

THE HISTORY OF THE MODERN MESSIANIC MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

In a twenty minute presentation it is impossible to mention more than just the milestones and highlights in the way God has blessed the work in South Africa.

The Messianic movement in other countries abroad impacted the success of the work in South Africa and I would like to think South Africa too has had some influence on the global Messianic Movement.

The Jewish population grew steadily since 1805 and was greatly supplemented by the 1820 settlers. Today there are about 70 000 Jews in South Africa, 50 000 in Johannesburg, 17 000 in Cape Town and 3 000 in Pretoria and small numbers in Port Elizabeth and Durban.

Reaching Jewish People with the Gospel

The history of the Messianic movement is closely connected to the work of various ministries and individuals involved in outreach to Jewish people with the gospel.

A. THE EARLY YEARS

1. Mildmay Mission

Mildmay Mission, founded by John Wilkinson in 1876, was the first missionary society to send a field worker to South Africa. **Mr E Reitman** started working in Cape Town in the early 1900's. Years later **Irene Samson** ministered in Johannesburg. The work of Mildmay Mission (today Messianic Testimony) in South Africa was interrupted for many years. Since 2002 Leigh Telli has been the worker in Cape Town.

2. Good News Society

Arnold Frank founded this society in Germany in the late 1800s. He was a Hebrew Christian and spread the gospel to Jewish people by publishing and distributing literature. He led John Düring to the Lord and helped him to come to South Africa where he registered the Good News Missionary Society in 1950. After Düring's death in 1979 **Sean O'Sullivan** became the new director of the society. In 2000 the society was renamed Messianic Good News. It still continues to publish literature proclaiming the Good News of the Messiah Jesus. **Peter Cohen** took over from **O'Sullivan** when left for the USA in 2000.

3. Prayer Union for Israel (PUI)

Prayer Union for Israel was formed in England in 1880 with the objectives to "unite friends of Israel of all denominations and to stir up Christians to pray for and to love the Jews." The movement reached South Africa in 1894 when a branch was founded in Cape Town. Among the early prayer partners was Dr Andrew Murray who would ride from Stellenbosch on horseback to attend monthly prayer meetings. A prayer meeting could last as long as six hours. **Harry Freeman**, son of a rabbi, became the first full time worker in Johannesburg. For many years he conducted open air meetings on steps of the Johannesburg City Hall. Harry Freeman's grandson, **Robert**, also became a field worker for PUI. In 1936 Stephanie **Venniker** came from the England branch of PUI to work in Cape Town.

4. Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)

Aware of the necessity to reach Jewish people with the gospel, the DRC appointed **Philip Cohen** in **1903** as their first missionary to the Jews. He was influenced by Joseph Rabinowitz of Kischineff, Russia, who founded the first Hebrew Christian community in 1882.

Philip Cohen writes in his book, *The Hebrew Christian and his National Continuity*, that some missionaries try to estrange Hebrew Christians and their children from the Jewish people. He says the Hebrew Christian finds himself in a ghetto again. He quotes from a friend's letter, "To the Jews I am a *Meshumad*, to the Christians a Jew, and to the Gentiles a nobody." Philip Cohen maintains that Hebrew Christians have lost their connection to the Jewish nation and therefore their witness to

fellow-Jews has lost its power. He writes, “We as Hebrew Christians should zealously guard our national continuity if we are to be the salt to our people.”

According to Cohen 250 000 Jews became members of the Christian church in the nineteenth century and he writes, “Just think what a tremendous testimony this solidarity of Hebrew Christianity would have been if those 250 000 and their offspring had maintained their national continuity.” And further, “When will Gentile Christian leaders of Missions to Israel see this, and when will Hebrew Christians’ hearts be moved with love and pity for their people so as to prevent the present state of things? God grant that it may be soon!”

Cohen was a supporter of an independent Hebrew Christian congregation and was against its assimilation into the non-Jewish community. He motivated his conviction by referring to Paul when he said in Acts 28: 17, “I did nothing against the customs of our forefathers.” Paul also referred to himself as “a real Hebrew.” (Phil 3:5)

The DRC supported Cohen’s views initially. In 1906 the DRC took the following decision, “It is desirable that converts should be members of the Dutch Reformed Church until such time as they are numerically strong enough to form a Hebrew Christian Church, and meanwhile Hebrew Christians can form themselves into an association to foster and encourage their natural sentiments.”

Cohen was very excited about the support he got from the church and continued with open-air meetings and visits to Jewish people. Some people accepted the Messiah. Unfortunately his ideal of a Hebrew Christian congregation remained unfulfilled. Tension between him and the Dutch Reformed Church built up. He retired in 1917 and died soon after that.

Eventually, sixty years later, in the 1970’s Philip Cohen’s vision became a reality with the birth of Messianic Congregations in the USA and Israel. It became the norm rather than the exception in outreach to Jewish people worldwide.

After the death of Philip Cohen the DRC appointed a number of Hebrew Christians to take the gospel to Jewish people, **Rev Ettman** (1924 -1927); **Rev Paul Kohl** from Poland (1926-56); **Rev Wentzel Salzberg** from Wilna in Poland (1929-1938) as well as his daughter **Miss Freda Salzberg** for a short time; **Miss Stephanie Venniker** (1931-1934); **Dr Peter Salzberg** (1939 -1969); **Miss N W Sinden** (1945-1949,1952); and **Rev Abraham Kohn** from Warschau, Poland (1935-1940, 1953-1961). After Dr Salzberg retired the DRC appointed non-Jewish ministers and a social worker: Dr Koos Vorster (1971-1976); Cecilia Burger (1975-); Rev Andries Batt (1976- 1980); Rev Murray Coetzee (1980-1983); and Dr Francois Wessels (1983-) were appointed to work in Cape Town and Dr Gert Swart was appointed to work amongst the Jewish people in Johannesburg in 1966.

Methods used in Outreach:

Apart from **personal visits** to Jewish people and engaging in conversation with them many **open-air meetings** were held by the Hebrew Christian missionaries trying to reach their own people with the gospel. Philip Cohen was the first person in South Africa to emphasize the importance of a Hebrew Christian congregation.

Peter Salzberg, son of Wentzel Salzberg, was a medical doctor and had a surgery cum reading room where he rendered free services to poor Jewish people. Peter Salzberg started the Cape Town branch of the **Hebrew Christian Alliance (HCA)** with 26 Hebrew Christian members in 1946. Monthly meetings were held where Jewish Christians could have fellowship with one another. He attended two conferences abroad. The one was the conference of *The International Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews* in Basel Switzerland in 1947 and the other was a conference of Hebrew Christians in London in 1955.

Koos Vorster introduced a new approach, the **parish approach**. His idea was to train as many Christians as possible to communicate the gospel to their Jewish friends. He wrote a book, *Christus vir my Joodse Buurman (Christ for my Jewish neighbour)*, with guidelines in outreach.

Koos Vorster used Gert Swart and the Andrew Murray Congregation in Johannesburg as a model. This congregation was founded as a result of Swart’s outreach to Jewish people and later on to

immigrants as well. Unfortunately after he retired the congregation's outreach to Jewish people gradually faded. Today we realise that a fulltime fieldworker in Jewish ministry cannot be replaced by leaving it to the congregation.

B. THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT IN CAPE TOWN

Jews for Jesus and the Liberated Wailing Wall

Murray Coetzee emphasized the idea that Jewish Christians should be the carriers of the gospel to their own Jewish people. In 1982 Murray Coetzee worked with Jews for Jesus in arranging the visit of their worship group, The Liberated Wailing Wall, to Cape Town. The concerts were well-attended, especially the one at The Three Arts Theatre. Jewish believers in Jesus, Christians and Jews attended this concert despite the fact that a few Orthodox Jews were standing outside the theatre trying to prevent Jewish people from attending by telling them, "This was not a Jewish meeting." The Liberated Wailing Wall experienced more opposition at the University of Cape Town where a group of students tried to disrupt a concert. Murray Coetzee went outside to reason with them saying, "How would you like newspaper headlines stating *Jew fighting Jew?*" He managed to calm them down and a number of them sat at the back of the hall watching the concert. In Johannesburg the group encountered strong opposition from Jewish students at a concert at the University of Witwatersrand. The students even vandalised some of the equipment. In 1984 when they visited South Africa again, the group tried to address students at the University of Bloemfontein, but they were thrown out.

Bible Study Group: Together Murray Coetzee and Cecilia Burger started a weekly Bible Study group at the home of a Christian couple in Sea Point. Murray Coetzee led this group where Jewish believers, Christians and Jewish seekers studied the Word together. It seemed to be much easier for Jewish people to meet in the friendly atmosphere of someone's home than to attend a church service.

In 1983 **Francois Wessels** took over from Murray Coetzee. He continued with the weekly Bible Study group. Apart from working together with Cecilia, he found a co-worker and friend in **Rodney Mechanic**, a Jewish believer and ordained minister of the Anglican Church.

Church's Ministry to Jews (CMJ)

Rodney (known as Roni) Mechanic and Beit Ariel Congregation: Rodney Mechanic moved to Cape Town in 1974 to begin missionary work with the South African Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews (SAJS). Rev Jack Mundell was the director and Roni was his assistant. Roni and his wife, Elisheva went to Bristol, England in 1976 where Roni studied theology for two years. On their return in July 1978 Roni was ordained as an Anglican minister.

In 1979 Rev David Harley of the Church's Ministry to Jews (CMJ), UK asked Roni to convene a study group in Cape Town as a working group to respond to some set questions for the Consultation of World Evangelization's consultation to be held in Pattaya, Thailand. Roni was invited to attend the 1980 gathering and to be part of the LCJE group as part of the consultation – reaching the Jews was one of the 17 sub-groups that made up the larger whole (see LCJE Occasional Paper from the Pattaya gathering).

Roni met Rev Walter Barker, director of CMJ at the time, who also attended this gathering. Roni corresponded with Walter as to the possibility of the Mechanics joining CMJ and in **1986**, after a time of preparation, they pioneered CMJ's work in South Africa. The Mechanics were attached to Christ Church, Kenilworth and Roni was given a special license by Archbishop Philip Russell to work among the Jews. Roni called the new ministry **Messiah's People**, an outreach of CMJ.

In 1984 Roni and Francois worked together when the Liberated Wailing Wall visited Cape Town for the second time.

Ministries joining hands

1985 marked the year when Francois and Cecilia expressed the desire to **work closer together with others involved in Jewish ministry**. At this stage there were three Bible Study/fellowship

groups for Jewish people in Cape Town. They were run by Francois Wessels, Roni Mechanic and Rev Alvin Showalter, representing Prayer Union for Israel. Francois approached these leaders with the idea of bringing Jewish believers together to celebrate the Jewish feasts. The result was six meetings with Messianic Jews in 1986. Some of them belonged to congregations where they were the only Jews.

Meeting others encouraged Jewish believers in Jesus to maintain their Jewish identity and to be living witnesses to the fact that when a Jew comes to faith in Messiah Jesus, he/she is still Jewish. We are still convinced that the strongest witness to Jewish people is the person who can say, "I'm Jewish and I believe in *Yeshua Hamashiach*."

A key event, during this time, was the **Purim celebration and half day seminar held on 22 March 1986**. The theme of the seminar was *the Identity Crisis of Messianic Judaism*. 25 Messianic Jews and other Christians attended. (By this time many Hebrew Christians were referring to themselves as Messianic Jews). Although Messianic Jews experienced joy and freedom in Messiah Jesus, they didn't feel culturally at home in the Christian church. In his talk on the Biblical background of the Messianic Jew, Francois said, "Our witness to Jewish people will only be credible when Messianic Judaism has once more, as in the first century AD, become a viable and visible option."

Four Messianic believers partook in a panel discussion. There were differences in emphasis and opinion as to the validity of Old Testament ordinances for the Messianic Jew, but despite these differences, there was a sense of being one in Messiah Jesus, knowing that unity does not mean uniformity.

Roni and his family went to England from July to December 1987. In their absence the work continued.

During Roni's absence, August 1987 **Bruce Cohen and Jim Morse visited Cape Town**. They were members of Beit Y'Shua congregation in Philadelphia, USA. Bruce and Jim answered questions and the ideal of a Messianic congregation began to take shape. Their visit made a deep impression on the Messianic Jews of Cape Town, emphasizing the need for a collective witness to the Jewish community. Everyone was struck by the enormous impact the collective witness of the Messianic Jewish congregation had on the city of Philadelphia.

In Nov 1987 a number of believers, Jewish and Gentile, who regularly attended Messianic Jewish meetings, signed **an open letter to fellow Christians** addressing certain critical questions about a Messianic Jewish congregation. They wrote as their ideal: to establish, some day in the future, a Messianic Jewish congregation in Cape Town. Not a congregation of Jews only nor a congregation Jewish Christians would be obligated to belong to. A congregation using a Jewish style of worship, using some Hebrew and traditional liturgy and celebrating the feasts from the perspective that the Messiah has come and is coming again. A congregation where God is worshipped in a cultural mode not foreign to Jewish people. The corporate witness of the congregation would show others that there are Jews who believe in Jesus and that their faith in Jesus did not terminate their Jewish identity.

Even though some people would not agree with everything, the letter encouraged them not to withdraw from fellowship.

Roni's return to Cape Town, in December 1987, gave momentum to the realization of a Messianic congregation. Edith Sher, a Messianic Jew and one of the signatories of the open letter recalls a meeting in her apartment with Roni and Francois. She recalls Roni saying he wanted to start a Messianic congregation with Francois cautioning him as to the timing. Even though they were not in total agreement Francois promised Roni his support. Roni started a congregation in 1988 and named it **Beit Ariel**. The meetings were held on Friday nights in the Baptist Church Sea Point and then in the restaurant of Jewish believers in Sea Point until they sold the restaurant. Francois and Cecilia at first visited and then joined forces with the new congregation. After moving from the restaurant the congregation used the Dutch Reformed Church Hall in Sea Point for a number of years. Several

moves followed and today the congregation hires a hall in Central Cape Town as the cost of rentals in Sea Point escalated far above the means of the congregation.

Hebrew Christian Alliance and Beit Ariel Congregation

The **Hebrew Christian Alliance (HCA)** in Cape Town was revived by Rodney Mechanic in 1989 after being dormant since 1982. He renamed it the Messianic Jewish Alliance (MJA). With the founding of the **Beit Ariel Messianic congregation** joint celebration of the festivals were held between the congregation and the HCA, because the leaders realized that not all the Jewish believers wanted to be part of Beit Ariel. They still, however, wanted to meet together with other Jewish believers from time to time.

In January 1991 Beit Ariel and the HCA joined forces to bring the Messianic Jews of South Africa together for the **Yeshua '91 Conference**. At these annual **Yeshua Conferences** (1991-1997, 2000 and 2002) Jewish and Gentile believers gathered over two days to focus on Yeshua and the Jewishness of their common Messianic faith. It was a time of celebration and gathering with both national and international speakers leading and teaching.

Beit Ariel Congregation - different leaders

Beit Ariel and the Messianic Jewish community in Cape Town were sad to take leave of Roni Mechanic and his family when they left for Israel in June 1993.

Francois Wessels led the congregation until **Bruce and Karen Rudnick** were welcomed as leaders of Beit Ariel on 20 October 1995. They left for Israel in 1999.

In the meantime **Herschel Raysman** was elected as chairman of the **National Hebrew Christian Alliance** of South Africa in 1992. Within a month after his election he was asked to attend the executive meeting of the International Messianic Alliance (IMJA) in Toronto. At this meeting he met pioneers of the Messianic Jewish movement. He also met Rich Nichol and Burt Yellen, representatives of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC).

In 1999 Herschel succeeded Bruce Rudnick as **leader of Beit Ariel**. Rabbi Bruce Cohen, from Bet El Messianic Synagogue in Manhattan, was the keynote speaker at the Yeshua 2000 conference. Bruce challenged the congregation by saying that if we wanted to reach the core of the Jewish community, the culture of the Messianic congregation had to be Jewish.

He pointed out that Messianic congregations differ. For some the fact that they have Jewish members is their strongest trait, but as far as worship, music and customs, these congregations are not much different from any other Christian congregation. Other congregations are more Jewish in expression with traditional Jewish customs. At that stage Beit Ariel was somewhere in the middle.

The challenge for Beit Ariel was to decide whether to keep the present model, a freer worship service with a few customs or change to be like a Jewish synagogue.

We had to consider the question, "Are we effective in reaching the Jewish community? Would a Jewish visitor feel culturally at home?"

In July and **August 2002** Herschel attended his **first UMJC Conference** and came back determined that Beit Ariel should become affiliated to the UMJC. While in the USA Herschel visited many Messianic Jewish congregations and spoke to many of the rabbis, gleaning the necessary insights that assisted him in determining the sort of Messianic Jewish congregation Beit Ariel should become.

Keen to study further, Herschel began to attend the annual UMJC Yeshiva and successfully completed 6 out of the necessary 17 modules necessary for ordination. Unfortunately due to the poor rand-dollar exchange and the subsequent cost, Herschel was unable to complete his studies.

Herschel realized it would make more sense to bring the rabbis of the UMJC to Cape Town and expose more people to their teaching. This commenced in 2001 with the first *Yeshiva* Conference and is still continuing until today. Beit Ariel hosted the following people: Rabbi John Fischer (twice), Rev David Sedaca (twice), Rabbi Russ Resnick, Rich Nichol, Stuart Dauermann, Dan Juster and also

Rev Bruce Stokes. A relationship was forged with First Fruits of Zion (FFOZ) and both Boaz Michel and Toby Janicki have been hosted twice. Their Hayesod (Foundations) course is an essential component for all who wish to become members of Beit Ariel.

Since Herschel came into leadership at Beit Ariel he gradually introduced more liturgical prayers over a period of time.

Church's Ministry to Jews after Roni left

As fieldworker for CMJ, Roni was followed by **Doogie St Claire Laing** in 1993. Doogie and his wife Hilda were a greatly loved couple who ministered effectively in the Jewish and Christian communities in Cape Town, despite the fact that neither of them were Jewish. Doogie retired in 1999 and **Edith Sher** became the full time worker in Cape Town. Raised in an Orthodox Jewish home Edith brought a wealth of knowledge and a wonderful gift of teaching to the ministry.

Janette Ross, who worked for CMJ in Israel for thirty years, visited South Africa in 1987 and soon after that became a field worker in Johannesburg under the sponsorship of CMJ UK. Janette worked and established the work of CMJ in Johannesburg until her retirement in 2003. Here she was one of the founder members of the **Beit Y'shua Messianic Congregation**.

John Atkinson was appointed by CMJ UK as the South African director. In 2010 he was inducted into fulltime service in Cape Town. John is now also the International Director of CMJ.

Since 2007 John and Edith have been holding quarterly half-day conferences at Christ Church, Kenilworth called *Roots & Shoots*. These conferences focus on the Jewish roots of the Christian faith and draw 300-400 people at a time. They also lead a weekly Bible study which is regularly attended by 70-100 people.

Edith presents a weekly radio programme called *Messiah's People* on a local Christian community radio station and has built up a loyal listenership over the years. Although aimed at teaching Christians the Jewish roots of their faith, it is clear from correspondence received that Jewish people also listen to the show.

B. THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT IN JOHANNESBURG

South African Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews (SAJS)

The **British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews (BJS)** was started in the National Scotch Church in London in 1842 as a result of Rev Ridley Hershell's urge to reach his own people with the gospel. He traced his encounter with Messiah Jesus back to a page torn from the New Testament wrapped round an article he purchased and had a real burden to see his own people saved. He was instrumental in leading his five brothers to faith in the Messiah. They all became Christian ministers.

The work of the Society in South Africa was started as a result of a visit of Mr Ernest Lloyd to the country in 1951. Shortly afterwards **Miss L Harris** was appointed as secretary and **Mr Julius Katz** was sent from England in **1952** to take charge of the work in Cape Town. The name of the Society was changed to the South African Society for the Propagation of the Gospel amongst the Jews (SAJS) in 1953. Julius Katz maintained a fearless and fruitful ministry among the Jews until his death in Rhodesia in 1955. He was joined by yet another well-known Hebrew Christian, Eddy Levine, who died in America at the early age of 45 years after a short illness. Eddy Levine often gave his testimony of how he came to know the Lord and moved his audience to tears when he told how much he had to suffer persecution in the early days of his Christian walk.

The SAJS had missionaries in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth in South Africa and many countries abroad. Apart from Julius Katz and Eddy Levine, Maisie Pillemer, Miss J Eglitzky, Mr Field, Mr & Mrs Fraden, Peter Eliastam, Mr S Muller, Stan Sher, Rodney Mechanic, Louise Newmark, Rev and Mrs O'Sullivan and Arlene Elterman worked for the SAJS in South Africa.

Lloyd visited South Africa again in **1952** and addressed a group of Hebrew Christians in Johannesburg. Maisie described it as encouraging to meet with others from similar circumstances. Shortly afterwards Mr Loewy started a branch of the **Hebrew Christian Alliance in Johannesburg**. Maisie was the secretary and in 1960, at age 41, she officially started to work for the SAJS as a field worker in Johannesburg and later in Durban. While in Durban she held discussion groups on Friday evenings at her flat. Mr **Jack Mundell**, a Baptist minister, was the **Director of SAJS** in Cape Town at the time and under him the work expanded and several new missionaries joined.

During this time Mr Lloyd visited Durban again in 1962. He addressed a meeting at the Durban Baptist church packed with Jewish believers, Gentiles and other Jews. The topics were *Christ in the Old Testament, Prophecies fulfilled, Passover and the Exodus and the Authenticity of the Bible*.

Jack Mundell and Jews for Jesus

On Jack Mundell's visit to America in 1969 he heard about Jews for Jesus and was curious to see what was happening in the States. Jews for Jesus' direct methods and boldness gained much interest in Jewish circles and the rabbis were warning people against them.

Mundell returned to South Africa with new passion. Many Jews were open to the gospel and he was hoping to adapt the methods of Jews for Jesus.

Annual Meetings of SAJS

Annual meetings of the SAJS were held in the cities where the missionaries worked and Cape Town hosted the Annual General meeting of the SAJS. These meetings were always well attended. In 1972 marked a year of record attendance in both Johannesburg and Cape Town. The main emphasis, at both these meetings, was the testimonies of Jewish believers.

In 1973 the Cape Town City Hall was rented. Over 1,200 people filled the hall. In their book *Dared to Believe* Andrew Barron and Lindsey Gallant write that Cape Town had not known a meeting as lively as this one ever before! Jewish youth and rabbis from the Ultra-Orthodox Synagogue nearby invaded the place. These angry intruders stormed the platform, claiming the right to speak as it was a public meeting. Dr Potgieter, the chairman, handled them graciously even allowing a rabbi to say a few words. Discussions broke out between Hebrew Christians and the young opponents. Meanwhile someone had phoned the police who took some of the young people and the rabbis into custody. After the meeting many young people stayed behind to speak to the Jewish workers and Hebrew Christians, and some of them came to faith in the Messiah as a result of this unusual meeting.

In 1978 Jack Mundell resigned as Director and returned to England. By the end of 1980 the Society had a new president, **Colin Peckham**, and a new Director, **Reg Codrington**. The headquarters of the Society relocated to Johannesburg. **Jack Poulton** succeeded Reg Codrington as Director in **1984**. In 1982 the name of SAJS was changed to Hope of Israel (HOI).

Hope of Israel approached Jews for Jesus in 1986 about teaching their missionaries to do the work with a fresh approach. **David Brickner** was appointed to travel to South Africa in February of 1987 in order to conduct a one-week seminar on Jewish evangelism. Later in 1987, the Board of Directors of HOI asked the Board of Directors of Jews for Jesus (JFJ) about the possibility of a merger. With the result that Brickner returned to SA with two members of the JFJ Board of Directors.

Andrew and Laura Barron were sent to Johannesburg to establish the work in **1989**. In the same year **Lawrence and Louise Hirsch**, from Australia (previously from South Africa), started to work with the Barrons. Lawrence is Jewish and he was given a scholarship to attend a local Bible college while training with JFJ SA.

JFJ SA was in the right place at the right time and the time was ripe! New leadership was in place, public evangelism and personal visitation were cultivated, extensive deputation was aimed at raising local funds and confronting theological roadblocks. A newsletter ministry was established that was designed to teach Christians more about Jewish people and Jewish evangelism. Publications were also designed for interested Jewish people.

David Brickner had identified **two key people** who played a supporting role in the birth of JFJ SA. Rev. **Jack Poulton**, the Director of HOI, pursued Jews for Jesus in the USA to help him carry on Jewish evangelism in SA. He was willing to go to Moody Bible Institute in Chicago for a special Jews for Jesus two-week training course on Jewish evangelism. **Maisie Pillemer** was the other key person. She had been a full-time Jewish missionary for 30 years. Both David Brickner and the Barrons agreed that Maisie Pillemer was the thread that connected the renewal in the 70s with the renewal in 1989-1992. She fully supported Rev. Poulton as he approached JFJ and she was totally supportive of David Brickner as he deliberated the merger with HOI. When Andrew and Laura Barron arrived to set up JFJ SA, she was unwavering in her dedication. At the age of 72, she stood on city street corners distributing JFJ gospel tracts to thousands of passers-by. Maisie was faithful and fearless as she stood watch over Jewish missions in SA for decades.

Worship Services

When JFJ SA began, the Barrons noticed that there were gatherings available for local Jewish believers, but those gatherings were fatigued. In 1989, JFJ SA began regular worship services on Friday evenings for Shabbat at Craighall Park Wesleyan church, which incorporated Jewish forms of worship as well as a Messianic Children's program. Messianic songs and liturgy accompanied by Biblical preaching drew more and more people out of the spiritual woodwork.

Jewish seasonal events were celebrated and volunteers were recruited to help missionary staff with logistics. At first, attendance averaged 15 adults. Approximately 60% of these people were Jewish and there were we often Jewish people seeking to know more. Many of these people were brought by Gentile Christian friends.

Jewish Christians and the Church

JFJ SA tried to refer many people to local mainline churches, but often these Jewish Christians would feel more comfortable with a Messianic Jewish worship structure and would make Friday meetings their spiritual home.

Andrew Barron wrote about the SA churches, "The ecclesiastical structures of the SA church in 1989 had no room or vision for Jewish evangelism. Several of the larger churches did have several Jewish Christian members. These members tended to be assimilated into the activities of the church and were not people who were interested in making a 'second decision' for Jewish evangelism."

Beit Y'Shua Congregation

Worship services on Friday evenings as well as Passover banquets, Hannukah and Purim parties were being held until early in the 1990s when some couples, including Janette Ross, who were part of the early movement were asking whether a congregation could be formed. A planning meet was held and the chapel of the Rosebank Union was arranged for future services as a venue was needed for the children's programme. Andrew Barron consulted with David Brickner and Moishe Rosen regarding the new congregation. They had a lot of concerns with regards to time and management. In principle the JFJ policy was to plant congregations in cities that did not have one.

A Friday night Bible Study developed into a congregation with small beginnings. At first there was no worship team. Beit Y'shua was registered as a non-profit organization with a constitution. Andrew Barron sees the dedication of Aaron Block as a turning point and remembers a section of the chapel filled with David and Liz's family. This gave Andrew a vision of what Beit Y'shua could be.

The congregation started to have dedication services, baptisms and bat and barmitzvah's. A Shabbat school was started for children. The congregation went from strength to strength and **Andrew, Laura and Eliyah Gould** did all the running of the congregation. **Lev Leigh** also joined them at this time.

When **Andrew and Laura Barron** left South Africa in 1996 and **Eliyah Gould** took over as leader of the congregation. **Michael and Teresa Sischy** joined the JFJ team in 1999 and succeeded

Elijah as leader 2006. The membership of the congregation is 20% Jewish and 80% Gentile believers in Jesus.

Hebrew Christian Alliance in Johannesburg

Since the establishment of Beit Y'shua the Hebrew Christian Alliance, now the Messianic Jewish Alliance (MJA), became less active until the monthly meetings stopped about six years ago. One of the members of the MJA recalls the lively meetings under the leadership of Maisie Pillemer years ago. Maisie passed away in the early 2000s.

The Liberated Wailing Wall (LWW) and opposition

In 1984, the LWW had people protesting at public meetings, witnessed riots to stop meetings, and saw people arrested. The local papers were filled with articles about these events for days on end after the group left. This kind of anti-missionary activism was a great surprise to the leaders of JFJ. When David Brickner travelled to SA in 1986-1988 he was also confronted with public opposition. This opposition was a signal to the leaders of JFJ that something needed to be done to more aggressively evangelize the Jewish people of SA. The feeling was that if there is so much opposition, there must be many people open to the gospel!

Two public meetings held by JFJ SA in 1991 were pamphleted by an organization called Jews for Judaism. This organization is run by a small volunteer group of self-appointed defenders of the Jewish community against the gospel. The University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) is the largest university in SA. It has a very large and active Jewish presence. In the Jewish student paper an article was published in 1991 titled "What is the greatest threat to Judaism at WITS?" Three of the five responders commented that evangelism of Jews was the greatest threat.

The Liberated Wailing Wall has returned twice to SA since the renewal period began (1990 & 1992). The 1990 tour was heavily publicized in the Christian press and JFJ SA arranged with the local police to have a presence. On only one occasion was there a possibility of opposition: Jewish students stood outside the church building and confronted individuals before and after the meeting. The presence of uniformed officers seemed to quell the violence. In 1992 JFJ SA expected opposition with the tour of the LWW, but none occurred.

According to Barron the Jewish community knows that JFJ SA is a real presence in SA and that public opposition to Jewish evangelism only serves to embarrass the Jewish community and raises the issue of the gospel in the Jewish community. The end result is more Jews hear the gospel. Opposition tends to be good for the gospel and for renewal. Opposition can be a signal to the church that the target group is being penetrated, or is ready to be penetrated with the Christian message. While opposition can be messy and not very much fun, we must live by the principle that "every knock should be turned into a boost!"

D. MESSIANIC MOVEMENT IN PRETORIA

Manfred Nochomowitz, a Jewish believer, and his wife Isit started Emet Ministries as a prayer group in August 2006 in their home in Pretoria. The prayer group soon outgrew their home and moved to a venue at Hatfield Christian Church. Manfred and Isit are members of Hatfield congregation and also part of the leadership team.

In 2007 Manfred felt the Lord telling him to begin a ministry with the name, *Emet Ministries* and vision statement: "Ministering the truth of the Gospel to the Jewish People and the truth of the Jewish People and Israel to the Church". In March 2008 the ministry was registered.

The first Shabbat service was at Hatfield Christian Church on the 2nd November 2007. Since then monthly Shabbat services were being held in Pretoria and Johannesburg. Apart from Shabbat services Emet Ministries run teaching seminars and equipping weekends and host a Passover Seder and Sukkot celebration every year.

Jewish people who come to faith through their ministry attend the Shabbat services. Approximately 120 people attend the services of whom 12 are Jewish believers.

E. CLOSING REMARKS

1. The Messianic movement in South Africa in was mainly driven by Jewish people who came to faith in Messiah Jesus, some of them from far distant countries. Their main concern was for their own people to be saved.

The cost of following Messiah Jesus is high for the Jewish believer. I salute all these Jewish brothers and sisters for answering the call of the Lord in the spreading of the gospel.

2. Anti-semitism and a lack of understanding amongst Christians of the unique position of the Hebrew Christian/Messianic Jew have presented a huge stumbling block in reaching Jewish people with the gospel.

3. Since the beginning of the 20th century there has been the need for Jewish believers in Messiah Jesus to meet together and to maintain their Jewish heritage even when they were expected to integrate and assimilate completely into the Christian Church. In the early days Jewish believers felt obligated to lose their Jewish identity and were being looked upon by Christians and their Jewish families as no longer Jewish. Philip Cohen (1903) tried to advocate the existence of a Hebrew Christian Church, but did not see his dream come true.

4. The establishment of Messianic Jewish Congregations in Cape Town and Johannesburg was probably the most influential step in our outreach to Jewish people for the last 50 years. These congregations fulfil two important roles: a) they present a collective, visible and accessible witness to the wider Jewish community that there are Jewish people who believe in Yeshua as Messiah and Lord and b) they provide a cultural-friendly spiritual home and place of worship and fellowship for Messianic Jews. The Hebrew Christian Alliance was a vital instrument in preparing the way for the establishment of Messianic Jewish Congregations.

5. Not all Jewish believers want to belong to a Messianic Congregation and their role in the Christian church cannot be underestimated. It is however important to encourage Jewish believers to get together to have fellowship and to encourage one another in their unique calling. For the past three years David & Jonathan Foundation and Simcha Ministry have been organizing specific events for Jewish believers together with other Christians in Cape Town.

6. I share the concern of others about the growing number of “Messianic” congregations and groups where Gentile Christians embrace Jewish customs without any consideration for Jewish people or the spreading of the gospel to Jewish people. Their excuse is the *chosen people*, the Jews, don’t need the gospel. In some cases these groups have embraced Judaism to such an extent that they no longer honour Jesus as Messiah and Lord.

7. In my research on the history of the modern Messianic movement in South Africa I became aware of the mighty work of God. One of the miracles was the incident where an article wrapped in a page of the New Testament resulted in a Jewish man finding his Messiah and his five brothers doing the same. This same man was instrumental in founding a ministry reaching Jewish people with the gospel in Britain which later spread to many other countries including South Africa.

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