



VISION EVANGELIZADORA LATINOAMERICANA

"...Alzad vuestros ojos y mirad los campos, porque ya están blancos para la siega."

Juan 4.35 b

July 22, 1991

Mexico City

THE JEWISH PEOPLE OF MEXICO CITY

I remember the very first time I went to live in Guadalajara, Mexico. My grandmother was so concerned because she thought I would have no one with whom to spend Rosh Hashanah. Soon I met a Jewish student from Venezuela who was also renting a room where I was staying. Together we went to the synagogue just a couple of miles away. Sixteen years later, in 1991, and after having lived 10 years in Mexico, I've discovered that there are Jewish people in many of the major cities, including Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Acapulco and Veracruz. In compiling information regarding the Jewish people in Mexico I visited a couple of synagogues as well as the Israeli Embassy. I was also referred to what turned out to be the Antidefamation League (ADL). Several reading sources are also quoted. Ten questions were asked to find out more about the Jewish people primarily in Mexico City.

1. How many Jewish people live in Mexico City?

The ADL said there were 35,000 Jews in Mexico City, where as another source who spoke to one of the Jewish centers last year was told that Mexico City has 350,000 Jewish people! Other figures for the entire country state that there are only 60,000. We know from history that the Jewish people have not participated in census counts, so there is no true figure available (ADL).

2. How did the Jewish people arrive in Mexico City?

In "Contenido" (Number 125, October 1973) it was stated that until 1924 there were no more than 500 Jewish people in Mexico. The President, Plutarco Elias Calles, made a public invitation for Jewish people to come to Mexico. Thousands accepted because of the economic crisis in Europe as a result of World War I, as well as the rising anti-Semitism. The ADL said that in the diaspora Jewish people spread throughout the world. Many sought refuge in Mexico as they awaited possible entry into the United States. Quotas in the U.S. were saturated and so, many remained in Mexico ("Contenido").

3. How many synagogues exist in Mexico City?

The ADL replied ten, others stated fourteen. There are four major Jewish communities in Mexico City: 1. Monte Sinai (Jewish people from Israel and Syria); 2. Magen David (Jewish people from Alepo, Syria); 3. Sephartico (Jewish people from Greece and Turkey); 4. Ashenazi (Jewish people from Central and Eastern Europe). I visited the Monte Sinai community which was said to have 1,800 families.

4. What type of synagogues are there?

The ADL stated that there are several orthodox, several conservative and one reformed synagogue.

5. What percentage of Jewish People in Mexico City attend synagogue?

The ADL promptly replied that the majority attend, many more than in the United States, percentage-wise. It was also said that usually Jewish children attend Jewish schools in Mexico. But "Contenido" estimates that half of the Jewish children in Mexico attend Jewish schools. They also declare that upon questioning a group of Jewish university students it was said that only 19% of their parents regularly attend synagogue, 78% attend for special events and 3% never attend. When asked if their parents attend orthodox, conservative or reformed synagogues, 80% did not know.

6. What does it mean to be a Jew in Mexico?

The "Keshet" (an independent organism of information about the Jewish-Mexican, May 15, 1991) stated four points for Jewish identity in Latin America: 1. Observe Jewish customs, 2. Participate in the life of the Jewish community, 3. Have Jewish descendants and 4. Instruct the descendants in the above three points.

7. Are Jewish people welcome in politics in Mexico?

The ADL said they are well received. Good relations exist. "Contenido" had an article about Jacobo Zabludovsky who, at 45 years of age, without having participated in the government, is one of the most influential "politicians" in Mexico--the only one who has survived four successive administrations, Zabludovsky is still respected as such. Yet, at the same time, some believe that the Jewish people are 'tolerated' but not invited to participate in government matters (owner of a well known clothing store).

8. Does anti-Semitism exist in Mexico?

According to an article in "Contenido" by Jaime Acosta, "There is no anti-Semitism in Mexico, but it never fails that someone will point out that the Jews are greedy, astute, calculating and selfish." However, in the "Keshet" (May 15, 1991) it's stated that on the walls of the National School of Professional Studies in Acatlan, things were written such as, "Kill a Jew and be happy," "Hitler way right," or "Juden Raus (get out Jews)" without any reaction from the university community.

9. How are the Jewish people employed in Mexico?

The ADL quickly replied, "In everything!" "Contenido" states that the first Jewish people in Mexico began to sell things door to door on credit. Later they began to make these articles in their own homes; thus giving way to the home industries (especially in clothing). Little by little the Jewish people were able to leave the poorer areas of town and move into a nicer area. Today there are hardly any poor Jewish people in Mexico.

10. What books exist regarding the Jewish people in Mexico?

* Mexico and the Jewish Diaspora (Mexico y la Diáspora Judía), by Guadalupe Zárate Miguel from the National Institute of Anthropology and History, 1986.

* Passport of Cultures (Passaporte de Culturas), about the life of a Russian Jew in Mexico, by Maria Eugenia Módera from the National Institute of Anthropology and History, 1982.

* The Jewish people in Mexico from Alepo.

Testimony of

ELLEN PARKER

"You were born a Jew and you'll die a Jew!" That's something I remember that my parents always told me. And I never doubted it was true. When I was very young my mother kept a kosher home, so I was told. But soon she discovered that she had been deceived. The meat she had been purchasing was not kosher, even though she had paid kosher prices. Feeling disillusioned, she decided that we would lead a conservative Jewish lifestyle. We went to synagogue on the High Holidays as well as at times on Shabbot. Really, to me we as kids had the best of both worlds. Being Jewish we were able to get out for the Christian holidays as well. I kind of liked it! I always believed in God, but He was far off, removed. Not like God who I know personally today who is always at my side--my best and closest friend!

To tell you about my belief in God as a young child I must tell you how I used to bargain with Him. I remember once when I was about eight years of age I lost my purse which contained something that belonged to my mother. I looked everywhere and couldn't find my purse. I knew I would be in big trouble if I didn't find my mom's belonging. So I made a deal with God. "If you help me find my purse I promise you that I'll never use a purse again." As I began to look once again, I quickly discovered my purse! And I kept my part of the "bargain" for years until I met my Messiah (who doesn't ask for a give-and-take situation--He only gives!)

As I entered junior high school for the first time in my life I began to wonder what was the purpose of life. Where did I come from? Where was I going? And I really couldn't find any answers. Later, as I entered high school, I became active in B'nai B'rith. (This is a Jewish group for teenage gals with its counterpart, A.Z.A., for guys. This way marriage will most likely take place within the Jewish faith.) In the beginning I was a Jewish Heritage Chairman, later Secretary, and finally President. I even became a counselor to two other chapters. And I asked my questions.

Once we had a visit from two men who said that they could call up spirits from the past in order to ask them questions. The answers would be written on the black board as these men would go into a trance. Everyone asked all kinds of questions! Then I asked them who the spirits said Jesus was. (At the time I didn't realize the source was demonic.) Everyone turned to look at me and then turned to them. "We don't have to consult the spirits for that question. We've already done it. They say He is God."

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My question stemmed from an encounter I had with a friend in high school, Sandy. She said that I needed to believe in Jesus in order to go to heaven. I told her that she was crazy. I was born a Jew and I'd die a Jew, but she, being a gentile, needed to believe in Jesus to go to heaven. I explained, "I already know the main guy!" She answered that it was alright to have my ideas but that it was really important to consider what God had to say. That was the first time I ever thought that God would have something to say.

My pride, however, kept my wall up as I assured Sandy that I would never read the gentile Bible as I had the Jewish Bible. (I had never read it, but I didn't want her to know!) She told me that it wasn't necessary to read the New Testament. Sandy said the Old Testament, the Jewish Bible, told how a Jewish person could know who the Messiah was. Once again, my pride kept me from asking Sandy to help me. Instead I said that I couldn't remember "off hand" where in the Jewish Bible it was written, but I would look it up and let Sandy know once and for all that Jesus never could have been the Jewish Messiah.

That's how my search began. I began to go with Sandy to her church--a Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society church. Sandy, born into a Japanese family of Buddhists, was the only one in her family who believed in Jesus. Everyone in the church was Japanese except me. There was even a service in Japanese and another in English. I remember after having attended for awhile the pastor gave a sermon on Jesus in the Old Testament. I became so angry I stood up in the middle of the service and said, "Where does it say that? Prove it to me!" Instead of throwing me out the door the pastor said he would write me out a list of over 30 prophecies in my Jewish Bible that Jesus fulfilled--and he did.

At that moment my search began to change. Rather than trying to disprove that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, I now wanted to find out if He really was! I continued to go with Sandy to her church for about a year, and as I did I observed her life. She had such a peace, love and joy that I wanted so much. But I didn't want to do what she said I had to do in order to obtain it (believe in Jesus as the Messiah and follow Him) because I knew what would happen in my home. During that year I tested Sandy in many ways. Once we crossed paths at school on our way to class. We each said hello and Sandy added, "How are you?" as we passed one another. I turned around (with my prideful temper in hand) and said, "Don't you even care to take time to hear how I am?" I watched Sandy as she came back, asking forgiveness and saying that she really did care.

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During that year I also asked God for many signs to prove to me whether Jesus really was the Messiah. I didn't even know that in the Bible it says that "Jews ask for a sign." While in class one day, my mind wandered to the things of the Bible that I was learning and I told God, "If Jesus really is the Messiah, show me as I get special permission to leave the room. Have me meet Sandy as I walk outside." I knew that Sandy was in another class across the school campus, but even as I was saying that prayer I almost ran (literally) right into her! Yet I still didn't believe.

At the end of the school year Sandy invited me to a Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society (JEMS) camp at Mount Herman, California. She said that there I would get answers for all of my questions. My parents gave me permission and even took me to meet the bus at the church. They thought I would have a good time at "Summer Camp." Once there, I did ask my questions. What's going to happen to all of the good Jewish people when they die? Are they going to go to hell just because they never believed in Jesus? They believe in God. And what about those who never heard about Jesus or have never seen a Bible?!"

Sometimes I would even get angry with God and say, "How can you expect us Jewish people to believe in Jesus if we believe that you are born either a Jew or a Gentile. And if born a Gentile, then you are a Christian. And look at all the terrible things that have been done in His name." Hitler considered himself to be a gentile, and therefore, in the Jewish mind was a Christian. It is no secret that he killed six million Jews. To believe in Jesus as a Jew is the same as saying to Hitler, "Why don't you kill a few more." And what about the Crusades? I'd be a traitor to believe!

Every night at this conference a pastor would give a sermon and then ask those who would like to receive Jesus to go forward. But on June 24, 1971, in the presence of God the pastor who spoke said, "If anyone has any questions, come forward--the Bible has the answers." I was the first one to go forward! We went to a back room and the pastor began to lead us in a prayer to receive Jesus. I began to laugh. "He can't answer my questions." Then I began to cry, for such was my desperation to find the truth. Quickly, as everyone prayed, I ran out. I sat under a gigantic tree in the beautiful Mount Hermon forest and began to think about the answers God had already given me. Is Jesus my Jewish Messiah? The prophecies said yes: born from a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), from the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the tribe of Judah, etc. and was to die for my sins through crucifixion--when that form of killing people hadn't even existed yet (Genesis 12:3, 17:19, Numbers 24:17, Genesis 49:10, Isaiah 53:6, Psalm 22).

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In my mind, I was convinced. But I still wondered what would happen to all of the good Jewish people? God answered me through Proverbs 8:17, "I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me." God promises that those who really look for him will find him. But if I say, "I was born a Jew and I'll die a Jew, and that means I'll never change from the religion of my parents," I'm really not looking for Him. However, if I do look, God promises to show me who He is! So God spoke to me through His Word.

As I began to walk along the beautiful forest paths of Mount Herman, God also spoke to me through His creation. I discovered plants that had three leaves connected to one stem, and God impressed upon me the reality of one God expressed in three ways, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As I grew up my parents always spoke about how the gentiles believed in three gods, but we Jews believed in the one true God! Now I knew that this was not true.

Like many Jews born and raised in the United States, I never learned to speak Hebrew. But any Jew anywhere learns the most important prayer of all, Deuteronomy 6:4, the SHEMA: "Shema Israel Adonai elohenu, Adonai echad. Hear oh Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one." Later I discovered that this "one--echad" meant a compound unity. Maimonides, a great Jewish leader who wrote the "Thirteen Articles of Faith," wanted to change this word "echad" to "yachid" which means one and only one. However, in the original language God meant it to be echad. I knew the word for Creator God as well, Elohim. Any word which ends in "im" in Hebrew is a plural word. Yet, if someone didn't know any Hebrew at all, they would just need to read the first chapter of Genesis where God states, "Let us create man in our image!"

Those two ways in which God spoke to me convinced me in my mind that Jesus was really the Messiah of Israel. However, the Lord spoke to me in a third way...to my heart. Sandy was so different from anyone I had ever met (as were the other Christian's at the camp). I wanted the love, joy and peace that I saw in her.

Suddenly, as I was pondering about these things, Sandy came and sat down beside me. I knew she was praying up a storm because she remained silent next to me. It was at this moment that I told the Lord, "I believe it!" As I said those words I knew I was telling Him that I believed that Jesus was God and had come to Earth to pay for my sins. "I believe it" told God that I was giving my life to Him as he had done for me. Now as I prayed my very first prayer as a true believer, I asked God to help me tell Sandy that I really had put my trust in my Messiah. I thought she'd never believe it!

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Every night at the conference there was a campfire service where each had an opportunity to share what God was doing in their lives. As we walked there I felt what I thought was the presence of God speaking to me. "You were born a Jew and you'll die a Jew. How can you be a traitor and leave the religion of your parents? Don't you remember all I've done for you? Don't you remember when you lost your purse?" I know now that this was the enemy, Satan, making his last attempt to lead me away from the one true God. As we reached the campfire there was a battle going on around me. Should I share about my decision? God's sweet Spirit prompted me on, and as I openly confessed my faith in Y'shua, my Messiah, God's peace embraced me. My sins were forgiven. A heavy burden was taken off my shoulders. I was new! That was only the beginning!

The day before putting my trust in Jesus I had written my parents a letter telling them of my time at the "Summer Camp." I told them that I was learning about Jesus and that I believed that He was a good man, maybe even a prophet, but they shouldn't worry because I'd never believe anything else. The next day I gave my life to Him and two days later I returned home. No one had told me how to tell my parents about my new found faith so as I entered my home, with all of the excitement of a new believer, I shouted, "I know who the Messiah is! It's Jesus!"

With those words the roof almost came down! Jesus had only been used as a curse word in my home prior to this. As I showed my parents the prophecies Jesus fulfilled as our Jewish Messiah, things only got worse. I was sixteen going on seventeen and had been a vegetarian for two years, trying to get to God in my own way. My parents thought that this latest "fad" too would pass. But when it didn't pass, I was forbidden to attend church. I must "seek Judaism" I was told. This was one of the first times in my walk with Jesus that I would learn of His faithfulness.

I didn't know a lot about the New Testament, but one thing I had read was Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents." I tried to read between the lines, "If your parents are Christians, obey them." But it didn't say that. There also was another problem in my home. My mom was an alcoholic. Often she would lose track of the time of day, insisting I should be at school at three a.m. I thought, "Lord, I don't have to obey her, she's drunk." But Ephesians 6:1 said that I was to obey, even if they weren't believers, even if...I decided to obey. However, I asked the Lord to provide other believers to help me to grow. I would invite my friends from church over to the house, but my mom, under the influence of alcohol, many times would literally kick them out. "Come over to my house; you'll go through a trial and grow in your faith." But not many friends wanted to be tested.

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Then one day, I spoke with my sister Dayle about my faith. I chose the only room in the house that had a lock, the bathroom, because my parents didn't like me talking about Jesus or even reading my Bible in the open. I pleaded with Dayle to believe. God was doing so much in my life. I used to be so nervous that I would bite my nails until they bled. My temper had been so explosive. But now God was giving me peace. She looked at me and said calmly, "Ellen, I've believed in Jesus for two years now."

I could hardly believe my ears. Then I thought that maybe she was just saying that to get me off her back. She assured me, however, that two years prior she too had been at a youth camp where the Gospel was shared. She asked God to help her get down a hill in the darkness of night without falling. If He did, she would believe. He did, and as she told a ~~friend~~ ^{friend} about what had happened, ~~she~~ ^{her friend} told her that now she needed to keep her end of the deal. After my sister prayed to receive Jesus, ~~she~~ ^{her friend} said, "Now you're no longer Jewish. You're a Christian!" My sister got so frightened that she never said a word to anyone. Also, ~~she~~ ^{her friend} never followed her up to disciple her or find out if she really had become a believer. She hadn't really understood the prayer she was told to mechanically repeat, though she thought she had. So when I came along insisting on believing in Jesus, she assumed she already did. We began to pray together and read the Bible together. God had brought what I thought was another believer to me in my very home.

In the meantime, my sister became engaged to a nice Jewish boy. Neither she nor I knew enough about the Bible to know that God didn't want us to marry someone who didn't believe. (II Corinthians 6:14) So, the wedding came with the Jewish Rabbi, the Jewish ceremony, and so on. My brother-in-law never knew what my sister believed. Later, after they moved to Tennessee (my brother-in-law, Shelley, was in the Coast Guard), he found Dayle reading the Bible. He became furious when she told him that she believed Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. He had been deceived! Only years later did I discover all that had happened. As a newlywed my sister lost that special love for her husband. She saw in the Bible, however, that God commands us to love one another. So she asked God to help her to love Shelley. He saw the difference in her life. One day when a good friend of his wanted to commit suicide, Shelley didn't know what to say to him. Finally he said, "Why don't you try this Jesus stuff that helps my wife so much." So his friend did. He found a group of believers on the base and gave his life to Jesus. He changed so much that God was able, in turn, to use him to help my brother-in-law become a believer. As Shelley took my sister to a good Bible believing church, she realized that she hadn't really given her life to the Lord, so she too became a true believer.

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Meanwhile, back home things went from bad to worse. I was sent to speak to an orthodox Jewish Rabbi in order to help me "seek Judaism." For two nights we conversed at length about the Messianic prophecies. Isaiah 9:6 says that the child that would be born would be the Everlasting Father. The Rabbi explained that verses one to five did indeed speak of the Messiah, but verse six did not. It was a very awkward situation as he tried to deny each prophecy.

The last straw came when I mentioned that Daniel 9 talked about the exact time Messiah had to come. The Rabbi threw his arms into the air and said, "Then believe what you want to believe. Just make sure you marry a nice Jewish boy!" As I left that night, my faith grew. Later on my parents gave me permission to attend church. I continued to grow, and my mom continued to drink.

At this point, the situation at home was very difficult. My dad had left in an effort to compel my mom to seek help. I remember early one morning at two a.m. when my mom, under the influence of alcohol, came barging into my room. I had placed my dresser in front of the door in order to get some sleep. Now everything was overturned and all of the little ceramic nick-nack animals I had saved as a child were broken all over the floor. As I began to cry for my things, God spoke to the quietness of my heart, "Why do you cry for your things? You should cry for your mom." It was at that moment that I pleaded with the Lord, "Do whatever you have to God, but let my mom believe in the Messiah before she dies."

Two weeks later my mom discovered that she had cancer in her throat. From smoking and drinking, a tumor had formed between the esophagus and the trachea. My mom, having been Jewish all her life, didn't know for sure where she would spend eternity. This opened up many opportunities for me to share with her about the way, Y'shua, our Jewish Messiah.

On August 14, 1975, my mom was to undergo surgery to remove the tumor. I had returned home to pick up a few things when I noticed two letters for my mom. When I went back to the hospital my dad left the room, and I was alone with my mom just fifteen minutes before the surgery was to take place. I opened the letters with her. The first one was from my sister. She assured Mom of our love for her, even if she lost her voice (there was a possibility). Dayle also told her that the most important thing was for her to believe in God as ~~my sister and I did~~ we both did.

The second letter was from Ruth Wardell, a woman who had spent over forty years telling Jewish people about Jesus in the Beth Sar Shalem (now called Chosen People Ministries). She was a friend of the family. In fact, the first time I ever learned of other Jewish people believing in Jesus was while I was at church one day. They announced that a Passover Seder would take place, sponsored by the Beth Sar Shalem, and that tickets could be

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purchased. Both my parents and I attended. Later they walked out, my dad angry and my mom alcoholized. I stayed. I became a volunteer and worked with the Beth Sar Shalem, where I later met Ruth. My mom had accompanied me to several Jewish Christian gatherings sponsored by them.

My mom loved Ruth. In the letter she had placed a tract which referred to Isaiah 53. After I read that chapter of Scripture with my mom, God's spirit moved me to ask her, "Mom, have you believed in God as Dayle and I do?" I told her that her sister, my Aunt Peggy, had also become a believer. Mom couldn't speak, but she nodded her head, "yes." Just then the nurse came to prepare her for surgery.

My mom was only fifty one years old. No one expected what was to follow. In surgery, part of the tumor separated and blocked her breathing passages. As the nurse came and told me my mom had died, I shouted, "No!" But soon God's spirit comforted me. "She's with me now, you'll see her again."

It wasn't until Ruth returned from vacation that I really discovered what had happened. She had promised that she would visit my mom before leaving. It was about eight p.m. and she still had to pack as she arrived at her door that evening. Even so, she turned her car around and found her way to our house; she had only been there a few times before. My mom was alone and received Ruth with joy. Ruth told me that my mom went for her Bible and opened it up to Isaiah 53. A big circle had been drawn around it, and she asked Ruth, "This is talking about the Messiah, but how can it? This is the Jewish Bible." That night Ruth explained the truth of Jesus, and my mom put her trust in Him. One week before she died. She had affirmed this to me only fifteen minutes before she died! God is so faithful.

My dad hasn't believed in Messiah yet, although I know he knows it's true. Once he told me that he wasn't happy with his life and that my going to church didn't help him. In my logic I answered him, "You aren't happy and you don't go to church; and I'm happy and I go. Why don't you go with me?" He didn't like my logic, but I trust that one day soon, he too will find peace in Y'shua.

When I first became a believer, I thought I was the only Jewish person in the world who had believed. Later I discovered that there are thousands throughout the world! As a spark begins a fire, so does the faith of one spread to others.

"Let your light shine in such a way before men that they see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Matthew 5:16