

**News and Current Events :: Israel recognizes homosexual couples**

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Same-sex couples in Israel will now have many of the same rights as heterosexual spouses according to a decision today by the Jewish State's attorney general which drew fire from many rabbis who warned Israel risked becoming another Sodom and Gomorrah.

In a precedent-setting directive, Israel's Attorney General Menachem Mazuz decided not to appeal a district court decision in Nazareth recognizing a same-sex couple in a recent inheritance ruling, indicating homosexual couples have the same rights in matters of property, taxation and inheritance as common law spouses.

Mazuz's decision reverses the previous attorney general Elyakim Rubinstein's decision not to recognize same-sex couples, although homosexuality has been legal in Israel since 1988.

The decision not only equalizes homosexual couples in matters of taxation and real estate, but dictates they will also be able to transfer gifts between them without paying taxes.

Haaretz quoted an unnamed source close to Mazuz as saying, "There must be distinctions made between various types of property, with an emphasis on pragmatism and flexibility, in the spirit of the times and the changing reality as well as personal status, which requires a more cautious approach and is usually a matter for the legislature."

Moshe Gorli, a legal reporter for Maariv, said the courts and the Knesset are already preparing the groundwork in light of Mazuz's reversal.

"The State of Israel will stop formally fighting against the efforts of same-sex couples to institutionalize their relationship. I think this is an honorable sign as to how far society and the state have come over the years," Gorli told the Jerusalem Post.

Knesset member Roman Bronfman said the attorney general's decision was "a milestone in the struggle of the gay community for equal rights and an expansion of the concept of the nuclear family."

But the Orthodox community was not pleased. Some rabbis warned that Israel risked becoming the next Sodom and Gomorrah. According to many, God destroyed the biblical cities because of their rampant homosexuality.

David Batzri, a prominent Israeli rabbi, said the ruling will bring God's vengeance and possibly a great flood upon Israel. "There were such laws in Sodom," his son, Rabbi Yitzhak Batzri, told Army Radio in his father's name. "The Torah, our book of laws, says that such things are sacrilegious," he said. "To make this permissible and positive ... is very grave. Instead we need to help these people to come out of this."