

GALTRONICS: A CASE STUDY IN ISRAEL

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We were enjoying life to the fullest in the beautiful Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. Living in the lovely home Ken had built onto the Placerville Bible Book Store allowed Margie to do Christian ministry while staying at home with our two young children. Ken, an engineer with Aerojet General, served as Sunday school superintendent and youth leader at Calvary Bible Church. Fishing, water sports, and outdoor living filled our extra hours.

CONCERN FOR ISRAEL

Yet a challenge by a visiting missionary was the catalyst that prompted us to follow the Lord wherever he would lead. The “wherever” was first to Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon, where we studied for five years. During this time we began to feel a special concern for Israel. The call became so real that our Christmas letter of 1968 told our friends and family that we were going to Israel after graduation, even though we did not know how. Israel had not accepted missionary visas for two decades.

Just before graduation, Ken received an offer from Motorola to work in Israel for three years doing research and development for new products. After a time of deep soul-searching, we saw the world of business as an open door to Israel. Over the next three years, the Lord confirmed our call with countless opportunities to share the gospel in the marketplace. We began to ask, “If this could take place with one believer in a secular company, what would happen if there was a ‘Christian’ company filled with believers?” Five years later, this simple vision brought forth a company known as Galtronics.

FIRM FOUNDATIONS

Over those five years, Ken continued to work for Motorola in Florida while preparing to launch a small company, with the intent of moving it to Israel. Ken noted a lack of manufacturers of two-way antennas in Israel. With the approval of Motorola, Ken began to develop and produce UHF-VHF antennas. He also launched his new enterprise. The employees were Christians with a desire to bless Israel.

After resigning from Motorola, Ken approached the Israeli Consulate in Atlanta about the possibility of relocating in Israel. During the presentation, Ken told Israeli officials about the employees’ faith in Jesus as Messiah and their desire to bless and help the emerging nation by providing employment and exporting product. Two hours into the presentation, the consulate director said, “I am not so concerned about your Christian involvement as I am about our need to strengthen our economy by establishing new businesses within Israel. We will welcome and assist you in Israel.”

The Crowell family returned to Israel in November 1977 and settled in Tiberias, a city in Galilee that needed industry. Many people assume that the *Gal* in Galtronics stands for the Galilee region where we work. However, there is a much deeper meaning. *Gal* is the Hebrew word for “wave/roll,” as in “to wave/roll over your trust onto” or to “commit oneself.” Psalm 37:5 says, “Commit thy way unto the Lord [*Gal L’Adonai*]; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (KJV). This is a moment-by-moment waving or committing all onto the Lord.

The government appointed an officer from the Investment Authority to help establish the new company. He introduced Ken to each government office in order to cut the usual red tape new ventures routinely encountered in the process of obtaining “Government Approved” status. This man became a good friend for many years. The mayor of Tiberias helped us secure a suitable manufacturing building. Within eight months, Galtronics became a “Government Approved Enterprise,” a feat that normally took three years.

OPPOSITION GROWS

After the initial warm welcome, however, opposition began to grow. A militant Jewish group known as Yad L’Achim, known for its hatred of all “missionaries,” started spreading lies about Galtronics using posters, newspaper articles, and so on. Their attempts to discredit us would fill a book, but we thank the Lord for his protection and faithfulness. Under the Lord’s guidance, a church, called Peniel Fellowship, began. The figurative stones of persecution strengthened and matured the group. Beginning with seven people, Peniel grew alongside Galtronics. Today it is a thriving fellowship of more than 250 members.

Overcoming the opposition took several years. We accomplished this slowly by becoming known personally in the city, entering into the local sports competitions (including winning the basketball tournament), and daily living out our faith in a non-threatening manner.

LIVING OUT OUR PRINCIPLES

In 1978, we set forth the threefold purpose of Galtronics:

1. To establish a witness in areas where there is none, and to support the building of the local church.
2. To provide work for believers who cannot hold steady employment because of their faith, and to provide for an open witness, one to one, in a natural work environment.
3. To bless the nation of Israel by exporting high quality “Made in Israel” products, which will result in a strengthened economy.

We fully understood from the beginning that the business must be self-supporting and profitable. The government expected Galtronics to provide employment and export product to bring dollars into the country. Not only have we been able to do so, the prime minister’s office and members of the Knesset gave Galtronics the nation’s highest

industrial award, the Praz Kaplan. The national newspapers carried headlines stating that this award was given “to Galtronics for blessing the Nation of Israel.”

We started a summer volunteer program in 1981. The program, which continued for ten years, offered students from LeTourneau University an opportunity to use their professional training to be tentmakers in Israel. Students from John Brown University also came to share their talents and faith on a daily basis. Some of these young people have returned to Galtronics, have married, and have begun their own families in the land. Our vision has expanded to include the following companies:

Galadon (1985): Believers distribute communion juice from Israel to bless the church worldwide.

Galcom (1987): This business manufactures radios tuned to specific Christian radio stations for missions use around the world.

Gal Group (1987): This is our administrative arm; it provides the other businesses with expertise in management, government interface, and marketing.

Galilee Experience (1990): This is a multimedia theater for tourists and Israelis. It includes a gift shop, an art gallery, and a cafe overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The presentation, thirty-four minutes long, covers 4,000 years of Galilean history, focusing on those who have shaped it the most—from Abraham to Jesus to Moshe Dayan.

Galilee of the Nations Music (1999): This venture provides music from Israel. It has become the largest producer of messianic music in the world. It pays royalties to local believing musicians, enabling them to support their families and ministries.

MegaVoice (reestablished 2000): This provides audio products with life-giving messages.

During Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the customers of Galtronics requested a backup production facility. We expanded with factories in Scotland and China. These moves gave our company international status, with 700 employees worldwide. By 1998 the company had reached a value of \$70 million.

NEW CHALLENGES

Several Christian advisors thought we should sell shares in the company and use the money to start other industries. After much thought and prayer, however, we decided not to enter into an initial public offering, as this would distract us from our original tentmaking purposes. Through the years we have had many offers from secular companies to buy Galtronics. However, we knew that the vision to bless Israel would not continue under new ownership, so we have chosen not to join in any such ventures.

When we needed more capital to grow, we accepted a group of Christian investors. But over two years of trying to make this arrangement work, we could not overcome some basic philosophical differences. The investors wanted to make the business profitable as quickly as possible. Then the company would distribute the profits through shareholders, who in turn would give to charitable organizations. Our vision, as always, is to run a kingdom business on biblical principles. The business helps develop tentmaking enterprises to support local believers.

Neither vision was any more right than the other, but they were incompatible. So both sides reached an amicable agreement to discontinue the second round of investment. We are currently reestablishing the business as a tentmaking ministry that remains in Israel, doing business according to our original vision.