

# The 4<sup>th</sup> Russian Messianic Jewish Leaders Conference

Warsaw, Poland

September 14-18, 2016

**A Report by Dr. Mitch Glaser, president of Chosen People Ministries**

## **Introduction**

I recently attended the fourth Russian Messianic Jewish Leaders in Warsaw, Poland. This monumental event was sponsored by Chosen People Ministries and was attended by 150 leaders of Russian-speaking Messianic congregations and ministries from around the globe. The previous conferences were held in Berlin, Jerusalem and Kiev.

Each city was chosen for its importance to Jewish life and history. Berlin was chosen because of the Nazi-initiated effort to destroy the Jewish population; Jerusalem, for obvious reasons as it has always been the capital of Jewish life and spirituality. It is also a reminder of God's faithfulness to the Jewish people. There are now more Russian-speaking Jewish people living in Israel than all the nations of the former Soviet Union (FSU) combined! Kiev, at one time, had the largest number of Jewish people in the FSU and was the home of many influential rabbis, scholars and Jewish leaders.

Prior to World War II, Warsaw was the largest Jewish city in the world. Before the Holocaust, Poland itself had three million Jewish people living in its environs. Much of modern Jewish culture and religious thought as we know it today was formed and shaped in Poland – the country that unfortunately lost the greatest number of Jewish people during the Holocaust.

If one was to analyze the movement of the Holy Spirit among Jewish people in the post-Holocaust era it would become immediately clear that the late 1960s through the early 1980s was a season of spectacular spiritual renewal within the Jewish community as thousands upon thousands of Jewish people became followers of Jesus the Messiah during this time. This movement is often paralleled to the way the Spirit of God worked among Jewish people during the Book of Acts!

Some have suggested that the social unrest; the impact of the Vietnam war, the counterculture and race riots sparked the growth of the Jesus movement when many Jewish and Gentile young people became followers of Yeshua the Messiah. The popularity of the film, *Roots* and the desire to connect with a stabilizing heritage consumed many young people. This led to non-Messianic renewal movements within the Jewish community as well. But, those Jewish young people who came to faith in *Yeshua* seemed to rediscover their Jewish identities. The growing importance of the nation of Israel also had an effect on the "Jewish Jesus movement" as well.

There were also a number of young Israelis who became believers in Jesus at that time –

especially post-army travelers looking for truth and the meaning of life. Today, many of those Israelis who found the Lord at that time are the current leaders of the burgeoning Messianic movement in Israel.

Yet, there was one very large group of Jewish people who remained unreached by the Gospel as they were behind the Iron Curtain. There, the message of the Messiah was somewhat inaccessible, except through the Orthodox Church. Which, for many generations, was generally viewed as hostile towards the Jewish people. On a popular level this was certainly true if one was to look at the actions of many Ukrainian and Russian common people who participated in the pogroms of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Additionally, communism attempted to wipe away all ethnic and religious distinctives. Although these attempts were never fully successful, it was quite difficult to be a practicing Jewish person under the various communist regimes.

Things have changed decisively with the fall of the Iron Curtain and break up of the FSU during the time of Perestroika in approximately 1989. From that event forward, more than two million Jewish people left the FSU for Israel primarily, but also the United States, Canada, Germany and Australia. By far the largest group immigrated to Israel under the Law of Return and this movement continues today, especially due to the continued unrest in Eastern Ukraine.

Once again, social unrest opened the door to spiritual renewal, as many Russian speaking Jewish people have become followers of Jesus during the last quarter century. Chosen People Ministries sponsored these conferences and I attended each of them. I remember at the first conference in Germany, when the leaders were introducing themselves and I was listening to their testimonies through translation, that there were only a small minority who became disciples of Jesus before Perestroika. Of course, they did not start their congregations until the early 1990s and afterwards.

While at the conference, each moment was packed with this rich sense of privilege for being able to view the fruit of an authentic movement of the Holy Spirit in a city where the Jewish people were almost completely destroyed. It was an incredibly moving experience.

This movement has grown rapidly in Israel and some say that 60% of the 12,000-15,000 Messianic Jews in Israel today speak Russian as their first language. Now, many of the leaders have planted multiple congregations, received training at various seminaries and Bible schools and have decades of experience as pastors or Messianic rabbis.

Chosen People Ministries now has 30-plus staff members who are Russian-speaking Jewish people on our global staff. Prior to this movement of the Spirit, we had one!

This is an undeniable, true movement of the Holy Spirit among the Jewish people. This is a signpost telling us that we are moving closer to the future redemption of all Israel described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:11-29.

This movement is impacting the worldwide Messianic Jewish community in many ways. A good number of our Russian-speaking Jewish people are contributing so much to our ongoing movement which now numbers into the hundreds of thousands.

The conference attendees listened to lectures, enjoyed various workshops that focused on evangelism, children's work, caring for the elderly and much more. One of the major concerns of the conference was the issue of Jewish identity in the Messiah as Russian Jews. Many had been raised to believe that it was impossible to be Jewish and believe in Yeshua the Messiah! These leaders are now growing in their understanding of what it means to be Jewish.

The differences in how the Russian Messianic Jewish Israelis viewed these issues is quite different than for those who live in the Diaspora and in the nations of the FSU. The Israelis now live in our Jewish homeland and have an easier time figuring out how to express their Jewish identity and pass it along to the next generation. It became clear that though the common language of the attendees was Russian, the Messianic leaders formed three distinct groups; those from Israel, those from the FSU, and those from the West. It was clear that the longer they had been away from the FSU the more their understanding of what it means to be a Jewish follower of Jesus was shaped.

Those still living in the nations of the FSU probably had the least influence of more mainstream Jewish life. Yet they were the most eager to learn more about Jewishness of Jesus. They express their faith in worshipping the Messiah Jesus with Hebrew liturgies. The Russian Israeli Messianic Jews have a more nationalistic identity as Israelis and struggle the least with their Jewish identities.

So many of the Russian speaking Messianic Jewish leaders expressed the sentiment that they were now able to enjoy their traditions and expressions of Jewishness that were previously denied them by the Soviets! This was a driving thought throughout the conference – recapturing what the Soviets attempted to take away. As one of the leaders said, “we were robbed of our Jewish identity and now we have taken it back through knowing Jesus the Messiah.” So many of these believers have endured persecution for the sake of the Gospel. However, they remain unashamed of Yeshua and of their Jewish identities. They tend to wear yarmulkes (skull caps), even in Europe where many Jewish people do not do so for safety reasons as antisemitism is on the rise. .

The Russian Messianic community want to publicly identify as Jews for many reasons. Above all so that they can share the Gospel in a Jewish way to Jewish people. The Israelis also seem to have a great burden to reach the religious Jewish community as well. Those who live in Russia, especially Moscow, are now also trying to continue their ministries and desire religious freedom in light of greater restrictions today. Their heart is to share the Gospel with others freely.

Continued poverty is also an issue in Israel among elderly Russian Holocaust survivors. Chosen People Ministries has a fruitful ministry to these dear people as do many of the other Russian speaking Messianic congregations and ministries. Additionally, the

Messianic Jews in Ukraine are having a difficult time because of the fighting in this dangerous region, which has impacted the Jewish people – especially the elderly Jewish population. Some of the believers and nonbelievers are simply too old to move to Israel and Chosen People Ministries is helping congregations in the area with benevolence funds.

The fellowship and worship times were incredible – especially Friday night and Saturday morning, which is when most of these Messianic congregations usually have their services. Just the fact that Jewish believers in Jesus were gathered in Warsaw was amazing. A gathering of this nature had not taken place in Poland since the Holocaust!

Please continue reading the reports of each day activities and enjoy the pictures and *amateur* videos so that you can somehow touch this great and growing movement of Russian-speaking Jewish followers of Jesus – the Jewish Messiah for all!

### **Thursday Evening: A Celebration of Messianic Unity**

Two messages on unity were delivered with great passion on Wednesday night.

A Messianic Jewish leader from Germany and another from Kiev led the discussion. They compared the blessings of the current movement to that of the Jesus movement of the late 1960s through the early 1980s.

The reasons for disunity were discussed and the steps to overcome these issues became the focus of both messages.

Prayer, better familiarity, and the development of trust was mentioned as being crucial to the future for the unity of the modern Messianic Movement and for a sense of mutual community between the Messianic Jewish believers and the Church in general.

This conference was used as a good example of the type of effort that enhances the unity of the Messianic movement and tempers the possible disunity that potentially could arise from the various positions represented and the now varying countries where the Russian Messianic believers live.

One of the questions asked by a conference participant focused on the need for a *more formal Messianic fellowship*. One of the speakers mentioned that this might be good but is not necessary to fulfill God's bright future for the Messianic movement. There is already a strong variety of efforts to reach Jewish people and provide a broader Messianic fellowship with periodic meetings for leaders and congregants and so it was not felt that this would be a fruitful effort. It seems clear that the Russian Messianic Jews prefer to join already existing global Messianic fellowships and to enrich these groups with their cultural perspective that was somewhat representative to the Jewish experience of many of their grandparents.

The answer by the leader of the very large Kiev congregation stressed the necessity of

finding unity with the “Gentile” congregations. He added that this gives broader and more depth to the unity enjoyed between the Messianic congregations.

A Messianic Jewish leader from Germany and another from Kiev led the discussion. They compared the blessings of the current movement to that of the Jesus movement of the late 1960s through the early 1980s.

The reasons for disunity were discussed and the steps to overcome these issues became the focus of both messages.

Prayer, better familiarity, and the development of trust was mentioned as being crucial to the future for the unity of the modern Messianic Movement and for a sense of mutual community between the Messianic Jewish believers and the Church in general.

The Russian/German leader focused on the testimony that mutual respect and love emphasized with one another can have. It also became clear that this very conference was one of the tools God was using to build this greater unity among Russian-speaking Messianic Jews around the world!

The group felt that this affirmed the sentiments of the Messiah Jesus Himself, who prayed,

*“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.” (John 17:2-21)*

### **Friday Morning:**

In 1928, The International Missionary Council - Christian Approach to the Jews sponsored a conference. This group would eventually merge into the World Council of Churches and they lost their evangelistic emphasis because of the horrors of the Holocaust and growing theological liberalism.

Not since 1928, less than two decades before the Holocaust that annihilated more than six million Jewish people, has there been a gathering of Messianic Jewish believers of the scale that recently took place in Warsaw, Poland.

The first evening provided a time of fellowship. The following day was filled with various teaching seminars covering subjects of great interest to Messianic Jews. The sessions and discussions focused the twin identities of modern Messianic Jews who are linked to both the church and the Jewish community. All of the speakers were Russian-speaking Messianic Jews, hailing from Ukraine, Russia, and the republics of the former Soviet Union (FSU). Currently, they are living in Israel, Germany, the U.S., Canada and many other countries across the globe. Additionally, a sizable majority of the conference participants still live in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and other parts of the FSU.

Today, there are close to 200 Russian Messianic congregations in existence as well as hundreds, if not thousands of Messianic Russian-speaking Jewish followers of Jesus who worship in local evangelical churches and congregations in Israel.

There is great interest among this new Russian Messianic movement in recapturing their Jewish heritage that was threatened during the 70-plus years of communist rule.

### **Topic: Training Messianic Jewish Leaders**

Kirill Polonsky, director of Chosen People Ministries in Moscow, emphasized the need to train followers of Yeshua in holy living and to be of practical help to the body of Messiah. He believed that formal theological education is good but limited in the Russian Messianic Jewish context. As a local pastor, he is more interested in training lay leaders. In his view, formal training – a typical seminary degree, cannot easily adapt to the individual needs of leaders and congregants – especially if they have jobs and ministry responsibilities and families to care for as well. He believes that structured lay training courses brings the information to the student rather than necessitating that the student travel to the theological training institute for their education. This is why he has emphasized seminars, personal mentoring and highly individualized training for Russian Jewish Messianic leaders.

Training for ministry in Israel among Russian Messianic Jews requires a more professional level of training according to the Russian Israeli Messianic leader who directs a training institute in Haifa. The Messianic Jewish movement in Israel has seen tremendous growth and it is said that 60% of the Messianic believers in Israel speak Russian as their first language. The leader from Haifa made the observation that many Russian Jewish believers came to faith in churches of varying theological views and that Messianic Jews who became believers outside of Israel often take on the theological perspective of the groups with whom they were associated with at the time. However, upon immigration to Israel, their Jewishness usually becomes more important to them and they need to gain a better understanding of their Jewish identity and how to serve Yeshua in the midst of an Israeli/Jewish world.

The Haifa Theological Institute provides a non-degree program, which seeks to train leaders who are serving in the Messianic movement. This is a well-organized Messianic Jewish theological training program that is taught primarily in Russian and geared to meet the needs of the growing Israeli Russian Messianic movement.

There is no doubt that the Messianic Russian movement is now entering a stage of growth that requires training for pastors, children's work, outreach ministries, and to generally provide a deeper understanding of the Jewishness of the Gospel and need to integrate the best of the Jewish world with that of historic Christianity. The Russian-speaking Messianic Jewish believers view themselves as part of the Jewish community. Especially in Israel and have a great burden to reach both Russian and Hebrew speakers in Israel. Their children are quickly adapting to life in Israel and the Russian Messianic Jews are now touching the lives of those raised more traditionally Jewish, though they are

not necessarily religious. This new context requires training in Jewish Studies, the Old and New Testaments, as well as in theology and practical ministry.

There are a number of other training programs in Israel as well, including Israel College of the Bible, which has a Russian language program and is a degree-granting program.

### **The Friday Evening Service**

The Evangelical church in downtown Warsaw was filled with more than 300 people and included Russian Messianic Jews and Polish, primarily Gentile evangelical Christians. It was *erev Shabbat*, the evening, which begins the Sabbath. The room was buzzing with expectation and excitement as everyone recognized the historical and monumental importance of this special evening.

The service began with Messianic and traditional Jewish worship music, the lighting of the Sabbath candles, and the Kiddush (the sanctification of the Sabbath which is done through saying special prayers and then eating a piece of special Sabbath bread called *challah* and the drinking of a cup of the fruit of the vine).

A minister of the church, himself a Polish Messianic Jew, led the service, which usually takes place at the church on Friday evenings. However, this evening was extraordinary as it brought together a large group of Messianic Russian Jews and Polish Gentile Christians. It was a wonderful expression of the unity we have in the Messiah. Of course, the cloud of the Holocaust hung overhead reminding us further of the miraculous nature of this gathering. Forgiveness prevailed as faith and fellowship in the Messiah triumphed over possible anger and resentment as most of the Messianic Jews attending this service had relatives who were killed by the Nazis in various concentration camps dotted throughout Poland.

Poland at the time of the Holocaust housed more than three million Jewish people – the largest Jewish population in the world. Warsaw alone had at least a half million Jewish people. The bleak history of the Jewish people in Poland was all the more reason to rejoice. There was a great sentiment that the very nature of the gathering demonstrated that God was faithful and did not allow His chosen people to be fully destroyed, and not only this, but the group meeting in this Warsaw church building all believed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. In and of itself, this was a testimony to God's power and love for His chosen people.

The service was joy filled. The testimony of the Polish Jewish pastor moved the group to tears as he shared his love for his own people. His desire is that Jewish people hear about Yeshua. This pastor has had a great ministry and in the last few years has brought over more than a thousand Israelis, in cooperation with Chosen People Ministries, to give them a break from the intensity of life in Israel – especially since many of those who came on these trips from Israel are elderly and quite a few are Holocaust survivors.

It was an emotionally charged evening for all and before sitting down to a sumptuous Sabbath feast, the president of Chosen People Ministries gave a message and the entirety of this sermon follows.

### **Sermon - Life from the Dead:**

**Dr. Mitch Glaser**

Dear friends. We are all witnesses to a historic moment in the work of God among our Jewish people. For these few days – there are more Messianic Jews gathered together in Warsaw, this great and historic Jewish city, than have gathered together since before the Holocaust.

There was one great conference held in Warsaw in 1927, sponsored by an organization called the International Missionary Council – Christian Approach to the Jews. This same group organized conferences in Budapest, Hungary in 1928 as well as additional conferences in various locales with high concentrations of Jewish people including an important conference in Vienna, Austria 1937. These three conferences were especially important because they predated the murder of six million Jewish people in Europe – and among these there were at least a quarter of a million or more Messianic Jews.

Hitler tried to destroy our people. However, he ultimately failed because of the faithfulness of God. Others have tried to destroy us and they failed as well. This is because God promised to preserve the Jewish people so that one day we would fulfill His plan and purpose for us as a nation to be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:3).

This reminds me of a few verses prophetically penned by Rabbi Shaul in Romans chapter 11 about the future of Israel and the Jewish people. These words of the apostle will gloriously be fulfilled in a future time, but our gathering this week and especially tonight, gives me the assurance, hope and faith to believe that God will indeed fulfill His promises to the Jewish people, including the restoration to the Land of Israel and the turning of Jewish people to the Messiah and His return to establish His kingdom.

The great Rabbi and apostle writes,

*I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (Romans 11:11-15)*

My brothers and sisters, we are evidence of the faithfulness of God and the truthfulness of His word says that one day our Jewish people will turn to Yeshua. When we do, the entire world will experience a corporate resurrection, the lifting of the curse of sin. The

restoration of our planet and the fullness of the promised kingdom of God – with Jerusalem as the capital city and a Jewish King – Yeshua – sitting on His rightful throne is described by the apostle as *life from the dead*.

As sure as we stand before the Lord as part of this momentous conference, I can assure you that the day is coming when God's word will be proven true! Our Jewish people, only a remnant from the followers of Yeshua today, will become a nation of Yeshua-followers tomorrow. And when that happens the world will experience the full blessings promised by God to our forefather Abraham.

We are signposts of His grace pointing to a future and glorious day.

Yet today we do see sparkles of God's faithfulness among our Jewish people. We see this among ourselves, in Poland, with our very eyes. We also see this in our ministries back home and wherever God has called us to serve Him. Our hearts are encouraged by the growth of the Messianic movement in Eretz Yisrael (The land of Israel). Where, just three decades ago, there may have been less than 20 Messianic congregations but now there are more than 150.

I pray that you will be encouraged by the fellowship we enjoy together and as we see the great things God is doing among us. We see that even our remnant according to God's grace is growing in both number and vitality in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, God's work among the Jewish people in Poland before the Holocaust was also very exciting! The 1927 conference brought together almost 200 Messianic Jews to celebrate God's work in what was then perhaps the largest concentration of Jewish people in the entire world – Warsaw – in a country of 3 million Jewish people – Poland – God was at work!

Allow me to read a report from the Vienna conference in 1937, a decade later and just a few years before the invasion of Poland, that describes God's magnificent work among our Jewish people in Poland. Martin Parsons, a Messianic Jewish believer and the leader of the CMJ work in Warsaw at the time, gave this report.

He provided a thumbnail sketch of the various ministries and missions to the Jews in Poland just two years prior to the Nazi invasion. He wrote rather comprehensively of the situation:

*The American Board of Missions has a center in Warsaw on the east of the river. They have room for some inquirers, in addition to general evangelistic work. The Mildmay Mission has a hall in the Jewish quarter in Warsaw and their work mainly touches poorer Jews. The American European Fellowship is in Warsaw and works particularly among children. They have a villa at Radoso, which is used in the summer for children's work. The Bethel Mission in Lodz has an evangelistic center and a colony. In addition, in Poland there is one Pentecostal evangelist, one member of the Open Brethren, one member of the Closed Brethren and a few private evangelists living by faith. The four missions in Warsaw work together in close cooperation. The shape of this is in the form of monthly, united prayer meetings and monthly evangelistic meetings. In Lvov there is*

*active cooperation between the Church Mission to the Jews and the Danish Mission with their joint monthly evangelistic meeting (IMC Vienna Conference Report:3).*

*Further reports from the MRW demonstrated that Poland had a considerable missionary presence prior to the invasion. The LJS had stations in Warsaw and Lemberg. In both centers many modern young Jews were being reached through English classes in addition to the regular program of evangelistic work, colportage and itineration. The SFOI had evangelistic centers in Lodz and Vilna. The BJS had a station in Krakow and were reaching whole districts in surrounding neighborhoods through colporteurs. In Lvov, the Danish Mission (DIM) had an evangelistic center. The Barbican Mission (BM) had an evangelistic and medical center in Bialostok and substations at Vilna, Lublin, Grodno, Rovno and Brzesc.*

This is a wonderful summary of God's work among the Jewish people in Poland, but there is more...including some wonderful reports of openness on the part of Polish Jewish people at that time...and you will notice, these reports will sound quite a bit like one's you might give today as well, as Jewish people were regularly coming to faith in this post-World War I resurgence.

*At Sieradz, it was possible by permission of the chief of police to hold a large open-air meeting, which was attended by hundreds of Jews. At Zdunskawola the use was attained of a church building holding 1,200 people. This was completely filled with an audience of Jews and Jewesses who listened attentively to expositions of the messianic prophecies given by the missionaries.*

*At Warsaw, Rev. H. C. Carpenter, the head of the mission and himself a Jewish believer, is holding practically a continuous baptismal class, and currently the Bishop of North and Central Europe confirmed twenty-four Jewish believers of different ranks, one of whom was a rabbi who had definitely decided for the Messiah and had been immersed (MRW 1925b:330).*

*In describing the results of the LJS work in Poland the secretary reported that one meeting was attended by 3,000 Jewish people, and week by week the mission hall in Warsaw was filled. Some 200 would-be listeners had to be turned away.*

*In 1926, the foundation stone of a new mission building was laid for the LJS and the building opened the following year. This meeting hall, named Emanuel of Warsaw, was dedicated soon thereafter. Carpenter had a number of ordained assistants, among them R. Brinker, and a number of lay staff members, including Bazyli Jocz, who was ultimately killed in a concentration camp during the Second World War, and whose son, the well-known Jakób Jocz, also served for a time in the ministry in Poland (Stevens 1960:91).*

*In 1927, J. Berkowicz was added to the staff of the BJS in Krakow, Poland (BJS 1927-28:30). Peter Goroditch, who began the Barbican Mission to the Jews (BM) work in Odessa (which later grew into a significant Messianic Congregation), conducted ministry*

*in a number of Polish cities at this time: Bialostok, Brest-Litovsk, Rovno, Grodno and Vilna.*

*Also serving in Vilna, Poland at this time was Bernard Rosenbaum with the Society of the Friends of Israel mission of Basle (SFOI) and S. Joffe with the MMJ in Warsaw. Other missions had works, but the names of their staff in the report were not listed. These works included: Missionhaus Peniel in Lodz which was part of the SFOI mission of Basle, the work of the Danish Israel Mission in Lvov and the efforts of the Berlin Jews Society in Zabrze.*

*The work of the LJS advanced after the construction of the Emmanuel Center and Church.*

*In Eastern Europe where we are now deeply thankful, our new Warsaw buildings are complete, the mission hall is regularly well-filled, and we need another room. The name of the building in Warsaw is The Emmanuel Mission House, and when you look at a picture of it, it is quite large (London Jews Society Annual Report 1927a:15).*

*In 1934, H. C. Carpenter retired from service with the LJS and was replaced by Martin Parsons. According to Carpenter, there were twelve baptisms in 1930, which made 300 since his appointment and a grand total of 11,323 since the inauguration of the mission in Poland. (London Jews Society Annual Report 1935:53-56).*

Bazyli Jocz, who died during the Holocaust and was the father of the well-known Messianic scholar Jacob Jocz, and recounts the following story involving opposition to their ministry of colporteurage, or literature distribution.

*One day I visited a coffee house. The owner was very pleased to see me and said that the people would soon come, and so they did. In a few minutes the room got filled, amongst whom also were some Hasidim from Ger, who listened intently when I spoke of being convinced of the great sympathy amongst the Jews to Christianity. One of the most ardent of them abused some Jews because they ventured to buy a tract, and he became so furious that he snatched the tract away from the man and tore it into pieces. Those present rebuked him severely and many of them bought tracts. At the end, the Hasid asked me whether I considered myself to be a Jew and if I believe the Torah. Receiving an answer in the affirmative, he gave his hand, apologized and also asked for something to read (London Jews Society Annual Report 1927b:62).*

You see, the Lord has been at work among our Jewish people in Poland for a long time. I would say that the work was incredibly successful. Many Messianic congregations, then known as Hebrew Christian congregations, and mission agencies among the Jewish people were active in Warsaw and all of Poland immediately before the Holocaust. For reasons I will never understand God allowed our Jewish people to go through a great season of suffering and the Messianic Jews suffered alongside their fellow Jewish people.

The Messianic movement between the world wars – especially in Poland – came to a

grinding halt due to the Holocaust. Perhaps, there was some thought that ultimately the Jewish people would be destroyed. That God would not be faithful to His promises – that the nation of Israel would never turn to Yeshua as Lord and Messiah. But they were all wrong. The devil has had his day, but the Lord will have His - forever. His promises are true and will never be broken. And though we might suffer – "*joy, cometh in the morning*" as the great Rabbi Saul prophesied,

*For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery —so that you will not be wise in your own estimation —that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written...(Romans 11:25-26).*

Until that great day, may the Lord find us faithful and fruitful in our ministries as we follow His calling as followers of Yeshua to go into all the world to make disciples and proclaim the good news until the glorious day when He returns as King. To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile!

May the Lord give you the strength and courage to continue His work among our beloved Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom!

### **Saturday Morning Worship Service and Lecture**

The worship service on Saturday morning was reminiscent of a traditional, but abbreviated, synagogue service. Typical Saturday morning Jewish liturgical prayers were said and sung by a cantor (the rabbi who leads the service through chanting prayers) and the Torah portion from the Bible was read and one of the Messianic Russian Jewish leaders from Israel preached a brief sermon on the text.

The songs were sung in Hebrew, Russian and in Yiddish - a language that would have been heard often on the streets of Warsaw. Yiddish is a combination of both old German and some Slavic words, written in Hebrew characters. When spoken, the language sounds like German. The three million Jewish people who lived in Poland prior to the Holocaust probably spoke Yiddish as much or more than Polish. The rousing worship was thoroughly enjoyed by the attendees and quite a few got up to dance to some of the livelier Yiddish songs reminding the attendees of golden days gone by. This most likely served as a reminder of their grandparents who may well have spoken and sung in Yiddish many years ago.

Eventually the music slowed and became more contemplative focusing the participants on the revelation of the God of Israel through His Son, Yeshua.

### **The Morning Lectures**

This led to a quick break and the topic for the morning on The Law and Righteousness.

The first speaker, a Russian Messianic Jewish leader from Israel spoke about the importance of the Torah (the Law) as God's tool of revelation to the Jewish people. He argued that the Law brought the Jewish people knowledge of God's word and will. Therefore, the Torah must in one way or another remain part of the spiritual life of Messianic Jews. The Law did not and cannot save Jewish or Gentile sinners, but it does give us ample information, along with the New Testament about how we can live a righteous life in the power of the Holy Spirit. To ignore the Torah is a mistake, he reasoned, as a believer would lose more than half of what God has revealed to His people. He argues that fulfillment is no reason to jettison what came before.

In fact, through Yeshua's death, resurrection and sending of His Spirit we are now empowered to live out His righteousness. This is done through practicality, living our lives and serving others. The expression of this internal righteousness through our actions is demonstrated authentically from what we believe. And this is the true power of our witness – not that we believe what is right. Although right belief is important, but that we do what is right as well.

The second speaker, who is originally from Kiev, Ukraine, but has lives in the United States for more than two decades, agreed with the previous speaker. The Bible – both Old and New Testament were kept from Russian Jews. Therefore, today, the Bible is viewed as more precious to them. The speaker had illustrations of some very practical passages found in the Torah that should not be ignored, including a litany of down to earth wisdom revealed by Moses in Leviticus 19.

Generally, the Russian Messianic Jews advocated the study of the Torah. Including the reading of it regularly in worship services and reading the five books of Moses through in a year. The New Testament of course should be read as well. However, both speakers believed that the Church generally does not appreciate the Old Testament in the same way as a Messianic Jew. This is good example for the rest of the Body of Messiah – to study God's word in the Old Testament more seriously.

### **Sunday Morning: Role of Non Jews in a Messianic Congregation**

The speaker was a leading Messianic Jewish leader in Israel. He stated that having Gentiles in Messianic congregations reminds us that all men are created in God's image and should be welcomed irrespective of their race or nationality.

It is also a reminder that God chose Abraham to be a blessing to the nations and the presence of Gentiles in our congregations reminds us of our God-given role to bless the Gentiles today as well. Furthermore, Gentiles in our congregations are a reminder of our unity in the Messiah. We are one in Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah, and all maintaining our unique God-given identities.

Gentiles who join Messianic congregations often feel inferior. Therefore, they either try to become Jewish one way or another rather than simply identifying with the Jewish

people in a similar way to Ruth – “*thy people shall be my people.*” And this can be accomplished without becoming Jewish.

In fact, it is unnatural for Gentiles to become Jews and Messianic Jews need to affirm Gentiles in their national identity so that we achieve a glorious unity in the Messiah, which is more in sync with the teaching of the New Testament.

In light of the tragic history between more institutional Christianity and the Jewish people: tensions still exist to this very day. Naturally, this leads to mistrust and misunderstanding which can only be resolved through mutual humility. By appreciating our diversity and making attempts to find reconciliation, though the actions needing reconciliation occurred many years ago.

This comes from the speaker’s perspective as a Russian Israeli. In Israel, the proverbial shoe is on the other foot and the Church has a Jewish majority. This is especially true of the Russian Messianic congregations. Arab, Russian Gentiles, or expatriates living in Israel who worship with Israeli Jewish believers and feel that they are on the margins of the congregation. This is often the feeling of Messianic Jews worshipping in Christian churches – especially in North America.

We all feel constrained to become identified with the majority culture in our church body though we might even understand God’s love for diversity. Those who attend Messianic congregations in Israel tend to try and become more Jewish and identify with the majority. But, the speaker suggests, Russian Messianic Jewish leaders in Israel should not encourage this, but rather remind Gentile believers that they are part of the Body and one with the Jewish followers of the Messiah. Gentiles are coheirs to the Abrahamic blessings and God also has a plan for non-Jews that are intertwined with His will and plan for the Jewish people.

The speaker, who serves with a Scandinavian Jewish mission operating in Israel, suggests that we need to go out of our way to encourage non-Jews to remain who they are and to feel comfortable in their own skin by showing an appreciation for their national identity and culture.

As mentioned, the Messianic movement and Jewish-Gentile relations within the body of Messiah in the Diaspora are different. Perhaps, the speaker has identified some lessons to learn for all parties and the Messianic movement within Israel is setting a good example for the way Jewish believers should be treated within the church in the Diaspora. The speaker believes that Messianic Jews in Israel should be welcoming of non-Jews and not require Gentile believers to live as Jews. We should not reinforce the feelings of inferiority of Gentile believers by encouraging them to become Jewish. We should encourage them to remain as they are and identify and fit in as non-Jews within the Messianic Jewish community as they are able.

The next speaker leads a Messianic congregation in the Pacific Northwest. He is originally from Ukraine and has a very different perspective than the previous speaker, a Russian Israeli.

This next speaker believes that the U.S.-based Messianic movement, both Russian and non-Russian, has a majority of Gentile believers in our congregations. He asked, **what is the draw for them?** Many even live a Jewish-oriented lifestyle and enjoy worshipping the Lord Jesus in a very Jewish way. They do not have an inferiority complex as they feel welcome and comfortable with Jewish traditions. The speaker says, “we welcome them to join our community and invite them to worship in a Jewish way.” He then gave the example of a Muslim who came to know Jesus and attends his congregation because he feels more comfortable and closer to the Jewish tradition than to historic Christian traditions.

The speaker reminded the group that one of the ways Messianic Jews fulfill the Abrahamic covenant is to bring a Jewish perspective on life and Scripture to the church and additionally, by welcoming Gentile believers into our Messianic congregations to receive these blessings.

The speaker suggests that the Gentiles who wish to identify with the Jewish people be embraced and encouraged, but not pressured to live a Jewish religious lifestyle (keeping kosher, observing holidays in the home, the usual times of prayer, etc.). Rather, welcomed into a Jewish, Yeshua-based community as full participants without conversion to Judaism. Thus, enabling them to avail themselves of the richness of Jewish tradition and experience that exalts Jesus as the one true Messiah for all.

This would encourage a deeper study of the below passage. Paul encourages Gentile followers of Jesus to reach Jewish people for Jesus by reminding them of the blessings brought to them by the first century unbelief of the Jewish people as following the Jewish Messiah does not require any type of formal conversion to a Jewish way of life.

*Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! (Romans 11:12)*

But, he adds, we need to remain open to those who, for one reason or another, sincerely wish to more fully identify with Jewish life and tradition, rooted and grounded in Jesus and Scripture.

## **Conclusion**

We thank God for His faithfulness to the Jewish people and this conference is a testimony of His grace. The Russian Messianic movement also points the great day that Paul describes in Romans 11:25-26.

We look forward, in great anticipation, to this “end times” harvest of His chosen people and will continue to work toward this end by proclaiming the Gospel to Russian-speaking Jewish people and all those who need to know our Messiah – may His name – Yeshua – be blessed forever and ever!