



Isack Kleimanis and family.

Photo courtesy of Andris Pešelis.

Kleimanis, Isack (Izaak) (1924–2007)

ANDRIS PEŠELIS

Andris Pešelis, M.A., is a pastor in the Latvian Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He holds a B.A. in religion from Griggs University, an M.A. in geography from the University of Latvia, and an M.A. in leadership from Andrews University. He is the author of a book on the history of the Adventist Church in Latvia and many articles in the Latvian Conference publications.

Isack (Izaak) Kleimanis was one of the most respected pastors in the Latvian Conference and in the territory of the former USSR.

Early Years

Isack Kleimanis was born January 27, 1924, in the city of Riga. His parents, Lamech and Esther Kleimanis, were shopkeepers. The name “Kleimanis” means they are descendants of the Israelite priesthood!¹ His parents were only moderately religious, but they observed Jewish traditions and the Sabbath.

The Holocaust

In 1941 the German Army entered the city of Riga and immediately began persecution of the Jews. Unsurprisingly, the Latvian policemen started carrying out executions of adult Jewish males in a forest near Riga. The policemen entered all Jewish homes and took away all adult Jewish males. Isack’s mother asked the policemen if they were going to take a 14-year-old boy too. Apparently, Isack was 17 but his mother said he was 14. Since some of the policemen were young adults, they asked for his passport, but his mother gave them Isack’s school certificate. On the certificate was the date of his birth—1924. After looking at his certificate, they let Isack alone. All other Jewish males were abducted and killed.

Thereafter, Isack was employed on a farm near Riga. This farm catered for the German army, especially in food provisions. As he worked the image of the deaths of his family members could not leave his mind. This was detailed in his diary.² On the farm where Isack worked there were few guards because the Germans believed the workers could not escape. Isack used this opportunity, along with his friend Benno, to escape to Riga. Although they knew some people in Riga, they needed to stay indoors and hide. However, this was not successful. Finally, Isack’s babysitter helped them hide at the apartment of two Seventh-day Adventist sisters—Eugenia and Katrin Apoga.

One day the policemen of Riga caught his friend Benno on the street. The Adventist sisters hid not only Isack, but also a four-year-old Jewish boy.³ This was a very dangerous time, and many times they were close to exposure since the police regularly checked houses and flats for documents of the residents in Riga. During this time Isack had an opportunity to know more about Jesus Christ. He read Adventist literature and learned much about the Christian lifestyle. He also spent time listening to their prayers. He was in hiding for 42 months.

Marriage and Ministry

During the war all of Isack’s family members and relatives were killed. After the war, in 1945, he enrolled in the Naval school of Riga. Isack had no friends from former days, but he found new ones in the Adventist church. In 1949 Isack was baptized.

In 1953 he married Lidija Meshkovska (Meškovska). They had a son and daughter Daniel and Vera. In 1955 Isack was called to ministry as a licensed pastor. He assisted in restoring the church in the city of Pskov, Russia. Kleimanis was ordained as a pastor in Belarus.

During this time his activities were monitored by the state security service who decided to take his children away because the family observed the Sabbath and the children didn't go to school on Saturday. The plan of the Soviet administration failed, but they had another plan. In 1962 they decided to close the Adventist church in Daugavpils where Kleimanis was a pastor. They also suspended his pastoral license.

As a result, he couldn't find any employment in Daugavpils. In addition, the state authorities made sure that if he got a job, he must work on Sabbath. Whenever he found a job that didn't require work on Sabbath, the authorities demanded that his employers fire him. They wanted him to be imprisoned. If Kleimanis didn't have a job, he could be sent to court and imprisoned because the state demanded all employable citizens to work and those who did not work were sent to prison.

Fortunately, he found a job as a resin gatherer in the forest. There he met other Adventists who were in the same situation. These brothers now had the Sabbath day free, and God blessed their work with a rich harvest of resin.

Later Years

Six years later, in 1968, Kleimanis got his license restored and started pastoral ministry again. He served as a pastor in many Latvian churches until his retirement in 1984. For a couple of years, he taught Hebrew at Zaoksky Theological Seminary in Russia. Then he served as a counselor in a Christian school in Riga. Because he survived the Holocaust, he was regularly invited to speak in different meetings and to different audiences, even to the Queen of England when she visited Riga. Kleimanis frequently wrote articles for Adventist newspapers and magazines. He died in 2007.

Contribution

Miraculous survival during the Holocaust, knowledge of the Bible and Jewish culture, and tenderness and meekness in relationships made Isack Kleimanis one of the most respected and loved pastors in the Latvian Conference and in the territory of the former USSR. His steadfastness and loyalty to Christ were special among survivors of the Holocaust.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Among the Jews there is a tradition that if the first letter in the family name is a letter "L" this means they are descendants of Levites, if it is a letter "K" they are descendants of priest Aaron.
2. Apparently, the executioner shot his sister together with her baby with one bullet.
3. Following Proverbs 24:11, they understood this as a command from God.

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