

LCJE Latin American Report
SHALOM AMIGOS
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God's work among our Jewish people in Latin America can be subdivided into four major areas: (1) congregational growth, (2) Messianic music, (3) rediscovery of Jewish identity, and (4) the reaction of the Jewish community to the Messianic Jewish movement.

Congregational growth can be best described as a "sovereign move of the Holy Spirit." Congregations seem to be springing up without any formal organized effort. I just met a Messianic Rabbi who recently began the first Messianic synagogue in Panama without any formal "ties" to a messianic group. To my knowledge, no major Messianic Jewish organization has yet implemented a specific synagogue planting program directed toward Latin America.

Messianic music continues to stir the Latin American soul. Radio Dinamica, Guayaquil, Ecuador, regularly plays Messianic music which is quite typical of Christian radio stations in Iberoamerica. Vida-Zondervan has produced three of Jonathan Settel's (www.settel.org) albums in Spanish, the latest being, "Danza y Paz." Combined sales are approaching over 50,000 units. Paul Wilbur (www.paulwilbur.org) recently announced the production of his "Shalom Jerusalem" album into Portuguese. Paul's albums are produced by Hosanna/Integrity Music.

The rediscovery of Jewish identity seems to be a phenomena which is occurring in the Traditional as well as Messianic Jewish communities. The following quotes come from an article, "The New Jews of Mexico" which appeared in the Jerusalem Report, October 10, 2000.

"Centuries after their ancestors fled to South America to escape the Spanish Inquisition, hundreds of Mexicans are making a dramatic return to their faith. And the 'established' Jewish community is none too happy about it." - Yigal Schleifer, Puebla, Mexico.

"Living in the small, isolated town of Zaragoza, in the rural state of Puebla, east of Mexico City, Castelan's family was different. Fair-skinned among their darker neighbors, the Castelans didn't go to church and never ate pork. Every year, in early fall - a time he now understands to be the festival of Sukkot - his grandparents built a hut in their backyard and the whole family would come over and eat fruit in it."

"Some research and brief exposure to a Sabbath-observing Christian sect persuaded Castelan that these family traditions were actually Jewish. His family, he realized, was descended from the hundreds, perhaps thousands of Jews who came to Mexico beginning in the

16th century to escape the Spanish Inquisition, and had started to practice a form of crypto-Judaism when the Inquisition reached Central and South America in the 17th century. “I was filled with an overwhelming desire to learn more,” says Castelan, now 57, a quality-control engineer at a Puebla metal plant.”

Peter Citelli was raised Catholic, though he had Jewish cousins named Levy. He researched his mother’s maiden name, Miranda-G(h)iron, and found out that her surname was Jewish. Similarly, many Latin Americans are discovering their Jewish roots.

A good example of the traditional Jewish community’s opposition to Messianic Judaism occurred last year in Argentina. The following report comes from Messianic Jewish LIfe, October-December 2000, Vol. LXXIII, No. 4.

“Hundreds of Jews, including a survivor of the Holocaust, professed faith in the Messiah at an evangelistic service in Argentina last month. More than 22,000 Jews attended the festival in Buenos Aires, August 18-20, 2000, organized by Hear O Israel Ministries, an Arizona-based group.”

“Local Jewish leaders tried to block the festival. A federal judge refused requests from Orthodox rabbis to shut it down, but ordered Jewish symbols, including menorahs and a Star of David, to be removed from the stage, the ministry said. Messianic Jews are not allowed to use the symbols, the judge ruled, because they no longer belong to the Jewish community.” Hear O Israel Ministries is challenging the ruling in court.

The Spirit of God is speaking to our people in Latin America from Mexico to Argentina (Dan to Beersheva) about Messiah Yeshua. Truly we are living in prophetic times!!!