

Jewish Diaspora

by Tuvya Zaretsky



Theological Observations on Jewish Diaspora

A full discussion of the theological dimensions associated with exile and Diaspora are beyond the scope of this article. However, it is helpful to remember that, in the biblical account of Adam and Eve, exile from the Garden of Eden was purposeful and an expression of God's grace. Adam and Eve were removed from the garden to prevent them from eating of the Tree of Life, and thereby making a fallen state permanent.

Also according to God's purpose He promises Abram, that his descendents would be temporary sojourners in a foreign land. First, the iniquity of the Amorites would be complete. Thus, God would be just in removing them from their

land and giving it to the Israelites.

Second, God nurtured the number of Israelites during their sojourning in Egypt. Though barely 70 descendents of Abraham originally went down into Egypt, after 430 years the nation numbered more than 600,000 men plus their wives, children and extended families. So scattering the nation served its incubation and growth.

Some would suggest that dispersion of the Jewish people, even their periodic exile from the Land, was pointless or cruel. Nevertheless, both the Assyrian and Babylonian dispersions of 722 and 586 BC were within the plan and purpose of God. Yahweh sent Isaiah as His messenger to warn and comfort Israel before both dispersions. In spite of temporary removals from the Land of Israel the Lord maintained that a faithful remnant

would ultimately return to Him in a Messianic Redeemer, saying “a Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob.”

That Redeemer is the Seed of the woman who was promised in Genesis 3:15. God’s plan was that He came through the Jewish people in the person of Jesus the Messiah to be the blessing to the nations through Abraham’s seed. A faithful remnant of Israel would trust in Him. So, in Acts 2, during the Jewish feast of Shavuot (Pentecost) Diaspora Jews came to Jerusalem to keep the festival. There they heard the good news that the Redeemer had come to Zion. Many believed in Him on that day.

Subsequently, those new Messianic believers went back out to their diaspora communities carrying the gospel message with them. The scattered Israelite nation was the Lord’s first means for spreading news of Messiah Y’shua (Jesus) to other Jews and some gentile proselytes back in their synagogues and remote communities.

The Lord used Diaspora Jewish believers to further spread the gospel after the persecution of Stephen. Jewish followers of Y’shua (Jesus) were under pressure, hunted and threatened because of their faith in the Messianic Redeemer. A cohort of Messianic Jews moved from Jerusalem to Cypress and then to Phoenicia, finally making their way to Antioch. Through their testimony “a large number who believed turned to the Lord” in that city. So, even persecution of that first Jewish remnant, served to spread the good news into the Diaspora where Jews and Gentiles continue to receive it.

Of course, a Jewish Diaspora exists in modern times. Yahweh God still reveals His faithful character as He maintains a people according to His covenant with Abraham. His preservation of Jewish people dispersed among the nations is an indelible testimony to the God who Moses described as “the Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin...”

And yet, it is only by the good news of Messiah Y’shua (Jesus Christ) that any Jew or

gentile, at home or in dispersion, will ever know eternal life. Therefore, we might note where Jewish people are today and how they can be reached with the gospel message.

Demographic Data on Jewish Diaspora

The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute provides exceptional annual reports on the status of world Jewry. Professor Sergio DellaPergola of the Hebrew University Hartman Institute of Contemporary Jewry is a respected scholar of Jewish demography. The latest JPPPI report was issued in February 2011.

Their “Equator Piece on Jewish Population” reported approximately 13.428 million Jews worldwide today. Of that number, approximately 80 percent are in the combined populations of Israel (5.7 million) and the United States (5.4 million). Israel now hosts the largest concentration of world Jewry since the first century.

Next to Israel, the rest of Asia’s Jewish population consisted mainly of rapidly decreasing communities in the eight Asian FSU republics: Azerbaijan (6,400 Jews in 2010), Uzbekistan (4,500), Kazakhstan (3,700), and Georgia (3,200). The largest Jewish population in a single Asian country, besides Israel, was Iran with an estimated 10,400 Jews remaining after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Israeli Jewry in Transition

The State of Israel is referred to as the Jewish homeland today. The term Israeli is a reference to the citizens of the nation State of Israel. Not all Israelis are Jewish. Some Israeli citizens are Arabs or other non-Jewish ethnicities.

The term Jewish is a descriptive reference for the ethnic people descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (AKA “Israel”). Historically, these people were called “Israelites” or the “descendants of Israel.” It is an ethnic designation.

Jews living in the Diaspora would be referred to as Jews of a particular citizenship. For example: American Jews, South African Jews and Argentine Jews, etc.

In the past 30 years, Israeli population has nearly doubled through migration of Jews from other countries. The first migrations after

declaration of statehood in 1948 came from countries in the Middle East and North Africa. More recent immigration waves have brought significant numbers from the former Soviet Union, nearly the entire Ethiopian Jewish population and, of late, a steady stream of South African Jewry.



Stephen J. Gould typified Israelis as “transnational migrants.” They are moving among former cultures and economies with ease. As a transient population, Israelis move easily for purposes of economic opportunity, academic research, world curiosity and political necessity. Israeli young adults, in particular, desire to travel outside of their small and isolated country. Immediately after Israeli youth complete their required military service, they traditionally travel for up to a year exploring the beaches of Goa, India; the foothills of the Himalayas; Thailand, Laos, Bali, Brazil, Western Europe and North America. Western missions have been successfully reaching these groups while they are traveling and open to new cross-cultural ideas.

Sixty-two percent of Israelis are secular with less than thirty eight percent identifying as “Traditional” or “Orthodox.” Israelis are experiencing culture change evidenced as openness to New Age spirituality through the influence of Kabbalah Judaism. That is also an open door for evangelistic ministry to Israelis when new spiritual ideas are presented in a culturally appropriate and compelling fashion.

Jewish People and China

Jewish history in China may date to the 8th Century AD when Jewish traders traveled the Silk Road. A Jewish settlement was established in the city of Kaifeng, in what is now Henan Province. They built a synagogue in 1163 and thrived into the early 20th Century. Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci wrote of them in his journal

reports of 1605.

In modern times, descendants of the original Kaifeng Jewish community have sought recognition as a Jewish minority, Youtai, on their PRC identity cards. The Chinese authorities’ official position has been that the Jewish descendants of the Kaifeng community have completely

assimilated to the Han Chinese.

Shanghai experienced three distinct periods of Jewish immigration according to Herman Dicker in *Wanderers and Settlers in the Far East*. The first wave occurred in the 1880s with the arrival of Jewish businessmen primarily from Baghdad. The most noteworthy names were the Sassoon and the Kadoorie families. The latter made its fortune in Shanghai and Hong Kong real estate and utilities. By 1932 the Shanghai stock exchange membership was composed 40 percent of Sephardi Jews.

A second wave of immigrants, in the early 1900s, was composed of Russian Jews fleeing pogroms and the Russian Revolution. Most settled in Harbin with a population exceeding 13,000 by 1929. These Ashkenazi Jews did not move south to Shanghai until after the Japanese took Manchuria. They resisted mixing socially with the older Sephardi Jewish community.

Shanghai existed as one of the few free transit ports in the early 20th Century. It did not require visas or police certificates. There were no quotas on Jews, nor did it require affidavits of health or proof of financial independence.

That facilitated the third wave of Jewish immigration as an estimated 20,000 came to Shanghai between 1937 and 1939 from Germany. Those Jews, escaping the Holocaust, passed through China on their way to the Americas, Australia and Palestine. At one time, the sizeable population of German and Austrian Jews was confined to the Hongkou District, which was less a ghetto than simply an area designated for state-

less refugees. After the war and amidst political turmoil in China, Shanghai Jews were evacuated, or moved, to Israel or the United States. After that, little Jewish life remained in Shanghai.

Centers for Jewish Studies exist today in Shanghai and in Nanjing. China and the State of Israel currently have diplomatic relations. There are cultural, technological and economic interests between China the Jewish people and particularly the State of Israel. For further consideration I commend the lengthy strategy paper published by Dr. Shalom Solomon Wald in 2004 as *China and the Jewish People: Old Civilizations in a New Era*.

Potential Ways to Reach Israelis in the Far East

Following are some suggestions for reaching Jews in Asia, especially Israelis traveling outside of their homeland and in countries in East Asia. Thanks to the Great Commission Center International for their encouragement to reach Jewish people with the gospel.

1. The State of Israel is interested in strengthening relations with Chinese people and cultures. Certainly for political and economic reason, the government of Israel will be interested in sending students to study and live in China. Where appropriate, it might be possible for Chinese families to invite Israeli students to live with them while they study in Chinese universities. Many Israelis, when outside of their home culture, are open to new cross-cultural experiences. Chinese Christian families could, in this way, have opportunity to interact with and influence Israeli Jewish students for the gospel.

2. It is appropriate to invite Israelis to teach Hebrew or Jewish history among ethnic Chinese Christians. That may be possible under a program of cultural exchange. The focus on cultural differences would provide another opportunity for introducing the gospel into discussion of philosophy, history and language.

3. Offer and send Chinese language tutors for Israelis either in Israel or in schools within Chinese population centers. Again, the opportunity for introducing spiritual information amidst cultural exchange would be very natural.

4. Partner with missions already in place or seek out opportunities to reach Israeli post-army backpackers. Christians from a variety of ethnic backgrounds have established chai shops, restaurants and youth hostels for ministry to Israeli backpackers in Nepal, northern India, Bali, Thailand, Laos and beach resorts, like Goa in India.

5. Attract Israeli backpackers to tourist sites within China through advertisements in Israeli magazines and newspapers. Clean, safe, inexpensive and welcoming hospitality centers are reported quickly and among young Israelis. Such hospitality centers have been used to communicate the gospel through discussions of Bible history and prophecy around meals.

6. Every fall season, the citizens of Israeli take a one-week holiday to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. In ancient times, the festival culminated with an agricultural harvest festival at the Jerusalem Temple. Now, delegates from various countries, including Christian groups, come to participate in a solidarity parade. A group of Chinese Christians could coordinate to join in such a parade and participate in cultural exchange activities in conjunction with that week as a way also to communicate the Messiah of Israel.

7. Partnerships: There may be as many as 7,000 Israeli Jewish believers in the State of Israel. Direct, outreach evangelism is legal and done regularly among Israeli citizenry. Chinese evangelicals would be welcome, and their participation would be quite helpful among the efforts to lift up the name of Messiah Y'shua in Israel. The Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism is a network of Jewish mission agencies from around the world. Their website is an excellent source of contact information for potential ministry partners in Israel.

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Mission to the Jewish People Conference held in Hong Kong



The Great Commission Center International (GCCCI) has engaged in mobilizing Chinese churches for Jewish mission since 2008. Conferences and seminars have been held in San Francisco Bay Area, Hong Kong and Macau. And prayer and information booklets have been distributed among Chinese churches worldwide.

GCCI Hong Kong office initiated the 2nd Mission to the Jewish People Conference in May of this year. The Conference was sponsored by four mission organizations, namely GCCCI, Christian Witness to Israel-Hong Kong, Chosen People-Hong Kong, and Chinese on Watch. The general theme of the Conference was “Grateful for the Source of Water,” the same as at the 2009 Conference, while the sub-title was changed from “Salvation is from the Jews” to “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem.”

The Conference was held at the Truth Lutheran Church in Kowloon on May 19-21. On May 19, Elder David Zadok, Israel Field Director of Christian Witness to Israel, shared with the congregation from the Old Testament of God’s heart for the Jewish people and encouraged the Chinese Christians to share the gospel to the Jewish people. The next day, Dr. Tuvya Zaretsky,

Director of Staff Training and Development of Jews for Jesus, cited Scriptures from the New Testament to explain why it was and still is difficulty for Jewish people to believe that Jesus is Messiah. He also pointed out that someday the Jewish people will recognize Jesus is Messiah. Both of these main speakers were Messianic Jews.

The seminar on May 21 was mainly for pastors and seminarians. Elder Zadok shared with the participants about the present situation in Israel and the tension between Israel and Palestine. He emphasized that there will be no peace if the two peoples could not reconcile with God first. He also gave a glimpse of hope that there are some reconciliation efforts between Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews in recent years. Although God has dispersed the Jewish people around the world because of their unbelief, and though Israel has always been threatened and

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The Third Cross-Cultural Mission Preparation Training



In cooperation with Chinese Christian Mission – USA, the Great Commission Center International held a Cross-Cultural Mission Preparation Training on June 4-9, 2012. The training was conducted in Mandarin.

This was the third one of its kind in North America. The main purpose of the training was

to prepare Chinese Christians for cross-cultural mission or non-Chinese planning to work among Chinese. The Chinese need cross-cultural training not only for mission to non-Chinese, but also to Chinese in different countries and/or cultures.

Chinese have hundreds of dialects. Some of them are quite different, as much as between French and English. In addition, people from different places may have quite distinct ideologies and social practices. Therefore, any Chinese Christian wishing to work among Chinese at or from different places needs to learn cross-cultural principles.

The training had three emphases: “being” “knowing” and “doing.” All participants were required to participate in leading worship, devotion and prayers and also in house-keeping. They were divided into small groups for close fellowship after classes. Training courses included: Understanding one-self, Spiritual Formation, Mission and Culture, Cultural Adaptation, Christian Movement Expansion, Mission Education in local church, Missionary Family, New Mission Trends, Spiritual Warfare on the Field, Missionary Care etc..

The organizers have announced that the fourth training will be on June 24-29, 2013. Those who have the burden for cross-cultural missions are encouraged to attend the training.



South Asia: In a remote area, two large Hindu temples dominate a small village of 4,500 people. A priest led the people worship an idol, “Goddess of Death,” who is believed to drink the blood of 100 goats placed daily before her during festival times for the sins of the people. A year ago, a team went and showed the “Jesus” Film four times. The priest was able to attend once. Watching Jesus’ innocent blood spilled at the cross, he realized that this had been the ultimate and only sacrifice acceptable to God. That night he was the first to come forward at the invitation. Now, there is a church of 300 and the former priest is active in evangelism and discipleship.

<JESUS Film Project, www.jesusfilm.org, 5/21/12>

Mozambique: An agency team has been distributing audio players for the New Testament in the Sena language in a number of extremely remote villages. The distribution is nearly always eagerly received. In many of the villages, listening clubs are formed and that often leads to the planting of a church. In a village where 20 players were given out, 5 people came to Christ one week later.

<Audio Scripture Ministries of Holland, www.asmtoday, 5/1/12>

Japan: More than a year after earthquake/tsunami disaster, most of the major items of the debris have been removed. But thousands of survivors remain in temporary housing. The emotional wounds cut deep as the sense of loss of almost everything, accentuated by the lack of permanent home, lingers on. Suicides are up to five times more than the average of prior years. After a year of helping in removing, building and physical aid, an agency is increasingly focusing on emotional and spiritual health. They visit the survivors regularly, listening to them, building relationship, and praying if they feel comfortable. The results are notable. Consistent contact not only helps in suicide avoidance, the people are exceptionally more open to the gospel. This area was one of the least evangelized areas in one of the least evangelized countries in the world.

<Asian Access, www.asuanaccess.org, 5/2/12>

England: Christians face two high-profile challenges of public display of religious faith. The European Court of Human Rights agreed to hear a case of two women accusing employer of banning wearing crosses at work. British officials claim that employers can do so as cross is not “Requirement” of Christian faith. And, a court ruled that a city council had no authority to open public meetings with prayer.

<InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, www.intervarsity.org, May/12>

UK: One way Queen Elizabeth celebrates her 60-year rule is her Bible distributing project through churches and schools. Biblica has accepted her request to create a New Testament

Bible that includes some notes and visuals. The original goal of 250,000 units is now up to 450,000 due to overwhelming response from churches. At a time when church attendance is at all-time low, it is hope that this gift from the Queen will encourage people to open the Word of the living God.

<Biblica (International Bible Society), www.biblica.com, 5/3/12>

Brazil: Last year an US evangelist worked out a plan with a dozen church leaders to train a new generation of evangelist to their own people. He also taught the evangelists principles and strategies of evangelism. One of them recruited 94 churches to join the plan to reach their city for Christ. More than 1,000 people committed themselves to pray for 5 people for three months. Early this year, the US evangelist returned to conduct crusades in 2 cities with hundreds coming to Christ. He was asked to go back next year and to continue the training. Each of the 94 churches will also host an evangelistic meeting this July.

<Sammy Tippit Ministries, www.sammytippit.org, 5/23/12>

Jordan: As crisis hits Syria or Iraq, some flee here. But their life can be just as hard. They do not qualify for refugee status and, once their 3-month visa runs out, they became illegal with all the problems of not able to get jobs, schooling, housing, nor healthcare, plus living under the threat of deportation. As some says, they are treated as dogs. So when an evangelical church in Amman reached out to them with its Hope Clinic, they are overwhelmed by the kindness and grateful to be treated as humans. As they experience firsthand the love of God, many Christians and Muslims alike return just to ask for prayer.

<International Mission Board, imb.org, 5/29/12>

UUPG: At the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) meeting last year, a missions official challenged the SBC churches to “Embrace” the worldwide 3,800 unengaged, unreached people groups (UUPG). They are the unreached ones with no known strategy in place to reach them for Christ. The challenge was to get churches start praying for at least one UUPG and asked God for a strategy. Then they would dedicate 8 weeks for 8 years to church planting in that group. Last summer 2 churches combined to develop a strategy for a group in Europe. They just returned from their round one commitment to Europe where they learnt about the culture and locations of their group as well as how to begin planting churches. They also went to the city and made contact with the group. They were well received and asked to go back. Doors are open that were not open before.

<International Mission Board, imb.org, 5/17/12>

ARTGPM Organized Prayer Rallies



The America Return to God Prayer Movement (ARTGPM) has held prayer rallies for America regularly in the San Francisco Bay Area since 2006. Beginning from 2012, they have decided to organize semi-annual prayer meetings in different locations in the Bay Area. On April 28 of 2012, prayer meetings were held in four different locations, namely, San Francisco, the Peninsula, East Bay and South Bay. Over 500 persons attended these prayer meetings. The theme for these prayer meetings was: “Prayer and Revival, Impacting the Ages.”

The Mission Statement of ARTGPM reads, “The vision of America

Return to God Prayer Movement is to promote spiritual revival through prayer. The movement focuses on mobilizing, inspiring, and providing prayer opportunities and training to Chinese American Churches. Through church revival, Christians bring Jesus’ redemption and transformation power to their communities and the nation.”

Their next prayer rallies are scheduled on November 3, 2012. Exact time and locations will be announced later. Please go to www.artgusa.org for details.



►From P.5 targeted by surrounding Arab countries since its re-establishment in 1948, God is still watching over the Israelis.

Dr. Zaretsky thanked the Chinese for their effort in receiving 20,000 Jewish people during World War II when all other countries rejected them in fear of Hitler. He told the congregation that the Jewish people is a small people group. Their population is less than 15,000,000, and about 50% of them are living outside of Israel. However, because of their worldwide dispersion, the Chinese are in an excellent position to reach the Jewish people since the Chinese are also dispersed widely. In addition, there are a lot of similarities between the two cultures and

their histories. Jewish people would like to make friends with Chinese as most of them are grateful to the Chinese people.

The Conference also invited a Chinese lady missionary who has been working among the Jewish people since 1981 to give her testimony and two pastors from Hong Kong to respond to the plenary sessions. They gave very encouraging messages.

Most of the participants lingered on for an hour after the meetings and talked with the speakers and respondents. All expressed their interest in knowing more about reaching the Jewish people.