

The Chosen People

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The Jewish People of Latin America

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The Jewish People of Latin America

500 Years of History

This issue of The Chosen People newsletter is dedicated to the Jewish people of Latin America—a segment of the Jewish world that goes virtually unnoticed by most North Americans. Yet, more than fifty years before the first Jewish settlers arrived on the shores of Manhattan Island in 1654, there were already Jewish people in the Southern Hemisphere.

As President of Chosen People Ministries, I spend quite a bit of time praying about how to reach Jewish people in every nation of the world. But I ought to tell you that I have something of a personal stake in Latin America. My wife, Zhava, was born in Argentina, and I have had a special burden for many years for the Jewish people in the Southern Hemisphere.

These Latin American Jewish communities have a long and illustrious history. The story of their migration and settlement is similar to that of many other Jewish groups. It contains the familiar elements of persecution, flight and the search for safe haven that have characterized Jewish history throughout the ages.

The Jewish People Arrive

Today, the Jews of Latin America reside mainly in Argentina (250,000) and Brazil (130,000).

Where did they come from, and when did they arrive? The answers to these questions are to be found on another continent altogether: Europe.



At the end of the fifteenth century, the Inquisition was in full force in Spain and Portugal. Rather than submit to forcible conversion, some Jewish people chose to suffer torture and death. Others agreed to renounce their Jewish identity.

Those who converted were called Marranos or Conversos. Some, though publicly “converted,” still risked capture and death by continuing secretly to practice Judaism. Others who had agreed to give up Judaism seem to have genuinely put it aside to live—outwardly at least—as Christians.

The first Jewish people to arrive in South America around the turn of the 16th century were Sephardic (Hebrew for Spanish) Jews who were fleeing the Iberian Peninsula. They settled mainly in Argentina and Brazil, and these first Latin American “Jewish pilgrims” set the pattern for subsequent immigrants. Today the Jewish population in Latin America stands somewhere around 400,000 and is still to be found in these two countries.

The Jews of Argentina

In Argentina, this first wave of Jewish immigrants was soon swallowed up in the already existing

SOUTH GEORGIA (FALKLANDS/MALVINAS)

Renewed persecution in

Brazil sends many Jews to New York City



culture. However, the "Latin American connection" was established. When Argentina became independent from Spain in 1810, one of the first acts of Bernardino Rivadavia, Argentina's first president, was to end the Inquisition. Argentina then became a destination of choice for Jewish immigrants from Western Europe in the mid-1800s.

This trend continued into the late 19th century and beyond as Argentina's willingness to accept immigrants led to the arrival of Russian and Eastern European Jews who were seeking to escape persecution and to better their lives. As the population increased, Jewish social institutions grew as well. The Jewish community formed synagogues and schools, along with newspapers and even a Yiddish theater in Buenos Aires.

However, the Jewish community in Argentina has seen its share of trouble. Political unrest and social upheaval throughout the decades have spawned intense periods of anti-Semitism. In recent years, Argentina's Jewish community has been the focus of terrorist attacks. In April of 1992, the Israeli Embassy was bombed, killing 32 people. In 1994, Zhava and I were in Argentina when the Israelite Mutual Aid Association headquarters in Buenos Aires was bombed, killing more than 100 people and wounding at least 200 others.

In spite of these difficulties, the Jewish community has played an important part in the economic and cultural life of Argentina. However, change is once more on the horizon.



Recent economic troubles have led to a new immigrant population—Argentine Jews departing to begin a new life in Israel. Now, 500 years after the Inquisition, these Jewish people are finally coming home.

The Jews of Brazil

Jewish history in Brazil dates back to 1500, when refugees from the Inquisition settled in Brazil. By the early 1600s, Brazil had acquired a population of about 50,000 Europeans—some of them descended from the Conversos. In 1624, part of northern Brazil came under Dutch rule. This was good news for the Jewish community, for the Dutch were sympathetic to the Jewish people and allowed Jewish immigration to continue.

The Jews in northern Brazil became established members of society. They prospered economically and built synagogues and schools. Some of the Jewish people then began to strike out in other directions. Some headed south, where they seem to have been absorbed into the native population. One recent startling development is the discovery of a tribal group in southern Brazil that keeps the custom of lighting candles on Friday night and avoiding the consumption of pork!

Things took a turn for the worse when the Portuguese reasserted their authority over the Dutch in 1654. Under renewed persecution, some Jewish people chose to flee. One group of escapees made their way to another Dutch town, New Amsterdam, which in time became New York City.

The 1920s saw a spike in Jewish immigration as about 30,000 Western European Jews came to Brazil. The following decade added another 17,500. As in many other places, the



Jewish community prospered or suffered depending on the disposition of the government in power. A new constitution in 1945 helped secure the rights of Jewish citizens, and in 1947, Brazil cast its vote in the UN for the creation of a Jewish state. Today, the Jewish community in Brazil boasts a full spectrum of social and religious institutions.

New Fields in Latin America

Over the years, Chosen People Ministries' evangelistic outreach has touched virtually every Jewish community in South America. Now the work in Latin America continues, with outreach among the Jewish people of Argentina and Mexico, and volunteer chapters throughout Latin America. We also hope to open a new work in Brazil. Please pray that we will find the right person to initiate this ministry.

The Jewish people of Latin America may seem a world away from us, but God has not lost sight of them, and neither should we. Although they dwell far from their roots, God has declared that *"He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth"* (Isaiah 11:12).

Your brother in the Messiah,

Mitch
Mitch



Dr. Mitch Glaser
President

Sources consulted:
Jewish Virtual Library www.us-israel.org
World Jewish Congress www.wjc.org.il



Elias and Rosa Habif – Seasoned Servants of Messiah in Mexico City



The Jewish people of Mexico share much of the same history as their brethren in South America. After the conquest of the Aztecs in 1521, a number of Jewish Conversos who had been forced to adopt Christianity—at least outwardly—immigrated to New Spain or Mexico, as it was later named. Today Mexico has a Jewish population of over 40,000. They are mostly a mixture of Sephardic (Spanish) and

Ashkenazic (European) Jews whose forebears were immigrants who arrived between the late 19th century and the eve of World War II. The overwhelming majority of them live in Mexico City, where Elias and Rosa Habif have begun their ministry.

Equipped for Ministry

Elias and Rosa Habif can truly be said to have been ordained through Chosen People Ministries for the very special task of reaching the Jewish people of Mexico.

Having grown up in a Conservative Sephardic Jewish family, Elias attended Hebrew school and practiced Judaism. In 1983, at a Chosen People Ministries meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina, he was moved to receive Jesus as Messiah. There he met Rosa, who would become his wife. They immediately began to serve as volunteers in the ministry.

Late in 1988, the Habifs were ordained into the ministry. They began to serve full time the following year,

beginning a ten-year period during which they worked to develop the ministry in Argentina and several South American countries. The Lord has blessed their work and has opened many doors for them to bring the message of salvation to the Jewish people of Latin America. Over the years, they have seen many Jewish people receive Messiah and have also ministered to many Gentiles. In addition, they've been instrumental in helping the churches understand the importance and the urgency of bringing the Good News to the Chosen People.

Expanding Horizons

Through the encouragement of Chosen People Ministries and the International Messianic Jewish Alliance, the Habifs began to pray about starting a Messianic Jewish Center somewhere in Latin America. The Lord answered their prayers by directing them to Mexico City, where they arrived in October 2000.

The work began with a small group of three women, two of whom were Messianic Jews. They met informally at first in the Habifs' dining room. They named this small fellowship *Kehilat ha Derech*—Congregation "The Way." Little by little, by the grace of God, the group has grown and now has a membership of 50 people.

Late in 2002, the Habifs started another Messianic congregation in Pachuca City, approximately 50 miles from Mexico City. There the fellowship numbers 30 people. Both synagogues consist of Messianic Jews and Gentiles who love our people. They have already welcomed many Jewish seekers who come and hear the Good News of Messiah Yeshua. They have also developed many relationships with non-believing Jewish people for whom they pray and whom they continue to invite to meetings.

The Habifs are a living example of the Apostle Paul's great exhortation: "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). ✧



José Abadi – From Resentment to Redemption

I was born into a traditional, Sephardic Jewish family in South America with roots in Egypt. As a child, I would go to synagogue on the High Holy Days, but I did not pursue Jewish studies.

Anti-Semitism grew worse during World War II, and my resentment of everything Christian increased. Although I didn't hide being Jewish, I did not reveal it to just anyone.

One day, I met a beautiful young woman named Amanda. We dated, but for a long time I hid my Jewish background from her. As our friendship grew, I agonized about hiding the truth.

Finally, I could stand it no longer. I confessed my Jewish identity to her, thinking that it would end our relationship. To my surprise, she told me that due to her faith, she loved God's Chosen People. In an instant, my sadness was transformed into enormous joy. Not long after that, I became a follower of Messiah.

Today, I have a beautiful family with my wife, Amanda, my two sons and their wives, who are all believers.

In 1979, I became the Chairman of the Board of Chosen People Ministries in Argentina, and I have served on the Board up to the present. By God's grace, I have been a part of what the Lord has been doing through Chosen People Ministries in Argentina and throughout South America. ✧





Top left: *Elias and Rosa Habif*; Left: *Daniel Tino* (a member of our Board of Directors in Argentina), *Ricardo Chemi*, and *José Abadi*

Ricardo Chemi— Drawn to Messiah

As a child, I was exposed to all the Jewish festivals due to the influence of my father's observant family. However, when I was nine years old, I saw the film *King of Kings* on television. After watching this film, I asked, "Who was this Jesus and why didn't we accept him as the Messiah?" No one seemed to be able to answer my question.

My deep desire to know Him led me on a search that ended with a dream. In my dream, Abraham and Moses introduced me to the Messiah. He was a shining light, and I recognized that it was Yeshua, Jesus. But

I told myself, "This is simply a dream." However, I began to read the New Testament. I was 14 years old.

I asked the Lord to help me discover the truth about Yeshua. When I finally came to faith through the

testimony of a friend, I felt a complete and overwhelming peace come over me.

During my studies at the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary, I was led to contact Chosen People Ministries in Argentina. Later, I completed my studies at the International Baptist Theological Seminary.

Now, as the leader of Chosen People Ministries' congregation in Buenos Aires, I have the great privilege of showing my people that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. ✠



Argentina – Vibrant Outpost of Messianic Ministry

Chosen People Ministries has been active in reaching the Jewish people of South America since the early 1940s. The work there was founded by Emanuel Lichtenstein, who served with the Mission in Nazi-occupied Europe and barely escaped to Buenos Aires. He began by ministering to other Jewish refugees. In the 1960s, the leadership torch was passed on to Victor Sedaca, an Argentine Jewish believer who emphasized ministry to the Sephardic Jewish Argentines. Roberto Passo joined the Mission in 1982 and served for twenty years. Under his tenure, the work continued to expand its sphere of influence.

A Center of Activity

Today in Buenos Aires, activities are coordinated through Chosen People Ministries' Messianic Center, which is blessed by the presence of Betsy Leon. Raised in a believing home in Lima, Peru, she came to Argentina in 1992 in order to study at the Baptist Seminary.

In March 1993, she began to serve the Mission in Buenos Aires. Her love for the Jewish people has kept pace with her growing responsibilities. She serves as secretary, manages administration and finances, answers correspondence and coordinates church ministries.

Betsy also attends Chosen People Ministries' congregation, leads the teenagers' group and serves on the worship team.

A Magnet for Messiah

The ministry team at Beth Sar Shalom has seen encouraging results in recent months, including more new Jewish visitors at services. There has also been a significant increase in the interest of church leaders to know the Jewish roots of their Christian faith. In addition, more members of the congregation have been trained as leaders.

New leadership has resulted in continued effective ministry with children, teenagers and young adults. The congregation also carries on a social program, including spiritual counseling in a well known local hospital.

Volunteer Outreach Programs

Where would Chosen People Ministries' global outreach be without dedicated volunteer workers? Volunteers throughout Latin America have certainly made a real difference for Messiah. Guided by a renewed vision to present Jesus as the Messiah in a Jewish context, the Mission's volunteer groups have sensed a growing interest in the Gospel among members of local Jewish communities.

Volunteer workers have branched out from Buenos Aires to bring special Gospel-related activities on a regular basis to other cities in Argentina and throughout Latin America. The volunteers are from different backgrounds, but they share a deep love for Israel and a spiritual call to reach the Jewish people with the message of Jesus as the Messiah.

Training Tomorrow's Leaders

Chosen People's Messianic Seminary in Argentina has been offering coursework in Messianic studies for about twelve years. Under the leadership of Ricardo Chemi, the congregational leader, additional teachers have been trained, and the number of courses has been increased. This year, 38 students are studying subjects that include the Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament studies and Jewish history and culture.

Chosen People Ministries in Latin America has entered a new and exciting chapter of outreach ministry to the Jewish people. Keep watching *The Chosen People* newsletter for updates about this vibrant outpost of the Jewish world. ✠



See the Through Jewish Eyes Bible

by Daniel Goldberg, Th.D., D.D.



The Throne Room – The Heart of Heaven in Revelation Chapter 4

The throne room is the heart of heaven, and worship is the main occupation of those in heaven. The fourth and fifth chapters in Revelation represent the greatest worship chapters in the entire Bible.

Revelation 4 begins the third division of the book—"the things which will take

place after this" (Rev. 1:19). Here John is transported to the very heart of heaven (4:1,2).

Revelation 4 shows us six main features of heaven's throne room.

ALMIGHTY GOD SITS ON THE THRONE (4:2,3)

The vision of God sitting on a throne is similar to that which Isaiah saw (Is. 6:1). The throne is "set" in heaven, far above all the petty struggles on earth. The throne tells of God's sovereign rule over the universe and His entire creation. The eternal God is supreme (Dan. 4:35).

A RAINBOW ENCIRCLES THE THRONE (4:3)

The rainbow is associated with the very presence of God and is a reminder of God's covenant with His creation established after the Flood (Gen. 9:13-16). Ezekiel associates the

rainbow with the glory of God (Eze. 1:28; See Rev. 10:1).

TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS SURROUND THE THRONE (4:4)

The elders are sitting on thrones, clothed in white raiment and having crowns of gold. The crowns they wear are victors' crowns (*stephanos* in Greek), indicating a reward for victory accomplished (1 Cor. 9:25). Whether the elders are representative of church elders or Israel or both is speculative, since their identity is not disclosed.

SOUNDS OF JUDGMENT COME FROM THE THRONE (4:5)

With the volume turned up, we hear rumblings, peals of thunder and flashes of lightning similar to the scene at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 20:18). These

sounds from God's throne indicate to John that judgment is forthcoming. Revelation Chapters 6-19 contain the Tribulation judgments.

LAMPS AND A SEA OF GLASS ARE BEFORE THE THRONE (5b-6a)

Seven lamps of fire are seen burning before the throne (1:4, 3:1). Here is a representation of the Holy Spirit in all His fullness and perfection. At the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was visible as a dove, while on the Day of Pentecost there appeared "divided tongues, as of fire" (Acts 2:3). The sea of glass before the throne may be an anti-type of the laver in the tabernacle (Ex. 30:18-21) and the Sea in the temple (2 Chron. 4:2-6) used by the priests for cleansing. In Revelation, we see a special sanctuary of God (11:19) while in eternity no temple exists (Rev. 21:22).

ALL WORSHIP IS DIRECTED TOWARD THE THRONE (4:8-11)

John listens to the exaltation of God's holiness by both the living creatures and the twenty-four elders in a way that is similar to what Isaiah heard (Is. 6:3). God is thrice holy (קדוש *qadosh* in Hebrew) and holiness is His foremost attribute, because it pervades all the other attributes of God.

REVELATION FOR TODAY

The theme of the worship hymn in chapter 4 is that God is the Creator (4:11). Recognizing the Creator is the first step toward trust in the Redeemer (Acts 14:8-18). In witnessing for our Messiah to Jewish people and others, it helps to remember that our sovereign Creator is enthroned in heaven and is there to help us lead others to the truth of Messiah's redemption. ✪

IN MONTREAL, ISRAELI COMES TO FAITH

In Montreal, one of the congregation's members brought a young Israeli man to visit a service where congregational leader Percy Johnson spoke about prophecy and Israel. The young man came up to Percy afterwards, saying that he had agreed with what Percy said and felt very much at home in the congregation. He continued attending, and over the next few weeks, he came closer to belief in Messiah. After seeing a play at a local church about the final hours of Jesus, he wept as he watched the portrayal of Messiah's sacrifice. The Israeli man was moved to receive the Lord, and the Montreal congregation is thrilled to welcome a new brother into the family of God.

MEETING MESSIAH IN MISSOURI

Chosen People Ministries' Michael Cohen, who is based in Chicago, ministered some weeks ago in a church in a small town in Missouri. He was surprised to meet a Reform Jewish woman who had accompanied her friend to the service. Michael spoke with her about his own Jewish background. After the service, they continued the conversation, and Michael shared the Gospel with her. It was evident that she was affected by Michael's words, and she expressed a desire to know the Lord. God opened her heart and she prayed with Michael to receive the Messiah. Later, when Michael followed up, he discovered that she was growing in her faith and attending a fellowship.



FAITH DECISION FOR ISRAELI DOWN UNDER

Barry Buirski, who serves with *Celebrate Messiah*, Chosen People Ministries' partner in Australia, was traveling recently in New South Wales. There, he had the opportunity to join with Kyle Sutton in visiting an Israeli-born Jewish man who had expressed openness to the Lord. Kyle had been witnessing to Mr. L. and thought it would be good for him to meet a Jewish believer. Barry and Kyle had the privilege of leading Mr. L. to faith in Yeshua. Please pray that this new believer will grow in his faith.

MY JERUSALEM GAINS INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

My Jerusalem, Chosen People Ministries' evangelistic magazine in Russian, was recently included in an international book fair held in Jerusalem. The fair attracted a large crowd and provided an almost unheard-of opportunity for mass evangelism, and a chance to become widely known by Israelis and participants of many nationalities. Pray that the Lord will use this wonderful publication throughout the world to draw many to Messiah.



DRAMA MINISTRY LEADS TO SALVATION DECISION

Recently, staff member Alan Shore presented *A Chosen Vessel*, a one-man drama on the life of the Apostle Paul, at a large Messianic congregation in New Jersey. The gathering of about 400 people was deeply moved. When the congregational leader followed up with an invitation to receive the Lord, at least one person responded and came to faith in Messiah.

GERMANY CONFERENCE REAPS HARVEST FOR MESSIAH

Vladimir Pikman, who directs Chosen People Ministries' outreach work in Germany, reports good news. There were fifteen faith decisions, mostly by Jewish seekers, at a recent Messianic conference in central Germany that was organized by Chosen People Ministries and two other evangelistic groups. The congregation in Berlin rented a bus to attend, and during the journey, another Jewish woman became a believer—right there on the bus! She is now in discipleship classes, and after attending one of the classes, her husband also became a believer.



Messianic Resources

Fast Facts on the Middle East Conflict

Randall Price, the well-known author on Middle East current events and Biblical prophecy, tackles tough questions about Israel and the Arab world. In *Fast Facts on the Middle East Conflict*, he offers a comprehensive overview of the situation and explores such issues as America's involvement and the role of the media. The book includes maps, charts and other helpful reference aids.

book 3005

price \$10.95*

The Jewish Art Calendar

The Chosen People Ministries Jewish Art Calendar is filled with Messianic prophecies and fascinating insights into the Jewish holidays. This is the perfect gift to give your Jewish friend. Order one for your own home, too, and experience the beauty of the Jewish holidays throughout the year. The calendar goes from September 2003 through August 2004.

calendar 5005

price \$12.95*

Messianic Praise

Music from Messianic artists weaves the purity of worship into the fabric of praise. You've just got to hear it! With Paul Wilbur.

cassette 4030

price \$11.95*

CD 4029

price \$16.95*

The Shofar

The ram's horn has sounded through the centuries as a call to repentance and for a gathering of God's people. Now you can own this beautiful Shofar from Israel to display or to use as a reminder of Messiah's presence and power. Shofars also make wonderful gifts. Because each Shofar is unique, yours may vary slightly in size and shape from the one shown here.

shofar 5020

price \$36.95*



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The Chosen People Newsletter

Chosen People Ministries has been taking the love of the Messiah to Jewish people worldwide since 1894.

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Please remember Chosen People Ministries in your will. "I will bless those who bless you." (Genesis 12:7)