

# The Streets of Tel Aviv

*By Brian Greenaway*

A couple of weeks ago, on my return from a ministry trip, I had to confess something to my family: the previous week I had visited a brothel for the first time in my life. Now before you move onto the next article, stick with me.

If any of the readers of this article have been to Israel, you will be aware that as you fly into Ben Gurion Airport, you fly in over the Mediterranean Coast and see the sprawling city of Tel Aviv, the beautiful beaches, the busy streets and the bright sunshine, or alternatively the myriad lights of the city that definitely never sleeps. The city looks bright and welcoming.

Then you may find yourself on a tour, visiting busy street markets, authentic historical sights, eating Falafel or Shawarma. Maybe, you will take a boat ride on the beautiful Galilee or float in the Dead Sea. Some may scale the heights of Masada or wander the streets of Jaffa. In the end its Jerusalem, with its contrast of old and new, the bright Jerusalem stone and the iconic view of the Temple Mount from the Mount of Olives.

However, not many will have seen the other side of Israel. The side that is just as common in any other major city in the world. Almost directly below one of the main flight paths into Ben Gurion Airport is a street nicknamed 'Death St'. It's so called because it is in the centre of Tel Aviv's roughest areas. Homelessness, prostitution, drugs and alcohol abuse abound there.

One of the things I do is to take small groups of senior church leaders who wish to engage with real Israel, the body of believers. Earlier this year, I took one of these groups to connect them with ministries who are making a difference on the ground in Israel. We did a little touring, but most of our time was spent with projects connected to our ministry, whom we are privileged to have provided finance and other support.

Whilst in 'Death St' as we walked along with hot food and drink for any willing to receive it, we saw in the dark, a young man sitting on a wrecked sofa. The sofa was red PVC, but torn with one arm hanging off. He was clearly under the influence of something and not quite coherent. As we spoke with him we discovered his name was Eli, and that although he was married with three children, he had not seen them for some time. His mother was still alive but she was very poor and he hardly saw her either. This was his life now.

He accepted food and drink from us and as we talked further he was willing to receive prayer. As we prayed God clearly began to impact this young man, as he become more lucid and coherent. Then he said that he wanted to follow Yeshua, so one of the pastors in our group led him in a prayer of salvation. It was a privilege. Now that is not the end of the story for people like Eli, more of that later.

Our base for the evening had been the 'Feed Tel Aviv' project. A soup kitchen, offering free home-made food to anyone who came by. It is a small shop unit that is open every day of the week, but is busiest at night, staffed by volunteers from 14 different congregations. And now back to my rather embarrassing admission in my opening paragraph. Either side of the soup kitchen are two very active brothels. When we first arrived I chose the wrong door, but was quickly and rather gratefully stopped by John, one of the other pastors that had joined us on our trip.

There was a contrasting mix of people to the Soup kitchen. Young and old, poor and not so poor, men on their way home from work visiting the brothels, young girls from the brothels coming in for something to eat between clients. I had a conversation with an old man who told us that many of his family had perished at Auschwitz, but he as a young boy had escaped through Russian occupied Poland. He had made his way to Israel, eventually, with his brother who had died in the 1967 war. Now, he was just lonely, looking for company. He was happy to chat to us and tell us his life story. We spoke to him of Yeshua, the Messiah and how he had come to give abundant life to everyone. Let's pray that the end of his life is one of hope instead of loneliness. History is one of the reasons 50% of Jewish people in Israel do not believe in God.

And what of the girls who work the brothels, some only last three to four months, killed by the cheap drugs sold on 'Death St'. Earlier that day the police had been down there and boarded up the half derelict building from which the drugs were sold. But the people were still out there.

I remember one broken conversation I had with a young man in one of the municipal parks, there he was crouched on an old blanket, with another to cover him. He was weary and worn, but he took some food and drink and managed a smile as I put my hand on his shoulder. After a week we came home, but the work continues, even through the severe restrictions of the Coronavirus outbreak. People are not allowed to gather, so the food is being distributed on the streets only.

What hope can these people have? Let me tell you about some good news stories. The soup kitchen is linked to several rehabilitation centres run by Messianic Jewish believers. If people respond and want help, a key worker will drive them, that evening, to one of the centres. If a space can be found.

We visited one of these centres in Haifa. Led by an inspirational man called Michael. 15 years ago Michael had been on the streets himself, when one day a Messianic believer had told him that his life did not have to end this way. That there was hope, and that a man called Yeshua had plans for his life. Michael responded to this invitation, and within 6 years his life was so transformed that he actually took on the leadership of the whole project. He is now married with 2 beautiful children.

Michael's words to us were: 'God changed my life, gave me another chance. Now I give my life to help others discover that same hope'. They started their ministry in the parks and on the beaches until a very kind offer of an old monastery came along. 120 years old, it needed major work, but now they have a ministry centre. This includes a reception unit called 'The buffer zone' for those who come in off the street to get dried out. They help them with life skills, and to find work, then there is communal living on site, with daily worship, work and prayer.

But here is the amazing part: In the years that Michael has been leading this project they have seen over 190 weddings amongst people who once lived on the streets, and around 300 children born to these transformed lives. They have a radical discipleship programme which puts these individuals through a four-month ministry and training programme, teaching Biblical living and skills for life. Then these individuals are put into ministry in one of the 30+ congregations that they have planted over the last 9 years. I've never seen something quite so radical, from living on the streets, dependant on drugs or alcohol, within a year leading in a local congregation and involved in ministering to others on the streets of Israel's cities – bringing the message of hope in Yeshua.

This truly is a 'Life from the dead' ministry. The Lord said to Ezekiel, 'Can these bones live?', when the Spirit of God breathes into them the answer is yes.

It was a great privilege to be able to visit and serve these guys who do this every day. It's a ministry which is truly blessing Israel. There is a danger that in the near future they may lose their premises to the development of nice houses. Michael is quite philosophical about it. 'We will just go back to the beaches, we did the work there before, we can do it again'. They have a building fund and are praying that that will grow sufficiently for them to be able to get a premises, for their ministry centre and also for their growing number of young people and children.

Their next generation are the ones to watch. We at Maoz believe that there will be a generation of Israeli born, Hebrew speaking young people who will transform their nation for Yeshua. This might just be the one. If you wish to help this ministry you can do so by contacting the Maoz office on 01732 886441 or [uk@maozisrael.org](mailto:uk@maozisrael.org).