

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But for Labib, Tunbridge Wells is not an option; it remains a dream. I first met him in 1998. He was then Director of the Palestinian Bible Society, working harmoniously alongside his Israeli Messianic Jewish counterpart. It was then I realized he did not have a negative attitude towards Jewish people or the State of Israel. Rather, he displayed a desire to “reach” them with the gospel in whatever way he could. Since then his job has increased in scope and today he is co-ordinating the work of teams of Palestinian Christians and Messianic believers for the Bible Society in the Middle East. It is Labib’s desire that his team members also have a heart for both peoples. Instilling what is in your heart into the heart of another surely comes from example. I have met a number of people, both Jews and Arabs, who work closely with Labib. It is clear that he has inspired them to have hearts that desire forgiveness and reconciliation.

I remember him telling me of one occasion when two of his brothers and colleagues (Arab/Palestinian Christians) were being held at a checkpoint between Israel and the West Bank. They had been told to sit and wait in their car whilst their passports were being checked. It was a hot day and the hours passed. Most people would find this frustrating and infuriating. But these men spent their time praying for the Israeli soldiers who were delaying their journey.

When eventually a soldier did return their passports and allow them to proceed, they asked if they could pray for him and his sick relative.

The soldier looked surprised. “How did you know I have a sick relative?” he asked.

“Because we have been praying for you and God has shown us that your mother is seriously ill.”

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The Jewish soldier put down his gun and started weeping as the Palestinians prayed for his family, and then they continued on their journey.

It's not often you hear stories like that, but Labib will tell you that as a Palestinian living in Israel, travelling through Ben Gurion Airport – something he does regularly – is a personal nightmare for him. Without fail he is stopped and searched. What is his response? “Ben Gurion is my mission field,” he says with a smile on his face. “When I tell them that I am a Palestinian Arab Christian, and that I love the God of Israel and their Messiah, I get their full attention!”

Labib believes we are living in strategic times and that it won't be too long before Israel realizes who her Messiah is and rushes to embrace Him. As an Arab Christian he realizes he has a part to play in this transformation and part of that job is working amongst the Muslim Palestinian people.

I regularly visit Bethlehem and Jericho in the West Bank. I've visited Ramallah and Bir Zeit. But on this occasion I wanted to go beyond those places to meet the people living in a town or village that few Western Christians had visited. I had heard about the growing number of Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) – secret believers living in fear of losing their lives, not to mention their jobs (if they have one). I wanted to know how many Palestinians living in the West Bank get to hear the true story about Jesus.

The current upheaval in the Arab world has highlighted once again the unbridled hatred that many Muslims have towards Israel – especially those Muslims whom we, in the West, have come to call “radicalized extremists”. However, although this may be true, when talking to Labib, who understands better than I the way an Arab would look at the

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same situation, a different viewpoint emerges that reveals that the hatred is not just one way.

“The hatred is mutual,” he says, “although expressed differently and in a more restrained manner among extreme Jewish terrorists, because of the rule of law in Israel and the general trust among Jewish Israelis that their government and the Israeli army deal with the Palestinian Muslim Arab issues. In the Arab world, people do not trust that their governments are dealing with the issues of the Israeli Jewish occupation (or America, for that matter). That is why they express themselves through acts of terror, extreme and harsh words, demonstrations and the burning of flags.”

Watching the news unravel on our television screens could cause us to wonder just where these events are leading.

On the other hand, the Bible indicates that sometime in the future, “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26) and that Jewish people will be made “envious” by Gentile believers in Jesus (11:11). So who are these Gentile Christians?

I arranged to meet Labib at the American Colony Hotel in East Jerusalem at nine in the morning. After drinking mint tea and discussing the plan for the day, we set off for Jericho, where he wanted to briefly visit some of his team to encourage them. Then we proceeded to drive up the Jordan Valley before turning left into the central area of the West Bank.

The first thing that struck me was how beautiful it was. Of course, we were driving through the hills of Samaria! And today, many of those hillsides (which are very high in places) are covered in olive trees. From time to time we passed through a small village. There were few cars on the road. We saw very few people. There is a lot of empty space here – a

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lot of unoccupied land that, Labib told me, “has been owned by Palestinian families for many generations”. Most of the houses were humble, simple dwellings whilst others were large and elaborate. The majority of the people we passed looked poor. We saw children playing in the streets. We saw donkeys being ridden whilst others were being led, laden with goods; some of them looked like moving bushes.

We were heading for a town called X (it would not be wise of me to name it).

Labib told me, “I’m going to take you to meet M” (I have disguised the identity of this man for reasons of personal safety), “a Christian Arab who has been working alone amongst the people of this small town for seven years. The town is entirely Muslim. There is a great deal of need and M has been helping them in any way he can.”

As we drove along I was full of questions. When were these villages built? How many people live in the West Bank? How many have jobs? Where do they work? Do all the children go to school? Are they free to travel from village to village? Patiently and thoughtfully, Labib answered every question in a calm and restrained manner, careful in his use of language.

The deeper we drove into the hills of Samaria, which today is known as the West Bank, the more I became aware of “settlements” on the tops of the hills. These were Jewish communities. There are some words that immediately provoke an angry, negative reaction, and “settlements” is one of those words. I have noticed that in many people’s understanding, “settlements” has come to define Jewish people who have snatched land from the Palestinians in order to build entirely Jewish neighbourhoods. Is this true?

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“Not always, but many times,” Labib replied.

As we approached X, it appeared that in the case of this village, it was true. “The Palestinians used to live on the top of that hill where there are now Jewish people living,” Labib explained, “and the Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and subsequently built a new town lower down the hillside. As a result the Palestinian villagers lost their farmland and access to roads.”

I was trying to put myself in their shoes and could understand that the Palestinians living in X had a low opinion of the Jewish people who had “occupied” their homes and taken their land. Here were two peoples living side by side, watching each other suspiciously, hating each other, distrusting each other, but never actually meeting.

I met M at a community centre in X. He was friendly, and delighted to see Labib. As they exchanged greetings and news I took the opportunity to look around. There were a number of women and young children in the centre. I noticed the walls had been painted with pictures displaying natural beauty – birds, trees, children playing. Weaving through the pictures were words in Arabic – to my untrained eye it looked like poetry. I later found out they were words from the Bible:

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*

*1 Corinthians 13:4-8*



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M was happy to tell me about the centre and explained how it was used to help local “marginalized people” and provide a meeting-place, especially for women, children and the youth. He explained that today, the local government of X, which is under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, covers several villages in the West Bank, and the entire area is Muslim.

“I became a Christian in the Alliance Church in the Old City of Jerusalem,” he told me, “and experienced the love of Jesus, which changed my perspective on life. We need to bring the love of Jesus to the people to help them live in this hard situation. We need to reflect His love and compassion and mercy, and encourage them and tell them, ‘It’s OK – there is occupation, but still there is hope, and if you focus on this hope you will be strong and you will not be for ever in this hard situation.’ So we are trying to bring hope to the people. I tell them not to focus on the enemy and how to fight them. Rather, I tell them God will bring justice to the people – give Him the chance to work.

“I tell them about the verses in the Bible that talk about love... they are shocked and blessed! I explain what is meant by patience, especially when you are in a difficult situation. We started designing a programme about love and the language of love as a tool of communication. They have no hope in life and are empty, but if we keep talking about the love of God for them, they will have hope in this bad situation.

“After six or seven years of working here, I feel part of this community and they are not angry when I talk to them; they trust me and they see the love that I have and the energy I have to help them and their children. I am not here to

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convert people; rather, I am here to serve. It is important that we are humble.

“Looking forward, my vision is to see reconciliation between Palestinians and Jews. I long to organize activities between the Jews who live in the old town of X – the people who stole the land – and the Palestinians here. I long for them to understand that it is not just about land. It’s hard to forget, but I pray that people will come to the point where they don’t want borders, but rather want to share a meal with each other. I believe it can happen, but we need the grace of God to fill this area.”

I also met a young woman who works with M in the community centre. Let’s call her J. She told me about her life – and it was hard. Her dream was to go and live in Dubai where she believed she would enjoy a better standard of living. I asked her what she thought of Jewish people. Looking me straight in the eye, she told me she had hated all Jews. That was until just a few months ago, during the long hot summer, when she witnessed a simple act of human kindness that was to change her worldview.

J had been queuing at a checkpoint to cross into another area. She had been stood waiting for over two hours and the temperature was soaring. Just in front of her was a mother with a young child, who was becoming distressed by the heat and thirst. All of a sudden a Jewish soldier walked up to this mother and offered her and her child a drink of water. “This was the first time I had ever seen a Jewish person being kind to a Palestinian, and it melted my heart,” she told me. “I now know it’s possible for us to live in peace, because they have hearts just like us.”

That such a simple act of kindness could change a

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person's outlook on life was very moving. On the drive back to Jerusalem, I discussed this story with Labib. He, like M, understands how important it is to encourage individuals, because it only takes one person to make a difference to another person's life, and that in turn can affect many others when the story is shared.

"What keeps you here?" I asked him, "when you could be enjoying a much easier life in America or Tunbridge Wells?"

"If I didn't believe that it's the job of us Arab Christians to provoke the Jews to envy, I'd be out of here tomorrow," he replied. "Who is most capable of making the Jewish people jealous? It's us! It's a family dispute that we are experiencing here in the Middle East. Jealousy in a family runs deep. This dispute has gone on for generations. But the Apostle Paul makes it clear in his letter to the Romans that 'all Israel will be saved' [Romans 11:26]. He also says, 'Did God's people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! His purpose was to make his salvation available to the Gentiles, and then the Jews would be jealous and want it for themselves'" [Romans 11:11, paraphrase].

As we approached Jerusalem, I had one more question for Labib. Does he really believe that Palestinians living in the West Bank in an entirely Muslim culture will one day respond to the gospel and believe in Jesus as the Son of God and embrace their Jewish neighbours?

"They already are, and that is what keeps me here," he replied without hesitation.

Perhaps this true story demonstrates the depth of what God is doing in Israel and the Palestinian Areas today. Maybe, because God works in such mysterious ways, it is easy to miss what is going on in the spiritual realm; our attention is so

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often drawn to the secular media's attention on the "conflict". The recent upheavals in the Arab nations of the world are an example of this.

This book (which is based on a series of radio programmes called *The Olive Tree*) is written to bring the stories of what God is doing in the Middle East to our attention. If Jesus is the Messiah, then it is no wonder that both Orthodox Jews and Muslims are disturbed by this and feel threatened, and therefore often react aggressively. In the following pages you will read the stories of former Orthodox Jews who are now believers in Jesus (or Yeshua). You will read of Palestinian Christians who understand, like Labib, that some time soon Jewish people living in Israel will recognize their Messiah and that it is their job to help them find Him. They also know that it is their job to share the gospel message with their own people, the Muslim majority.

By the time you reach the end of the book I believe you will find that your mind has been stretched and your heart thrilled as you too embrace all that God is doing through both Jewish believers and Arab/Palestinian Christians living in Israel and the wider Middle East in these days.

Julia Fisher

January 2012

## Chapter 1

# Oded Cohen

**T**oday Oded Cohen and his wife Bimini are missionaries with *Jews for Jesus* in Israel – something he never would have imagined!

One of the fascinating things about meeting believers in Israel is that each person has an interesting story to tell about how they came to believe that Jesus/Yeshua is actually the Messiah of Israel. Often these stories are funny. Invariably they involve a struggle. And often they are costly.

I first met Oded at the *Jews for Jesus* offices in Tel Aviv to record a radio interview with him for *The Olive Tree* series. It soon became clear that his story could not be contained in a thirteen-minute interview, so I sat back and let him talk. Like most Israelis, he has a dry sense of humour, he does not take himself too seriously and is extremely unpretentious.

To be a missionary with *Jews for Jesus* in Israel takes some courage, and for Oded it has been a long journey. His story begins on a kibbutz in southern Israel where he was born. Whilst a few kibbutzim are home to religious Jewish people and adhere to strict religious laws, the kibbutz where Oded grew up, like most of the kibbutzim in

Israel, was entirely secular. There, the subject of God was either ignored or avoided. Instead, the emphasis was on building the physical State of Israel, reclaiming the land and defending the country.

Oded takes up the story.

I grew up believing that if there is a God, He is far away and has nothing to do with us. Not only did I not believe in God, I and everyone else from our kibbutz were fiercely anti-God. There was, and still is, a power struggle between the religious and secular Jews in Israel, so we grew up resenting the religious people. We served in the army and they did not. Whilst we were spending some of the best years of our lives running and sweating and fighting, they were sitting in a *yeshiva* studying the Torah (the first five books in the Bible, which include the Mosaic laws), or whatever it is they study. We felt that a small minority of religious Jews were trying to dictate to us secular Israelis how to live our lives. We resented that nothing was open on the Sabbath. There was no transportation. No restaurants. No movies. We resented the fact that they took all our fun away and consequently, if that was what God was all about, we wanted nothing to do with it.

When I and all the other children on our kibbutz were growing up, we developed our own tradition on Yom Kippur. This is supposed to be the holiest and most solemn day of the year – a day of fasting and repentance. However, we did not fast; rather, we delighted in preparing a big barbeque feast that filled the entire kibbutz with the aroma of food, and if we could get hold of a pig to roast, that was a double accomplishment for us!

From a very young age we all knew we were the “chosen

people” but we never understood what “chosen” meant. We presumed it meant that we were the best. We were very proud of our achievements. We had the best army in the world and the best agriculture; we were able to make the desert bloom.

After I had served four years in the army I decided, like most Israelis, to travel the world. I briefly stopped in the United States to see my brother before travelling on to South America, where I backpacked around for a year. I then went back to the United States, which was very attractive to me. It felt like I was living the American dream and that I could achieve whatever I wanted to. I could be free to live my life as I chose without anyone dictating to me what I should do. (When I lived on the kibbutz, our entire schedule was structured and set by others.)

I thought, when I left Israel, I would only be away for one year. But once I arrived in the United States I soon realized I could have anything I wanted. I bought a car. On the kibbutz we shared cars and if we wanted to drive anywhere, we had to book a car at least a week in advance and, by the time the day arrived, you probably might have changed your mind! But in America I had my own car and I could go wherever I liked, whenever I wanted. There was such a sense of freedom.

The American dream bug caught me and I decided I wanted to make a lot of money. Little did I know what was going to happen!

After a year of travelling, I met the woman who was to become my wife. Bimini is a Chinese American with a nominal Catholic background. She did not hold to any deep religious faith. During our first four years of marriage, Bimini was exposed to many Jewish traditions, including the celebration of the Jewish holidays. After hearing bits of the

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Bible and singing beautiful praise songs to a God we didn't really know, Bimini began to sense that the God of Israel is a personal God who did not just abandon His people, and she decided she would like to convert to Judaism. She began reading the Torah and began looking for a rabbi to teach her how to become Jewish. Whilst I was happy, my parents were elated that I would finally have a "real" Jewish wife!

However, soon after we met a wonderful Christian couple who shared their faith with us and gave us a Bible, complete with the New Testament. At that time, my wife was a little bogged down reading the book of Leviticus. We both really love animals, and she could not understand why all the blood sacrifices were necessary. So she stopped reading the Old Testament and delved right into the Gospel of John. Within a couple of months she came to believe that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and the Saviour of the world. God healed her broken heart and filled her life with joy and peace.

I was extremely disappointed at this point. What was I going to do?! Not only was she no longer going to become "Jewish", but she had now turned Christian on me! Then she tried to convert me! She told me there was no contradiction between being Jewish and being Christian, because Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. I told her it was all right for her to believe that, but I was Jewish and Jewish people do not believe such things!

One day, whilst walking along a street, Bimini met a man who was wearing a *Jews for Jesus* T-shirt. She explained to him that she needed help in persuading her Jewish husband to believe in Jesus. I eventually agreed to meet him, but in my mind I had decided to challenge him so much that he would leave me alone. Besides, I was convinced that he



would be unable to answer my questions.

So a *Jews for Jesus* missionary named David visited us first, but even though I was polite and listened, I was not very interested. Several months later, Garrett, also from *Jews for Jesus*, came to our home to share the gospel with me. I told him that I wanted him to show me from my Bible [i.e. the Old Testament], and not from the New Testament, where it says that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. And, to my surprise, he took me through all the Messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Bible and showed me how Jesus had fulfilled them, one by one. I was shocked because I had never seen this before. I had studied the Bible in Israel as a child, but nobody had ever mentioned those prophecies – and certainly nobody had ever mentioned Jesus. Although it started to make some sense in my head, I still believed that I could not be Jewish and believe in Jesus. After several meetings with Garrett, he finally told me that there was nothing more he could show me for now, and it was time for me to ask the God I knew of – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – to reveal Himself to me and to show me who Jesus is. I dismissed his suggestion. How could anybody talk to God like that (if God even existed)? But I told him I would give it a try.

It was then that some amazing things began to happen. My wife and I cared for a number of pet rabbits in our home – animals that we had rescued – and one of them, named Chloe, was paralysed in both back legs. We had taken this poor rabbit to the best veterinarian. We also took her for various treatments, such as acupuncture and acupressure, physical therapy, and a chiropractor. You name it, we tried it! In California there are a lot of alternative medicines available. We had spent so much money on this poor rabbit,

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but nothing had helped. One day, while feeling sorry for her, I stroked her head as she sat on my lap. I thought to myself, "Wait! Let's see what 'He' can do about it." So I closed my eyes and laid my hand on the rabbit's head and said, "Jesus, if you are who they say you are, let's see you heal this rabbit." Before I had even opened my eyes, the rabbit jumped off my lap and hopped on all four legs around and around the room before coming back to me. I was stunned. But after the initial shock had worn off I said to myself, "Wow! That sure was some coincidence!" I didn't want to believe that God had answered my prayer; I was so stubborn.

Of course, I didn't tell my wife about this. I didn't want her to be right! Time and time again, over a long period of time, I continued to test God, and He kept on answering.

At that time, for about three years, I had been suffering from a painful inflammation of the hip. If I sat for too long, I would experience severe pain in one hip when I got up and walked. One day, whilst driving to work, I thought, "Let's see what 'He' can do about that." And again I said, "Jesus, if you are who they say you are, let's see if you can take care of that pain." I totally forgot about it and after about a week I caught myself thinking, "When was the last time I felt that pain in my hip?" It was completely gone, and to this day it hasn't come back. But once again, I persuaded myself that maybe my hip had gotten better by itself. Maybe something in my diet or in my exercise regime had helped. (Never mind that I had no special diet and no exercise regime!)

Also during this time, I was having many dreams. I remember in one of my dreams I saw a big healthy tree with a thick trunk, but it had been felled at the point where the branches started. At the foot of the trunk, close to the ground,

a healthy branch was growing that was covered in leaves. I woke up in the morning remembering this vivid picture. As I thought about it, I wondered whether the big tree was Judaism and the branch growing out of it was Christianity – and maybe Judaism and Christianity were not contradictions after all, but rather a continuation sharing the same root. This time I shared the dream with my wife. I had never seen that picture anywhere else before. Bimini explained to me that the Bible uses the same description. She took me to the book of Romans and I read how Christians, the wild olive shoot, are grafted into the cultivated olive tree, the people of Israel.

By this time my wife had become a “full-blown” Christian. She would spend hours every week out on the streets sharing her faith with strangers. I criticized her for that. “How phoney can you be?” I would say. “You meet somebody on the street that you have never met before and you tell them that Jesus loves them. How do you know that Jesus loves them? You could be talking to a criminal!” Bimini explained to me that she did it out of obedience to the teaching of Jesus, who commanded His believers to love everybody, in the same way that He loves everybody, and because she didn’t want anyone to be condemned to hell. I have to admit, I didn’t really buy this obedience idea. Neither did I believe that God would judge anyone.

That night, I dreamt again and in my dream I saw my favourite radio show host, Geoff Metcalf. I had such a high regard for this man, I believed everything he said. In my dream he told me to read the story of Lot’s wife. I woke up in the morning and I had no idea what the story of Lot’s wife was all about. So I asked my wife, “What is the story of Lot’s wife all about?”

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She realized something had happened in the night. She asked me, “Oded, who told you to read the story of Lot’s wife?” When I told her it was Geoff Metcalf, she laughed. “Oded, that wasn’t Geoff Metcalf, that was God; but you wouldn’t take it from God, so He disguised Himself as Geoff Metcalf so you would listen to Him!”

When I read the story, it made perfect sense because it was about obedience and disobedience.

After about a year and a half of testing God and denying the miracles, something happened that finally made me believe in Jesus. I came home from work one day feeling very feverish and I knew I would be in bed for a few days recovering. I was so weak and miserable that I was willing to do anything to feel better. So, for the first time, instead of testing God, I just threw myself on the bed and opened my arms and said, “Jesus, I open my heart to you. I need help – please heal me.” I fell asleep like a baby.

The next morning I woke up feeling like a totally new person. Not only was I completely healed, but I knew I had received a brand-new heart. I raised my hands and said, “God, I give up, I surrender.”

I thought to myself, “How many signs? How many miracles? How many dreams? How blind must you be before you realize that God is trying to show you something?”

And my life has never been the same since.

During the next three years I joined my wife in volunteering with *Jews for Jesus*. We would help in any way we could, often behind the scenes. Then one day David Brickner, the Executive Director of *Jews for Jesus*, invited us to his office to talk about the ministry and asked if we would prayerfully consider joining them. My dream about becoming

rich and lazy was still strong in my mind and I knew that if we joined the ministry that would be the end of my dream! So I agreed that we would pray about it.

At the back of my mind I also knew that if I joined the ministry it would be very hard for my parents to accept; aside from their son believing in Jesus, it would be a shameful admission to have a son as a missionary. God forbid! I wanted to be able to visit my parents on a regular basis and maintain a close relationship with them. If I joined the ministry, I knew I would no longer have that freedom because my parents would be ashamed and embarrassed about what I was doing.

At this same time Bimini and I were enrolled in a Bible study course and we were studying the book of Matthew. I remember there were two lessons that really spoke to me. The first was the story of the rich young ruler. As I was driving the forty-minute journey home, I asked myself what was standing between me and God; what would be hard for me to give up in order to follow Jesus? At the same time I was wondering why God had saved me and what His purpose was for my life. Another question I had was, "Can I really say I have made Jesus the Lord of my life?" I still had my own plans and desires, and in all honesty I couldn't say that. So whilst driving along I strongly heard God telling me, "Oded, forget about being rich. Forget about being able to do whatever you want. Come and work for me and I'll provide all you need."

There was one further problem that stood in my way – another rabbit! When I left Israel the hardest thing for me to leave was my dog. How do you explain to an animal that you will be back sometime in the future? It was then I promised

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myself that if I had another animal, I would commit to looking after it for its entire life. In addition, this rabbit was ill, and it was hard for me to just abandon her and break that commitment. So I asked God, “But what about Penelope?” – that was her name! As soon as I had asked that question, I felt that all communication with God was cut off. I understood that God was saying to me that I was not meant to question Him; if God had said He would provide all our needs, He meant it. A few days later Penelope passed peacefully away. Now, we had rescued many pet rabbits and Penelope had been ill for a long time. But I knew this rabbit’s death was unique and that it was connected with that communication with God. I sensed that God had taken her.

During another Bible study class we were studying the implication of the words of Jesus when He said, “Pick up your cross and follow me.” Again I had the same question: “Can I really pick up the cross and follow Him? Can I let go of everything I want to do and follow Jesus?”

It became clear to me that was what I needed to do. I told my wife (who had been quite sure for some time that we were being called to serve with *Jews for Jesus*) that it was time for us to go back and see David Brickner and agree to work for the organization.

That was ten years ago now.

So, you ask, what does it mean to be back in Israel with my Chinese-American wife, working as missionaries taking the gospel to the towns and villages within Israel? It means a lot. Firstly, the fact that I have returned to live in Israel surprises me. It wasn’t my plan. We were comfortable in America and we had no reason to come back here, where life is much harder. When you get used to the United States

it makes no sense to live here. But four years ago, during one of our visits to Israel, we were sitting in a café in Jerusalem when we both sensed the same call and turned to each other and realized it was time to come and share with God's people in Israel.

However, there was an immediate problem because my wife didn't speak Hebrew. In addition, she was not used to Israeli culture or Israeli food. How would she be able to minister to people in Israel?

For me it was very clear. When God says "Go", you go. When God sent Abraham, he didn't say, "But what will Sarah do?" However, whilst it was clear to me, I did not want to force my wife to do anything against her will. So we came for a short while and helped with one of the *Jews for Jesus* campaigns in Israel, and it soon became clear that she would have no problem.

Now that we are here, it is amazing to see what God is doing in the land. As we work on the campaigns we are seeing so much openness and curiosity. There is a lot of opposition as well, but we expect that!

As I look forward to the next few years, I am expecting to see a great revival in Israel. When that will be I don't know. In the meantime I just want to remain faithful to His calling.

As for my parents, they have come a long way in their thinking. Recently they even came with us to a Messianic congregation. They would probably prefer it if I was doing something different, but they have accepted my decision to be a believer in Jesus and are far more open now to what we are doing. I see the same change in Israelis; whereas a few years ago people would not have been prepared to talk about

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Jesus, today that has all changed and many people now know someone who is a believer. There are many congregations now all over Israel. So it is a most exciting time to be here in Israel and it is a wonderful privilege to be a part of all that God is doing.