



ISRAEL

Publishing for the Hebrew Church

Baruch Maoz describes the scarce resources available to Hebrew believers in the Holy Land.

Israel, the Land of the Book, is a wasteland when it comes to Christian literature in Hebrew.

The doctrine of the Trinity—a much contested truth in this country—is explained and defended by nothing more than a 65 page booklet. The Deity of Christ is presented in an 18 page booklet. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit does not have even one book devoted to it.

To date Israel does not have a single commentary on the entire Bible in Hebrew, but commentaries on just five books (Genesis, Leviticus, Luke, Acts and Romans). There is not a single book in Hebrew on church polity, only one on understanding the Bible, and none on systematic theology.

Two Christian publishers, Yanetz and HaGefen, publish materials in Hebrew, though there have been many hit-and-run publishing endeavors through the years. The two publishing houses complement each other.

Yanetz

In Jerusalem, Yanetz, run by Victor Smadja, under the Keren Achva Meshichit Foundation, pioneered Christian publishing in Hebrew in

Israel. It focuses on the production of books for which funding can be assured in advance.

Yanetz seeks to meet the needs of Hebrew-speaking Christians by producing books for evangelism. Yanetz also publishes material in Russian. It has over 300 titles in Hebrew and Russian: all but one are paperback, and most are given out free. Yanetz carries a hymnbook used by some congregations in Israel, comprised of translated hymns and some original Hebrew compositions. One of the books published by Yanetz was written in Israel.

Yanetz has a fine printing press and one of the largest soft-cover binders in the country. Editing, translation, proofreading and art are outsourced, but printing and binding are done in-house. Books, tracts and other materials are made available to churches, organizations and individuals who have proven to be effective distributors. Most equipment was bought through the generosity of Christian organizations overseas, especially in the United Kingdom and in Switzerland. The equipment is owned by the Foundation, and is used to generate income

through services to secular, non-Christian bodies.

HaGefen

Christian Witness to Israel, a British missionary society dedicated to promoting the gospel among Jews, founded HaGefen on the outskirts of Tel-Aviv. HaGefen functions largely as a publishing house, with very little of the work outsourced.

HaGefen produces Israel's only all-age Sabbath school material. It publishes Israel's most popular hymnbook and the only Christian children's storybook in Hebrew. One of its major projects is the production of a Bible for children in modern Hebrew, accompanied by original fine art illustrations. HaGefen publishes two quarterly magazines, one for adults and one for youth, as well as tracts, booklets and some audio recordings.

HaGefen seeks to provide literature that will instruct and edify the Church. It is publishing a series of original sermons by Hebrew Christians on major doctrines, and more locally-written commentaries in Hebrew. For translations, HaGefen focuses on books such as *Knowing God*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, an abbreviated

edition of *Calvin's Institutes*, and the like.

Challenges to overcome

Though the Hebrew Christian community has 6,000 people, potential readership, including children and adults, does not exceed 500. Most of Israel's Hebrew-speaking Christians are immigrants who are far more at ease with their own language. Publishers must reach the future generation—or seek to publish elsewhere.

Few Hebrew-speaking Christians read much. They prefer biographies and devotionals—books that entertain more than they challenge or inform.

Though small, the Christian community among the Jews is very divided. Reading is not encouraged by most church leaders, lest it expose their congregants to competing views.

Most distribution is done evangelistically, on the streets and through the mail. The few Christian bookshops in Israel are seldom frequented by local Christians and do not break even. Publishers must win the confidence of the community they seek to serve, and persuade believers of the value of solid reading. ❖