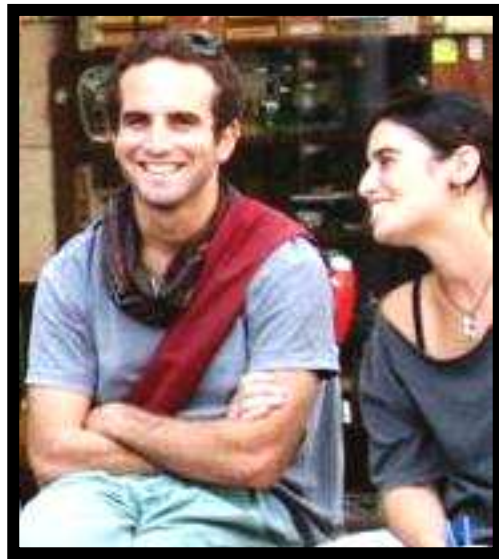


People Profile

A Profile of the Secular Jews in Modern Israel



by: John West

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“And so, all of Israel will be saved” *Rom. 11:26a*

Secular Jews

Israel is a country of 6.4 million people, 80% of whom are Jewish.¹ It is an immigrant nation with over 100 different countries represented among her immigrants. Many immigrants bring with them a diversity of cultural and religious expressions. This raises an important national question: “What does it mean to be an ‘Israeli Jew’? Only 20% of the Jewish population was actually born in Israel.² So the vast majority has brought their religious and cultural ‘flavors’ from their former communities. The Israeli Jew therefore, suffers a type of identity crisis. Only 10-15% of the Jews clings to their religious heritage while the remaining 85-90% has abandoned faith and tries to find their expression in secular, humanistic Zionism. So, in this context, being ‘Jewish’ is regarded as an ethnicity not a religion. They struggle to etch out their existence and identity in the Land of Israel by the sweat of their brows and living by their own wits rather than through commonality of faith and through prayers. A rallying cry in Israel today is: “If I am not for me, then who is?”

A wounded faith: Deep in the heart of every Jew, I believe there is still a deep rooted faith in God. There remains the basic belief that God exists, that they are His people, that He performed wonders and great deeds in the past, and that He will most likely show up again in the future. But it has been many generations since a prophet has shown up leaving God’s people like sheep without a shepherd. Although hundreds of thousands of Jews followed Jesus and the Apostolic leadership of the early church, between 70AD - 300AD there was a rift between Jews who followed Jesus and those who didn’t. The followers of Jesus would ‘turn the other cheek’ as the Romans persecuted the Jews and destroyed the Temple. The Jews who did not follow Jesus considered them betrayers of their people as they would not fight for Israel! After 300AD, gentile followers of Jesus accounted for the majority of believers. Many of the early church leaders misunderstood the events surrounding the crucifixion and began labeling the Jews as ‘Christ-killers’. This laid the groundwork for 1,700 years of persecution by the ‘church’. So, after being removed from neighborhoods, provinces and whole countries; after three major slaughters in the Crusades, Inquisition and the Holocaust; many Jews feel their prayers have gone unanswered. Deep inside, they sense they are still God’s chosen people, but do not understand why God would allow them to be treated so harshly for so long. So many have found it too painful to pursue God and have left it up to Him to call when He is ready. It is common to hear: “When the Messiah comes, He will explain all of this.” Or, “When the Messiah comes; I’ll ask Him about that.”

This is a unique time in history for the Jews since it is the first time in 2,500 years that Jews have been able to govern and defend themselves in their own land. This has not come however, without a great price. The wholesale slaughter of 6 million Jews during WWII evoked a great sympathy among the United Nations and emphasized the need for the Jewish people to have their own state. On May 14th, 1948, as prophesied in Isaiah 66:8, “a nation was born in a day”! Religious Jews see God’s hand in the restoration of Israel, while secular Jews see it as their opportunity to be a free people without gentile rule and without God. My mother-in-law recently stated: “If God is our Father, then we would rather be orphans.”

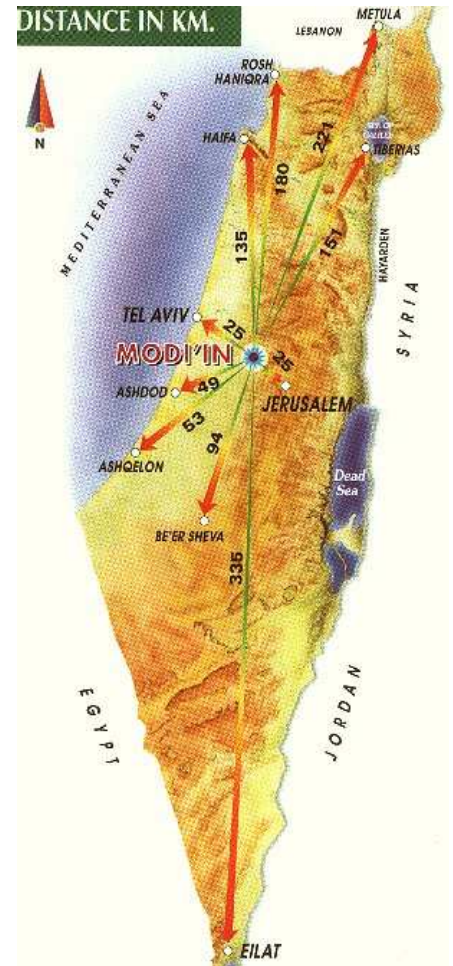


Target Location Description

Modi'in, "The City of the Future", is a planned city in the exact center of Israel. This planned city was established in the Judean foothills in an open, empty space. Most of the cities of Israel were built upon the ancient ruins of older cities in fulfillment of Amos 9:14 "I will bring back my people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit."

Modi'in is unique in that it is the most secular city in the country. It is a modern city that attracts young, educated professionals and their families. Modi'in is planned to grow to 250,000 people making it the fourth largest city in Israel. The city is also unique in that it has many parks that promote community and social gathering. About 50% of the city's land is dedicated to parks.³

Modi'in's location places it in the heart of Israel geographically, population wise, and transportation wise. This is an ideal center for ministry activity!



The Heart of Modern Israel!



Modi'in: "City of the Future"



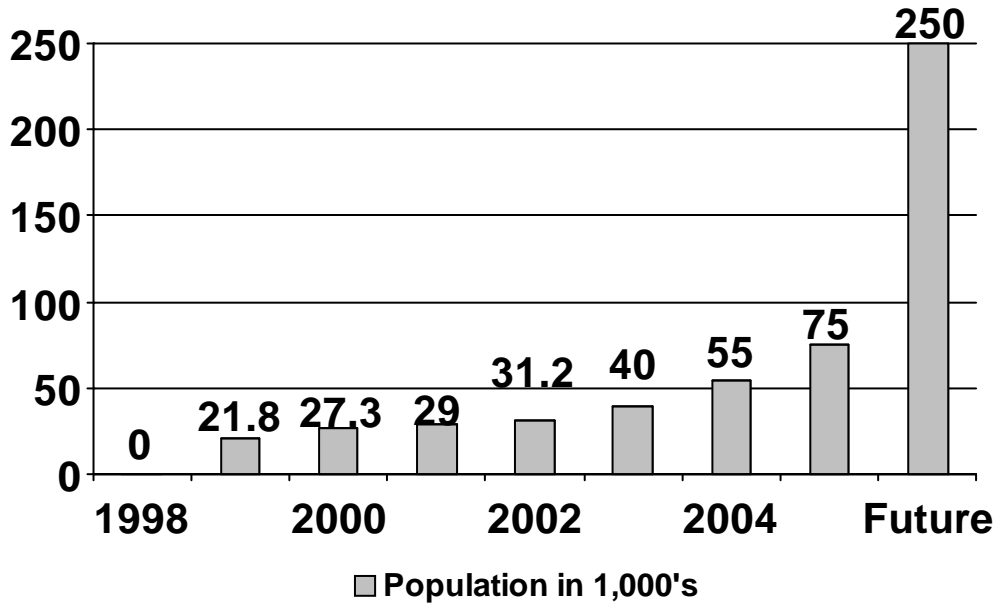
The Home is the Heart...



Relationships are the key...

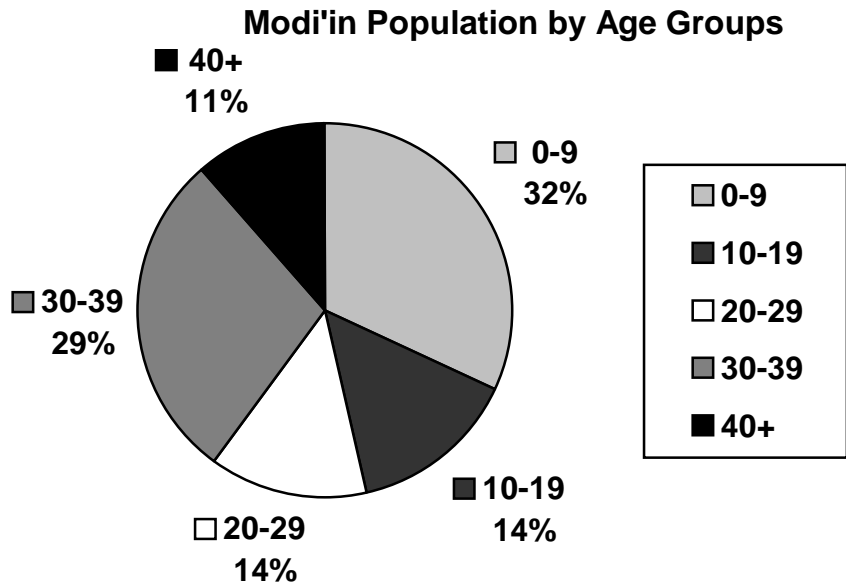
Demographics

Population Growth in Modi'in



Population Growth in Modi'in⁴

The division of the population by age groups in March 2002 was as follows:



Division of Population by Age Groups⁵

Note: 89% of the population is under the age of 40

Occupations: The most predominant professions in Modi'in are in education, engineering and technical fields, medicine, computers, economics, and administrative services.

Median income⁶: The average monthly salary reported in the media for the telecommunications equipment field in Sept. 2003 was \$4,194; in the medical and scientific equipment field it was \$4,132; in the R&D field it was \$4,160; and in the computing services sector it was \$3,742. Therefore, the average monthly salary in Modi'in was estimated at \$4,057.

Trends: Modi'in is experiencing a trend of "family reunification", with parents moving to the community in order to be close to their children and grandchildren. Many have chosen Modi'in as their home because of recommendations from friends. Approx. 90% of all home owners are married. Most families are young, well-established, and have two children.⁷

Future Growth Potential: Planned and projected to grow to 250,000 people, Modi'in is in the heart of Israel and at the crossroads of two main highways and the train that link Israel's major populated areas. The growth of Modi'in is one of the most exciting facets. It is vital that we establish a healthy church presence in the city as a center for ministry activity.

On the Increase:

- ↑ Divorce
- ↑ Economic Stress
- ↑ Unemployment
- ↑ Poverty
- ↑ Homelessness
- ↑ Hopelessness
- ↑ Anxiety

Psychographics: Modi'in enjoys a well-deserved reputation as a unique and dynamic community with a young, well-educated populace.

- Basic attitudes
 - Approximately 20% of the population is traditional Jewish.
 - Very attracted to New Age
 - Called the 'most secular city in Israel' (A religious/traditional country)
 - This is not a 'party town'. There are no pubs here.
- Values that affect lifestyle
 - Family is probably the first and foremost value in Modi'in. There is a trend of grandparents moving to Modi'in to be close to their children and grandchildren
 - Education is probably the second highest value in Modi'in. One third of the city has a high school education and 60% of high school graduates have a higher academic education.⁸
 - Quality of life: "Modi'in's residents have chosen the city in order to raise their quality of life. Most of the residents of Modi'in are young families."⁹

National Trends Affecting Modi'in:

Jewish people are returning to Israel at an incredible rate. For example: 20% of the population in Israel speaks Russian! This mass immigration has created special needs for housing, schools and employment. Poverty, homelessness, and recent breakdowns in the peace process all contribute to a very low national confidence. Although many of these scenarios do not directly impact Modi'in practically, residents of Modi'in feel a certain amount of helplessness and anxiety over the future of their country.

Unlike many Jewish communities outside Israel, extended families do not play an important part in the lives of the Israeli Jews. Rather, the nuclear family is the most important unit. Because education is highly valued in Israeli society, schools are free and compulsory through the twelfth grade. Most Jews view mandatory service in the Israeli army as a crucial part of the transition into adulthood.¹⁰

Current trends in society: Over the last four years we have noticed an increase in the tendency of people to fight for their own place as opposed to doing what's best for society. Maneuvering themselves into preferred positions while stepping on others is more and more common in jobs and clubs, not just in politics. There have also been increased tensions between the vast secular majority and the religious minority. This has the potential to lead to a type of civil war in Israel! Tensions were at a peak last year leading up to the Gaza Strip disengagement. A religious leader modeled non-violent grief and prayers and was able to win sympathy and unity with the secular communities. This was short lived as



tensions began to rise again shortly after the disengagement. One year later, Israel found herself in a war with Hezbollah and the north under intense rocket fire. Many people moved south and were hosted by fellow Israelis. This also served to unite the country's left wing and right wing as well as secular and religious. Now that the war is over, differences of opinion as to how the situation was handled are contributing once again to disunity.

Political Change: Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon's recent strokes and subsequent comma has thrust the nation into political stress and fears. He was a very powerful leader with strong convictions and an ability to unite different political parties probably better than any other leader in recent history if not since the founding of the modern State of Israel. The new prime minister is well loved as the former Mayor of Jerusalem and was thrust into a war with Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon. Many people are dissatisfied with his handling of the situation. Confidence in the government is waning and therefore a sense of helplessness and uncertainty about the future is growing.

Righteous Gentiles: 'Righteous Gentiles' is the phrase used for those non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. At Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem, over 11,000 'Righteous Gentiles' are honored as people transformed from indifferent bystanders into heroic saviors. Hardly would a Jew call another Jew 'righteous' unless his/her piety in good deeds and generosity is evident to all. But to refer to a gentile as 'righteous' is almost unheard of! These gentiles have earned the title because of their self-less and sacrificial service to aid the Jews in times of trouble. Sometimes they paid the ultimate sacrifice in order to help the Jews. This Christ-like attitude of self-sacrifice must be adopted by any Christian who would aspire to ministry to the Jewish people. This attitude has distinguished those heroes of the Holocaust and will continue to earn the respect of those who have so often experienced the 'back hand' of Christianity.

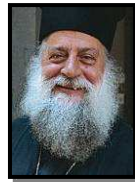
Their language: Biblical Hebrew has been revived with a modern twist! Modern Hebrew is not a very far jump from ancient Hebrew; not even as far as King James English to modern English! Hebrew was revived as a unifying language for the

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Kaph (11)	Lamed (12)	Mem (13)	Nun (14)	Samek (15)	Ayin (16)	Pey (17)	Tzay (18)	Qof (19)	Resh (20)
ש	ת	י	כ	ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ
Shin (21)	Tet (22)	Yod (23)	Kaph (24)	Lamed (25)	Mem (26)	Nun (27)	Samek (28)	Ayin (29)	Pey (30)

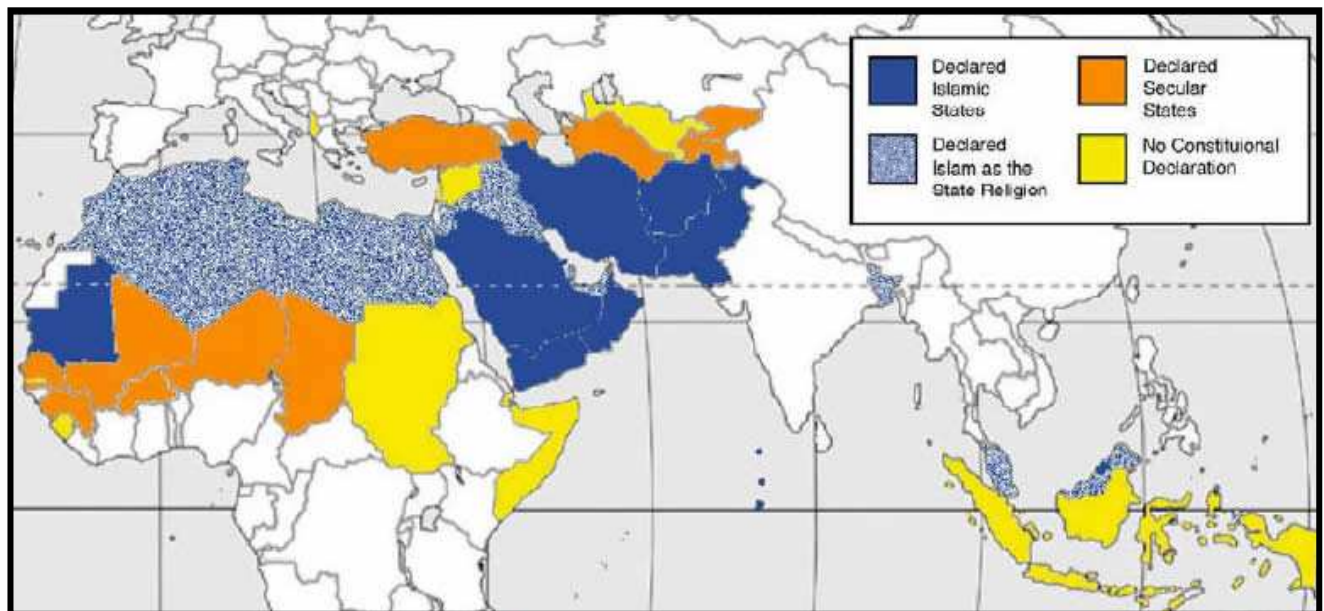
refugees and immigrants from dozens, and now over one hundred, nationalities represented among the Jews in Israel.

Neighboring people groups:

People groups within Israel are represented as follows: Muslims account for 16% of the population and are scattered throughout Israel but mostly in the occupied territories and Palestinian controlled areas. Arab Christians account for 1.7% of the population and they live mostly in Israel proper, sharing cities with Jews and Muslims. Other Christian groups, such as Armenians and various displaced peoples, represent only 0.4% of the population, while the Druze (a sect of Islam friendly to Jews) represent 1.6% of the total population¹¹



Hostile Muslim Countries surround Israel on the outside. However, Israel now has peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. This is a source of great insecurity for tiny Israel as she is surrounded by such a great number of enemies. Oddly enough, the surrounding Muslim nations view Israel as a giant enemy to Islam and the world; calling her the brood of Satan's children. So, both peoples live in fear and respect of each other's power. Can you spot Israel on the map below?



Map courtesy of Zinda Magazine

Christianity: As mentioned earlier, the history between Jews and Christianity has not been good, nurturing or peaceful. However, there are those Christians who do have a special love for the Jews and desire to reach out to them with the Gospel. These Christians usually adopt one of two approaches. The approach most often adopted is one of



confrontation. They believe it is necessary to confront the Jews with their sin. This is how they explain the tragic history: God is punishing them for their sins. This type of confrontation could be developed over time while developing a relationship that will allow them to speak so frankly or it could be the cold, spontaneous confrontation on a street corner with a tract in hand. Either way, this has proven ineffective in leading many Jews to Jesus. It has even served to give the evangelists a bad name.

The other approach is one of comfort. This is inspired by Isaiah 40:1-2 "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins." This approach is far less adopted but proving more and more effective. It demands a lot more from the Christian. It takes more time, love and patience and he will not see rapid conversion but should see rapid attitude change. This is extremely important because the Jews, of all people groups, know the scriptures and they have a good, overall knowledge of God. Knowledge is not the problem, but knowledge is particularly valued and emphasized by western Christians. The Jews, however, have suffered because of their special relationship to God. They have also suffered in relationship with Christianity. Therefore, the beginning of reconciliation must be on a

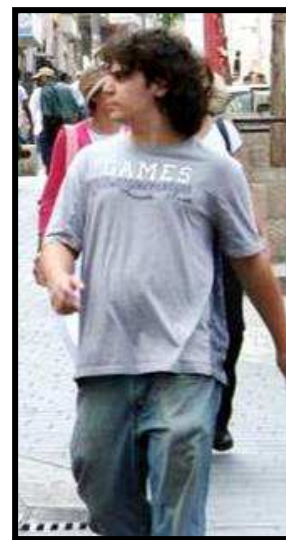


relational level; on a healing level; and the scriptures tell us to begin with comforting His people. We must show them a different face to Christianity. We must show them the true face of the Gospel of love and reconciliation. Instead of confronting them with their sins, they need to hear 2 Cor. 5:19-20 "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf:

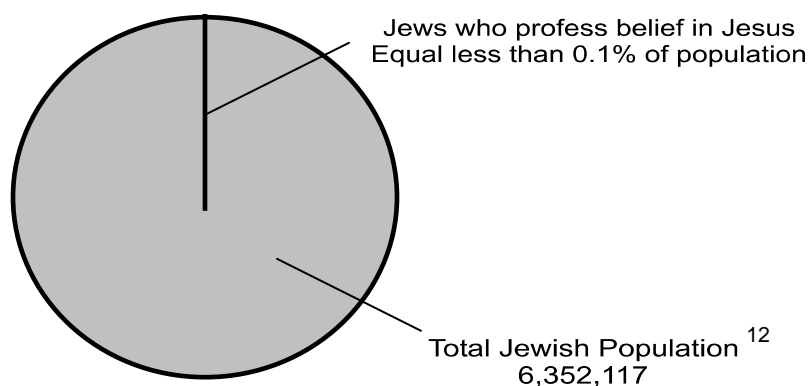
Be reconciled to God."

Identity Crisis, Rejection and Survival: As stated earlier, Israeli Jews suffer from a certain degree of identity crisis. They are still trying to figure out what it means to be Jewish and Israeli. Of all the customs and aspects of culture that they hold onto or let go of, one thing is agreed upon across the board: Jews do not believe in Jesus! If a Jew should believe in Jesus, he is no longer considered Jewish by the State of Israel. This adds to the identity crisis of those who believe. They are already a mixed group of people, mistreated and despised by the world. Now they have their own country in which to be 'Jewish', whatever that means. But those who turn to Jesus find themselves rejected by the rejected! This is no small matter to be alone and rejected by your own lonely and rejected people group! It is therefore imperative to focus on the essentials of our identity in God. Perhaps as Jews find their identity once again in Yahweh, they will influence their fellow countrymen to discover their own unique, God given identity as Israelis in a modern world. Paul says the restoration of the Jews will be "life from the dead!" Romans 11:15.

Secret Believers: Many Jews, on their quest to discover their identity (whether conscious of it or not) have gone full circle and have come to Jesus in the end! However, because of the dynamics of rejection and identity issues, they have kept their faith to themselves. There seems to be no way at the present to get an accurate idea as to how many 'secret believers' there are in Israel, but my impression is there are a lot of them. This happens most often when they are traveling over seas. They are freer to look into Christianity in another land. Many missionaries, realizing this, have set up places to meet Israelis in popular places and attractions. I have heard many stories of Israelis coming to faith on a trip, only to keep it a secret upon returning home. Often times, they will download materials from the internet when they are alone or watch the 700 club on TV to feed their new faith. But so far, it seems that they are not ready to go public with their faith.



The Messianic Body in Israel as a Whole:



The following table is a snapshot of the 80+ Messianic congregations in all of Israel:

Demographics of the Messianic Body in Israel (1999¹³)		
Members/Core Group	How Many?	% of Body
Total Adults	3560	100%
Israeli Born	650	18%
Ethiopian	130	4%
Russian	1495	42%
Other (Various Backgrounds)	1285	36%
Adults in house groups	171	5%

This table reveals a surprisingly low percentage of members in house groups. This will definitely be the focus of healthy body life emphasized by Salt of the Earth. The actual number of Israeli born believers that attend public meetings might be significantly less than depicted here. This number might include the 'secret believers' who do not go public with

their faith. Notice the high percentage of Russian speaking adults. This table also shows a high percentage of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Note: This table does not include statistics from Arabic Speaking congregations.

The Church in Modi'in:

The church in Modi'in, like the rest of the Messianic congregations in Israel is in a struggle for its identity and its survival. The approximately 15 believing families living in Modi'in have come from different congregations in other cities and have found it difficult to organize themselves into a church. They are finding it increasingly difficult to stay motivated in their faith, to pray for their children, and are "looking for someone to organize them."¹⁴ The last two attempts failed because of differences of opinion in styles of worship and leadership. After an almost two year break they are together again for another attempt at unity and fellowship. Their services are modeled very much like American and European services, only they are in Hebrew with translation provided.

End Notes:

¹ CIA World Fact Book, Israel, 2006

² Ibid

³ Modi'in Profile, 2004

⁴ Modi'in Municipality Website. www.modiin.muni.il/

⁵ Modi'in Profile, 2004

⁶ "High Tech Pay Stops Falling", Zeev Klien, Globes, October 2003

⁷ Ibid

⁸ M-net-Modi'in online, www.m-net.co.il/olim/general_info

⁹ Deputy Mayor Yossi Bar-David, Modi'in Profile, 2004

¹⁰ The Joshua Project, Israeli Jews, 2006

¹¹ CIA World Fact Book, Israel, 2003

¹² CIA World Fact Book, Israel, 2006

¹³ "Facts & Myths about the Messianic congregations in Israel" Hansen and Skjott 1999

¹⁴ From an interview with Arik and Mona Peled in Modi'in