

WHAT IS GOD DOING IN ISRAEL?

Also by Julia Fisher:

Meet Me at the Olive Tree

Israel's New Disciples

Israel, the Mystery of Peace

Future for Israel?

What is God Doing in Israel?

When Jews and Palestinians meet Jesus

Julia Fisher

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Introduction

If you are already thinking this is a rather audacious title, let me explain!

In reading this book you will be entering another world; a world of persecution, trouble, conflict, and fear. You will be experiencing everyday life for Jews and Palestinians who believe in Jesus and who live in Israel, the West Bank, and the Middle East. Their stories are challenging because they are about people who, because of their faith, have variously been disowned by their family, have suffered personal tragedy, have lost jobs and personal reputation, or are living in fear of losing their life.

At the same time, these are stories that are full of hope and life and excitement. The same people will tell you that their faith in Jesus, Yeshua, is more important to them than anything else and that if they have to die for what they believe and who they believe in, they are prepared to pay the ultimate cost.

So who better to ask, “What is God doing in Israel?” than the people who believe in Him who live there? After all, they are the ones who are living out their faith there.

In this book you will meet Muslims who have become believers in Jesus, some of whom are now suffering greatly as a result as they have lost not only their jobs and

reputations, but they have also been disowned by their families and in some cases are living in fear of their lives. You will read about Jewish people who have immigrated to Israel from the four corners of the world, including India, Russia, Morocco, and America. What was it that persuaded them to leave the land where their families had lived for generations and move to another country where life would be hard? And what about those evangelical Palestinian Christians living as a tiny minority group among the much larger majority Muslim Palestinian population? These are people who often feel ignored by Christians in the West yet, as you will discover, they have a strong sense of calling to live out their God-given destiny in Israel and the West Bank today. Surprisingly, perhaps, you will read of Arab Christians who have come to Israel from neighbouring Arab countries. As for Jewish believers who are emissaries to the Muslim world, yes, even this is going on! In short, when asking about what God is doing in Israel and the Middle East today you find there are some very unexpected things happening, especially when placed against the backdrop of the turmoil that is the Middle East.

And by being prepared to open yourself to the diverse stories of these people, you will, I hope, gain an insight into what God is doing in Israel and the Palestinian areas of the West Bank today. I am sure that all Christians would agree that the Bible has much to say prophetically about the land of Israel and its people. However, when interpreting prophecy, it seems there are many opinions! Perhaps the stories in this book will reveal some hitherto hidden threads that will help in your understanding.

While the people whose stories have been included in this book do not all share the same political and theological views, it is not the intention of this book to engage in political or theological debate. Rather it is simply to present another view, a view that can only be gained by spending time with people and listening to their stories told humbly and honestly, from the heart. Listening to these people sharing their stories and explaining their understanding of what God is doing today in light of their understanding of Scripture is, as you will read, revealing.

For the past twenty years I have been privileged, as a journalist, to be able to visit Israel and the West Bank regularly to research and record the stories of believers in Jesus who live there, both Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians. Because of the personal cost to them of living in the region, the question, “What do you believe God is doing in Israel and the wider Middle East today?” seems the most pertinent question to ask. Why else would they stay? Perhaps because of the personal cost involved, I have not met any half-hearted believers in Jesus living in the region. This is an area of the world where what you believe defines who you are and where you come from. To switch belief from being either an observant Jew or a religious Muslim to become a believer in Yeshua, Jesus, is therefore a decision that is not taken lightly, as you will discover.

All the people you will read about in this book are people I have spent considerable time with. Many I have met several times over the years as I have followed their stories. Others are new contacts and represent stories that are emerging. I thank them all for being willing to share

their lives and be included in this book so that you can engage with them and, more importantly, with what God is doing in Israel and the rest of the world in these days in which we live.

Julia Fisher

July 2015

CHAPTER 1

David and Leah Ortiz in America

On 20 March 2008, fifteen-year-old Ami Ortiz was almost killed by a bomb that was left in a Purim parcel¹ outside the family's apartment in the city of Ariel in Israel. For months afterwards I read with both anguish and interest the news of his recovery. The reports, regularly written by his mother Leah, reflected the shock and pain felt by the family as well as the ability to forgive the man who had committed this atrocity. The Ortiz family displayed great dignity, integrity, and faith.

This is the story of a family who, when they moved to Ariel,² experienced a level of harassment and persecution from Jewish people living in their neighbourhood who were prepared to resort to violence and intimidation because they found the faith of the Ortiz family unacceptable and threatening to their Jewish way of life. The name and person of Yeshua was so abhorrent to many of the Orthodox and secular Jews who lived in Ariel that they were determined to hound this “missionary” family out of town.

I first met David and Leah in Beer Sheva where I went to interview members of Jews for Jesus who were there conducting one of their evangelistic campaigns. Having spoken to many of the team, I was asked if I would like to meet the team's chaplains.

"Who are they?" I enquired.

"David and Leah Ortiz," came the reply. "David is resting as he is recovering from major surgery, but let me go and ask them if they would like to talk to you."

Having heard so much about David and Leah Ortiz and having followed Ami's story, I was particularly keen to meet them and delighted when the message came that they would be free in an hour.

My first impression was how self-effacing they are and genuinely interested in other people. We only had a short time together, but their talk was of how pleased they were to be able to work alongside the Jews for Jesus team and support them.

They invited me to visit them on my next visit. "Come to our home in Ariel," they said.

A few months later, climbing the stairs to their apartment on the third floor, knowing what had happened to Ami on that fateful day in March 2008 and how much damage their apartment had suffered as a result of the bomb, I wondered what to expect.

David and Leah showed me what remained of their dining room table after the bomb had exploded: it was no longer a table, more a frame surrounding a gaping hole. "The walls were riddled with shrapnel, there were holes in the ceiling above where the bomb exploded, and all the

windows were shattered,” they told me. Everything in the apartment had been destroyed by the blast. But David and Leah were convinced that God wanted them to stay in Ariel and repair their home and carry on with their work.

This is their story, and it gives an insight into what God is doing in Israel at this time. I spoke first to David, who is originally from Puerto Rico, to find out how he had developed a yearning to live in Israel.

David’s story ...

Although I was born in Puerto Rico, when I was six months old my parents moved to New York where I was raised. We were five children; later on we were six because my parents adopted a six-month-old cousin whose mother was murdered. In the house we spoke Spanish, outside we spoke English, and later on I spoke Yiddish with my friends.

I found New York fascinating because there were people there from many nations, including a large Jewish population, many of whom had come from Europe having survived the Holocaust. Little did I realize then how influential these people would be in shaping the future destiny of my life.

When I was seven my father began working for a company that imported and exported a variety of goods. The owners of the company were Orthodox Jewish Holocaust survivors. When they came to the United States they started a wholesale clothing business and sold to many Jewish people all over the world. There I met Jews from Iran, Jews from Cuba,

Jews from Argentina, Jews from Greece and Slovakia, Jews from Europe; in fact, Jews from every corner of the world. There I learned about the world and heard about places hitherto unknown to me.

My father started bringing books home about the Holocaust. For me this was an education. I was reading about events in Europe that I had previously never heard about. When I reached the age of twelve, during the school holidays my father took me to work with him. I was fascinated to meet Jewish people from so many different countries, and as I listened to their many and varied stories, I started to understand a little of their long history, which in turn increased my interest in them as a people group.

Each day, later in the afternoon when the store was quiet, I watched as the owners gathered for prayer. They would respectfully open their Jewish prayer books and the Talmud³ and other Jewish writings. Although I was not Jewish myself, they soon realized I was interested in what they were doing. They started to teach me about Jewish history and they introduced me to some Jewish writings and literature. I found it fascinating, and as I grew older I started to work there in my vacations.

When I was fourteen years old, something happened that shook my world – my parents decided to move back to Puerto Rico and build a house there. In Puerto Rico they and my sisters became believers in Jesus but I did not want to embrace the faith of my family. They talked about Jesus from morning to night and I found it really disturbing, like nails scraping

against glass. So, a few years later, when I was sixteen, I left my family in Puerto Rico and returned to New York. For a short time I lived with some relatives while I looked for a room to rent and happily resumed working for the Jewish company.

I was determined to make a success of my life in New York and so I studied to finish high school in the mornings and worked part time in the afternoons.

One day I arranged to meet a friend on a ferry boat. As I was waiting for him to arrive, a stranger came up to me and started talking about Jesus! He sounded just like my mother! As my friend hadn't arrived I decided to amuse myself and talk to this "Jesus" person for a while. I challenged him, "If you can show me in the Bible where it says Jesus is 'the way', I'll accept him right now."

"That's simple," he replied. Immediately I felt afraid. He opened his Bible and read to me, "'Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life.'" I was shocked and realized I had no excuse before God now! When he asked me to pray the Sinner's Prayer,⁴ I agreed, but just so I would have "fire insurance", as it were, to keep me out of hell. I could say to the Lord that I had prayed the prayer, and go on to live my life the way I wanted to. At that moment, my friend arrived and was interested to know who and what we were talking about. When I told him I was about to pray, he offered to join in!

Four months passed and I thought no more about the man on the ferry. Then, one night, I got into a violent argument with someone in which I picked up

a knife and almost killed him. I actually felt something inside my arm pushing my arm forward. I was scared because I realized I had lost control of myself. Returning to my apartment I prayed, "Lord help me." Immediately I felt something warm on the top of my head and then I was quite literally flung from one side of the living room to the other. It was a large apartment and my flatmate watched as I "flew". Demons came out of me – I could feel them coming out of my back. After that, everything changed. My thought patterns changed and all the evil thoughts that had previously filled my head were gone.

The next day I went to work as usual and said to one of the Orthodox Jewish men, "Something happened to me yesterday and I have to tell you about it."

"What happened?" he said.

"I've become a Christian."

He said, "You've always been a Christian 'cos you're not a Muslim and you're not Jewish!"

I told him, "I was born a pagan but when I accepted Jesus as my Lord, I became a Christian. I also got filled with the Holy Spirit and the Lord spoke to me."

"How could this be?" he replied, "God only spoke to Moses; how come He spoke to you?"

So I tried to explain what had happened and how the demons had come out of me.

"David, we've known you from the age of seven. I'm looking into your eyes and I can see you're telling me the truth, but it's very hard to understand because we can never accept Jesus."

I had a strong desire to read the Bible and find out

more about Jesus. So on my way home from work one day I went to the Hebrew publishing company owned by the Hasidim⁵ and asked for a New Testament. At that time I didn't appreciate the difference between the Old and New Testaments – I thought the New Testament was an updated version of the Old!

"I want to buy a New Testament," I said to the owner.

He said, "We don't have the New Testament."

I said, "Really?" and left the shop.

I walked a little way up the street and stopped. "Maybe I didn't say it right." So I turned round and went back to the shop. "Excuse me, do you have a New Testament?"

He said, "We don't have the New Testament."

I walked out. But the Lord told me, "Go back and ask again." I thought, maybe he didn't hear me.

So I went back. "Excuse me, but do you have the New Testament?"

His face got red and he shouted, "Get away from here. Old Testament yes, New Testament no! Get away from here." He was screaming at me and everybody in the shop turned round to look at me. "Go to 56 Second Avenue. Get away from here."

So I ran all the way to 56 Second Avenue, which was about seven blocks away. When I arrived I saw a big window filled with some pictures of rabbis. I thought to myself that these people would have the same problem with me as the Hasidic Jewish bookseller, but then I saw a small sign which read, "We have found Jesus the Messiah whom Moses spoke of."

I knocked on the door. A man answered. I asked him if he would sell me a New Testament. He said, "We can't sell you a New Testament but we can give you one for free."

I said, "For free? You mean no money at all?"

He said, "Yes, it's a gift."

I followed him upstairs and he gave me a New Testament. When I opened it and started to read I felt drunk. I started moving back and forth. I didn't understand what was happening to me. Apparently I had knocked on the door of a Jewish mission.

"You're getting drunk in the Holy Spirit," the man said to me. "Would you like to stay and have some dinner?"

I looked at him, "You don't know me and you're inviting me to dinner?" I didn't feel comfortable, and then I remembered I had a hole in my shoe!

At that moment another guy appeared called Gil who was an Eskimo, originally from Alaska. "Are you joining us for dinner?" he asked.

I said, "No."

He said, "Don't worry, I have a hole in my shoe too!" And he lifted up his foot and showed me the hole in his shoe.

I said, "How did you know I had a hole in my shoe?"

He said, "You're supposed to come to dinner."

So we went upstairs and had dinner.

Now my flatmates were involved in organized crime. They could make \$15,000 in a matter of fifteen minutes selling drugs. So when I arrived home later that night and told them what had happened to me

they looked uncomfortable. I could continue going in my new direction, they told me, but they would continue in theirs. Two weeks later, however, they told me to leave. "You have to go, you cannot talk about Jesus in this house – you will destroy the gang."

Not knowing where I would go, I started to pack my bags, but the day before I planned to leave, one of them came to talk to me. He told me he wanted to become a believer. Then, one by one, all my flatmates became believers! It was like a domino effect, and in a short time twenty people had become believers, and they are all still serving the Lord in ministry today.

So I continued with my work and also continued to visit the folk at the Jewish mission. They talked a lot about biblical prophecy. Chapter 31 of Jeremiah⁶ was one of the chapters we discussed about how God would make a new covenant with the House of Israel. So when I went to work I mentioned this chapter in Jeremiah to the Orthodox Jews.

"David," they said, "we want to talk to you frankly. Don't mention Jesus." I had never seen them so agitated. "We will never accept him."

I went upstairs to the second floor and prayed, "Lord, this is pretty bad. These people are not going to make it to heaven because that covenant was with the Jewish people. It's a new covenant – what am I going to do?"

All of a sudden I felt a burden and heard the voice of God, like a man speaks to another, "Don't go to the Gentiles, but go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." I started to laugh. To me that seemed so funny.

You don't send a Gentile Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican to these people – they won't listen to me! You send a Jew to the Jews. But then I remembered that in his letter to the Romans Paul had quoted from the prophet Hosea, "I will call them ' my people' who are not my people, and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one."⁷

I may not be Jewish, I realized, yet God counts me as one of His people because I believe in Jesus. Energized by this new revelation I started witnessing more to the Jewish people I was working with, and I could see they were curious, even jealous for what I had.

It was at this time I knew I had to go to Israel to live and work. I believed God was calling me. But how was it going to happen?

Later that night I was in my apartment thinking about how I would go to Israel when one of my flatmates, who was from India, came into my room, "I want to tell you something, David – you're lonely. You need a wife."

I said, "I'm not lonely."

"You're lonely," he insisted.

"Listen, I don't get lonely," and at that he left and closed the door.

I knelt down and cried out to the Lord, "I'm so lonely, what am I going to do? I guess he's right!" So I randomly opened the Bible and put my finger on a page which happened to be in the book of Psalms. I could not believe what I was reading,

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house.⁸

“This means I don’t need to ask for a wife; I should pray for her! According to this, she’s there already!” So I started praying, “Lord, get her ready for me, prepare her; get her really ready for me! And bring healing to my life so that when I meet her I will be ready too.”

At this point, I turned to Leah who had been sitting quietly listening to her husband recount his early life. It struck me that Leah must have heard David’s story many times yet she listened attentively to every word he said and smiled encouragement at him throughout, and even laughed at his jokes! It was clear that although they are from very different backgrounds, David and Leah have grown very close and, as you will read, they have dealt with many difficult situations over the years.

Leah takes up the story ...

Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
for ever.⁹

When I was young in the faith, and in my twenties, I thought these words from Psalm 23 meant that only good and merciful things would happen to me throughout my life and I could look forward to a life of blessing in all of my circumstances. Now, having lived through and survived a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis

for myself, a bomb explosion that critically wounded and scarred our youngest son, and an almost fatal mistake in my husband David's operation along with a cancer diagnosis, I understand the verse very differently. Not only have we all survived these circumstances by the total grace of God, but the Lord has used them all for His glory, and has given us a testimony for His Name's sake. Now I understand that no matter what happens in life, and tragedies do happen to believers and unbelievers alike, still the goodness and mercy of the Lord is very present, following us as we walk through whatever we have to walk through, making sense of the senseless and giving deep meaning and lasting truth to unexplainable circumstances.

I was born in New Jersey, in the United States, into a Jewish family. My grandparents came from Eastern Europe and my father and mother were both born in America. They held very strongly to Jewish tradition and when I was growing up we went regularly to the synagogue and we celebrated the Jewish holidays. We therefore always had a very strong identity. We knew that we were Jews before we were anything else; before we were Americans, we were Jews. Our extended family numbered between seventy and a hundred (because my father was one of six children and there were many cousins). When we gathered together for the holidays, at a typical Passover Seder¹⁰ there would be at least seventy people there. It was fantastic!

I went to a public school¹¹ where the whole neighbourhood and all the surrounding

neighbourhoods were Jewish. Three times a week, after public school, I went to Hebrew school. There we received Jewish instruction, we learned the beginnings of the Hebrew language, and we learned how to read from the Jewish prayer book which is called the Siddur. I did that until I was thirteen years old.

My parents expected me to marry a nice Jewish businessman and be a mother and a wife and live in the suburbs! They expected me to go to college, but that wasn't as important as being married to a nice Jewish businessman!

For some reason I always knew that life wasn't going to work out for me in that way. I was a non-conformist, and so were my brother and sister (I was the youngest of three children).

We were spiritual seekers. From the age of eleven I was looking for God. I remember sitting in my room when I felt a breeze coming through the window. I said to God, "If you are real then I want to know you." When I went to Hebrew school I heard Bible stories and I learned about a God who spoke to Moses and Abraham and told them what their purpose was. I wanted to know what my purpose was: why had I been born into this world? What did God want me to do?

From a young age, a Jewish person instinctively knows a couple of things: firstly, that Jesus is not for Jews – that is not a possibility. Rather, Jesus is for the Gentiles, for the Christians. Secondly, Jews are supposed to remain Jewish for their entire life. You are expected to live as a Jew and to die as a Jew.

During the 1960s and 1970s, when I was a teenager, the New Age movement¹² arrived, and that was permissible for Jewish people. In fact, it attracted many Jewish people. My sister and I were very close, even though she was eight years older than me, and together we began to seek spiritually in many of these groups. We were quite willing to experiment with whatever was put in front of us and so we went from one New Age philosophy, practice, and group to the next. Drugs were also involved. We were always rebellious and could never conform. As far as we were concerned, we were seeking God with all of our hearts.

I studied at New York University. My sister was also living in New York City and so we saw a great deal of each other and pursued our spiritual search together. We studied with the Jehovah's Witnesses for a time before moving on to study with the Mormons. My sister even became a Catholic and began going to a Catholic church. But when she took me to the Catholic church I felt it was just religion, like Judaism, and I knew it wasn't what I was looking for.

At that time, a revival sprang up. Today they call it the Jesus People revival.¹³ It was amazing because you really did feel the presence of God on the streets of New York City. Wherever I went people were witnessing about Jesus, and as a result folk were getting saved. Hippies were getting saved. Even gang members were getting saved! This movement began to affect the lives of thousands of young people.

One day my sister, the person I trusted and felt closest to, came to talk to me. She told me she had received Jesus as her Saviour and I had to receive Him also because I was a sinner! It felt as though she was stuffing the Bible down my throat, and for the first time in our lives I had to disagree with her. "I cannot receive Him," I said, "I'm Jewish!" which was ironic, because I was open to every other cult and practice. I would pray to every Hindu god, but I could not receive Jesus. And so, for the first time in our lives, my sister and I parted company.

It was then that the Lord began to reveal Himself to me. I felt my sin was a heavy burden on my shoulders and I could feel myself sliding into a deep depression. Having been heavily involved in the occult I started to see demonic beings in my apartment, which frightened me. There were days I could not get up to go to work.

It was Easter time and some programmes appeared on the television about Jesus. As I started watching I was drawn to the person of Jesus and, strangely enough, I began to love Him. My sister and some of her Jewish friends who had become believers were going to a Messianic congregation on the lower east side of Manhattan that David was also going to. They invited me to go with them, but I still refused to talk to my sister and wouldn't go there. But it all became too much for me and one day I went into my apartment and said, "Lord Jesus, if you are the Messiah then I need you," and at that moment something came into my heart. Today I know that was the Holy Spirit.

My heart overflowed with love, joy, and peace and I felt the heavy burden of my sin being lifted off my shoulders. In front of my eyes I saw a blackboard with my life on it and it was being erased. I knew in that moment I had been “born again”,¹⁴ even though I had never read those words in the Bible, and then I saw a “veil” being taken away from my eyes.¹⁵ And I had never read that in the Bible either!

In that instant I became a believer, and whereas before I had never wanted to go to that Messianic congregation with my sister, now I counted the minutes and seconds until the next meeting! I began to read the Bible voraciously. I took all of my New Age books and threw them away; I destroyed them because I didn’t want anybody else to use them. I began going to the Messianic fellowship and they became my family.

I realized that one day I would have to confront my parents with this news, and I knew it would be very difficult.

One of the first things that happened to me after my experience of being “born again” was that I met my husband! I was part of this small congregation, run by an elderly Jewish pastor and his wife, that included Puerto Ricans, Chinese, a guy who had been in the Black Panther organization, and other Jewish people like myself. David Ortiz was one of the first people I met there. A couple of months later we fell in love and immediately knew we were going to get married, so we got engaged! All this happened without my parents’ knowledge.

The day came when I had to go and see them and tell them that I was a believer in Jesus.

They didn't understand. And when I introduced them to David and told them I was going to get married they were still firmly convinced that I should marry a Jewish person. My father told me that if I went ahead with this "crazy religion" as well as marrying David, then I would be disowned. I knew he was telling me the truth because my father was a person who if he said it, he did it, and he would never go back on his word. I told him that while I was sorry he couldn't accept my decisions, even so, I believed it was God's will for my life. He didn't understand that at all and told me he would never talk to me again. And that was it. We left the house not knowing when we would see my parents again.

It was a difficult time. I became ill with pneumonia; it was like an emotional response to what had happened. But then the Lord began to minister to me from the Bible and I understood the words of Jesus when He said:

"I tell you the truth ... no-one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life."¹⁶

When His mother and brothers came to visit Yeshua and wanted to see Him, He said:

“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”

Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”¹⁷

And so, in a very real sense, the Body of Messiah became my family. My sister who was also a believer was disowned by our father too. David and I married. My father refused to speak to me for years, but when the grandchildren came, my mother wanted to see me. We met occasionally and she would spend some time with her grandchildren. But then the day came when I had to tell her that we were going to move to Israel.

David was called to Israel first. One of the first things he said to me when we were dating was, “You know, I have a calling to go and live in Israel, and if you marry me you have to be prepared to come too!”

I had been to Israel when I was a teenager, before I was a believer. It was very interesting. As I toured the land with a group from my college, something came into my heart for the land; it was a connection to the land itself that I had never felt when I had been living in the United States. However, I detested the Israelis! They seemed to me to be so different culturally to American Jews and I had some really bad experiences with them. I came back saying, “I love the land but I will never live there!” So when David talked about going to live in Israel, I thought, well, we’ll get married, we’ll get settled, we’ll get established, we’ll have children, and he’ll forget all about it.

We got married and we had children, but we were never able to get settled and we were never able to get established in the United States. David kept talking about how everything that was taking place with us was preparation for Israel, including his studies in dental technology.

"I'm not going to live in Israel," I told him, "but if you want the Lord to speak to me about living in Israel then you're going to have to be quiet and never talk about it again so that the Lord can speak to me."

Anybody who knows David Ortiz knows he can never be quiet about anything! But he never said another word after that! And the Lord began to deal with me in so many ways. We also began to meet Israelis, and by the time we left the US and made aliyah¹⁸ to Israel in 1985, I was not just 100 per cent sure, I was 1,000 per cent sure that this was God's will for our lives. We shared a burning desire to preach the gospel to the Jewish people. They were my people and David had been raised with Orthodox Jews. He knew much more about Orthodox Judaism than I did when I met him. He had been immersed into that culture and society from childhood. So that was our calling, to share the gospel with the Jewish people.

Looking back, I have no regrets. There are many things that have happened to us throughout the years but I have never regretted moving to Israel because I have always known that the best and safest place for a marriage and family and any kind of work you do for the Lord is to be in the centre of God's will. So long as I knew we were in the centre of God's will

there couldn't be any regrets, because whatever has happened, I have always stood on the verse:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.¹⁹

Fourteen years passed and my father still would not speak to me. I realized that many people had given me words of encouragement from the Lord that one day we would be reconciled. After eleven or twelve years this still wasn't happening and I was asking the Lord, why? I came to realize He had to do something in my own life before He could re-establish my relationship with my father, and that involved having a deeper relationship with Him as my heavenly Father before my earthly father could come back into the picture.

Then my mother made contact to say she wanted to see us and she offered to pay for all of us to visit America. We had five children at that time. My parents were living in Florida but she was going to meet us in New York. However, a few days before we were due to arrive she injured her back and my father wouldn't let her travel. Instead, he offered to arrange for us to stay in a hotel near to where they lived, although he remained adamant that he would not meet us.

So we arrived in Florida. My mother was going back and forth between us and my father. One day she said to us, "I'm not going to tell you what to do, but he sits at the pool every day between eight and nine o'clock in the morning. David encouraged me to

go and see him. Taking the children with me, I walked down the beach to his apartment house and there he was, sitting by the pool. We hadn't seen each other for fourteen years and he had never seen my children.

I said, "Hi Dad, I've missed you."

"Well, that's been your fault," he replied.

"I just wanted to say hi and introduce you to my kids."

He stood up and one by one took each child's face in his hands and looked into their eyes.

"I would like to hug you," I said to him. So we hugged and we left and we came back to Israel.

A month later, in August 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, initiating the Gulf War. Every week my parents would call me and say, "There's going to be a war; your children are going to die. Come back to Florida and we'll buy you a house!"

So finally, one day as I put down the phone, I felt I should take the children to Florida for the duration of the war while David stayed in Israel. We flew to Florida and moved into an apartment. One day my father walked in, and it was as though all the previous years had been erased. After the war, when David came to join us, before we all few back to Israel together, we talked to my parents about Yeshua and continued to visit them every summer until 2006. My sister was also reconciled to our parents.

It was when my father was dying that he called for my sister and me to visit him; he wanted to talk about Yeshua. He was afraid to die because he knew he was about to enter eternity unprepared. The night before

he died he saw the Lord. A night nurse was with him who also happened to be a believer. He said to her, "I see a man."

"Who is it?" she asked him.

"It's the Lord," he replied. She led him through the Sinner's Prayer²⁰ and at the end he said, "in Jesus' name, Amen." A few hours later he went into a coma, and twelve hours later he died and went to eternity with the Lord. It was a miracle.

Since living in Israel, we have been very mission minded as well as running a congregation here in Ariel. In addition, the Lord opened a way for us to witness to Palestinians. That was a little bit difficult for me in the beginning and the Lord had to do a work of forgiveness in my heart because I realized that all my life I had learned with every fibre of my being that the Arab people were my enemies. I realized that I did not care for their souls and I did not love them, but I knew I was wrong to continue that way because the Holy Spirit was moving among the villages and many were getting saved. But in a moment of time, the Lord gave me His love for them, and my enemies became my brothers and sisters. Through the love of God we have had incredible fellowship and have experienced the "one new man",²¹ the gospel to the Muslims, and the gospel to the Jews. It's been an amazing experience.