

Interview to Joseph Shulam

By Sister Adola, of the sisters of Zion, in Curitiba, Brazil

Question 1 – Why is the term “Zionism” used for the first time in 1893, 111 years ago, and what is the significance of “Zionism” today?

The Jewish people have been in exile since the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. During these years of exile, Jews were scattered all around the world, even up the Amazon valley. Most of these years, Jews were persecuted, driven away from their cities and states by tyrants and kings, all over Europe, Russia, and even to South America. The long arm of the Spanish Inquisition chased them all around the world. They had no hope to be able to return to their homeland that God had given Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their seed forever, until the end of the 19th century. But as the result of gross persecution and injustice after the French Revolution that carried on its flag - equality, fraternity and liberty, Jews began to feel that their yoke of exile was too much to bear. Several Jews like Theodore Herzl wanted to put an end to this long “Via Dolorosa” of suffering. He wanted to emancipate them, organizing them in their own state, just as other groups of people at that time (women, and other colonial nations, for example) were dreaming of emancipation.

They took on the name Zionism, because of their desire to see the prophecies about Zion fulfilled. A return to Zion is not only a return to the land of Israel, but they wanted to see a new type of Jew - no longer a beaten Diaspora-Jew, but one who could lift his head with new character, living to fulfill the dreams of the prophets - “out of Zion will come the law from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2,3).

Question 2 – Is the Zionism of Theodor Herzl the same as “spiritual Zionism” of Asher Guinzberg?

The Zionism of Theodor Herzl basically ended with the establishment of the Jewish state, with Jews that were farming and that began living a normal human life. We are living now in a post-Zionist era. Now the old Zionists are looking for a new identity. It is my opinion that the new Zionism has to include not only Jews but also Christians that believe in the fulfillment of the prophetic promises to Israel, and are included in the words of Isaiah as a part of the rebuilding, the return, and the reclaiming of the spiritual heritage of Israel, which is an indelible part of the identity, character and future of the body of Yeshua, the Messiah. Zionism has to be spiritual and not only physical. We have already fulfilled the physical, by returning to the land that God gave to Abraham. The difficulty now is reclaiming our spiritual heritage, which, without a shadow of a doubt, includes Yeshua as our Messiah.

Question 3 – Who are the Messianic Jews and what is their life style?

Messianic Jews are first of all Jews. You cannot be a Messianic Jew without being Jewish first, and a lot of our brothers in Brazil and the United States have not learned this yet. You find a lot of people that are not at all Jewish, that want to be Messianic Jews - it doesn't work. It is like trying to make chicken soup without chicken! But if you are a Jew, and believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and you have not given up your identity

as a Jew, then you are a Messianic Jew. That means a Jew who has Yeshua as his Lord, his Master and Savior. But there are as many “flavors” of Messianic Jews as there are flavors of ice cream - Jews who are more orthodox, others less orthodox, Jews who are sour, others sweet. But any Jew who believes that Jesus is his Messiah and Savior is a Messianic Jew.

How do they live? They have a variety of lifestyles - from very Protestant, to Catholic, to Orthodox Jewish, and I suppose all of them are acceptable to God since they simply reflect the fact that Yeshua is the Messiah. The Kingdom of God is neither food nor drink, nor what we wear, nor about which day we rest.

Question 4 – How did you become a Messianic Jew?

First of all, I was born a Jew, born to Jewish parents, circumcised on the 8th day and my parents took me to Israel when I was less than two years old. I didn't do anything to become a Jew. Secondly, when I became a disciple of Yeshua Ha Maschiach in 1962, I was baptized and received the Holy Spirit, God added me to His church, that is, a disciple of Jesus.

My conversion process began when a teacher who is not a Believer asked me to write a paper about the history of Christianity, and I had to read several materials. When I read the New Testament, I was quite upset at first for not finding anything about Christianity in the New Testament. I read nothing about the Christian denominations - I did find one Baptist, but he was also Jewish! That is what really started me on my personal search, until I found Jesus - or, I guess, - Jesus found me!

Question 5 – How do you see the Apostle Paul and the letters that he wrote?

Well I have been spending years now studying Paul, and writing books about Paul. And right now I am writing a commentary about the book of Galatians, so I could speak a lot about Paul. The thing I want to remind the readers is that Paul was not a Lutheran priest, or a Presbyterian pastor, he was a Jewish rabbi, highly trained and educated, an official of the government with diplomatic clearance - otherwise he wouldn't have been sent by the high priest to another country to extradite a Jewish believer and bring him to the land of Israel. Paul was a very dedicated person that had official status. On the road to Damascus, the Lord had special grace for him, and appeared to him, but that was really not the conversion of the Apostle Paul, contrary to what many believe. If one reads Acts 22, 10-16, he finds that Paul was converted after he heard Ananias preach the Gospel to him. He was converted after his eyes were healed from blindness, and scales fell off his eyes. He was converted after he was baptized, and his sins were forgiven. Yeshua didn't say: “Get converted, just say a little prayer and go on your mission.” He had to hear the Gospel, to repent, to be baptized, to be trained. No one can be converted automatically, it is a process. As Jews we know that there is nothing that happens instantaneously. So Paul was in a process that included faith and obedience.

Paul's letters deal with one main theme that is - to deal with the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles within the Body of Christ. He wrote most of his letters - 1) to raise support. Romans, I Corinthians 16, II Corinthians 8 and 9, Philippians 4, Ephesians - are fund-raising letters. Paul makes a big appeal that the Gentiles ought to give money for the saints in Jerusalem. The money wasn't the important part, but rather to show that there is oneness and participation of the Gentile congregation with the Jewish church. 2) and to deal with the problems in the church concerning the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul writes the letters to resolve these problems. Within the one body, with Jesus as the head,

there were Jews and Gentiles living and worshipping together, and that created some problems. But now we have these letters and need to apply the same wisdom and the understanding that the letters of Paul give us for the problems that exist today.

Question 6 – How do you interpret the word of Paul in Romans chapter 11:25-32, “All Israel shall be saved”?

Paul has a very interesting theology about the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles, and he says something very shocking to most people. I have read the New Testament hundreds of times, and still didn't see it. He said the Gentiles were included in the Kingdom of God for the purpose of provoking the Jews to jealousy. In other words, the mission of the Gentile church according to the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul himself, recorded in Romans 11: 11-14, is to provoke the Jews to jealousy. Paul is basing that on Deuteronomy 32: 17-21 in which Moses prophesied that this is what God is going to do. Because they have provoked Him because of their idolotry, and that is why God is going to use the very Gentiles to provoke the Jews back to Him. Therefore it is no wonder that Paul says in Romans 11 that, although the branches have been cut off from the olive tree, God is able to graft them in again; not only able to - He will! That is the context of Romans 11:25-26 when he says, I don't want you to be ignorant. I will reveal to you the mystery. The secret is that - thus all Israel will be saved. He calls it a mysterion in the Greek. God says He is going to save the Jews, and will do it - there is no doubt about that!

Question 7 – Does the Holocaust serve to soften the hardness of Israel's heart?

This is a hard question. I don't know. I don't know if God used the Holocaust to harden the hearts or soften the hearts of the Jews. I don't know what would have happened if there were no Holocaust. I was born after the Holocaust, my sister was born before it, my parents went through the Holocaust - so I am a second generation Holocaust survivor. I rather think that the Holocaust did not help at all, that it was really a detriment, and a tool of the devil to drive the Jewish people further away from the cross, from Yeshua. There were a few people that became believers during the Holocaust, but the majority of Jewish people hardened their hearts even more. The Germans were so-called Christians; they went to church on Sunday. When the Wehrmacht soldiers or SS officers got up in the morning, before they went out on a mission, they got blest by the Chaplain of the death camp who was a Lutheran, Evangelical priest! These were the nations that brought about the Protestant Reformation, the Fathers of Evangelical Christianity! So - I don't think the Holocaust did anything good for the Jewish people.

Question 8 – Do you see the second coming of Yeshua the Messiah in power and in Glory, and when do you think it is going to happen?

Yes! I hope it is today! I hope it's now. But if it's not today, I will be glad to receive Him anytime He comes! The faster He comes, the better. But in my opinion, no one knows the day and the time and the hour, not even Jesus Himself. And anyone who says, he knows, is basically a false prophet. If Jesus doesn't know, and then some pastor comes and claims that he knows, then he knows more than Jesus, and should be considered a false prophet!

Question 9 – Are the Messianic Jews in the same distance from Catholics and from Protestants? (Should they not be closer to Protestants than from Catholics?)

I cannot speak for all the Messianic Jews but can only speak for myself: as individuals, for me Catholics, Protestants and Greek Orthodox are all the same - they can be wonderful people, dear people. But as institutions, all of them are man-made, basically pagan as far as I am concerned, and all of them are non-Biblical. All of them have made up their own agenda, and have little to do with Jesus, with the New Testament or with the Bible. The institutions are products of Western Christian history. But as individuals, they are wonderful people that I love to have fellowship with.

Question 10 – What is your criticism of Christians in general and of Protestants in particular?

Well, I think I have already said enough criticism!

Question 11 – We know that there is no freedom of worship in Israel. Can we say the same thing about the liberty to proclaim the Gospel?

The state of Israel is not persecuting the believers in Israel, and is not persecuting the Christians in Israel, nor the Muslims. The state of Israel is a very liberal state that gives every-one the right to believe what he wants to believe. The problem is, that they interpret “religious freedom” in different terms. In Israel, you don’t have a right to coerce, pressure or convince someone else to change their belief by using bribery, coercion or taking advantage of some-one’s weakness. I agree with this 100%. I think that Christianity is a faith, not a religion. Therefore someone can only become a Believer by believing, hearing the Gospel, by studying and getting to know Jesus, and not by giving him food, clothing or any other material benefit. The idea to help the Jews emigrate and then evangelize them is an old missionary tactic that has not worked, and it will never work. It is a hidden agenda; it is not honest.

Question 12 – Does Israel need Christian missionaries?

No, I don’t think that Israel needs Christian missionaries. I think the best thing for Israel would be for all Christian missionaries to go home. Why?

- 1) They bring their denominations which cause divisions - in Brazil, in the States, wherever: Pentecostals think that the Baptists aren’t saved. The charismatics think that the Baptists are not saved. That’s the way it is. Now God is restoring the Jewish people back to their land. Do we need more division or more unity? We need more unity. We have come from every country, every language, every color, to unite together in the land of Israel - that’s what the prophesies say. God is going to give us one Shepherd and make us one people. Jeremiah, Ezekiel say that very clearly. How can we become one people under one Shepherd if we become Presbyterian, Catholic, Pentecostal - and all fighting against one another.
- 2) Christian missionaries in Israel have used unethical and unbiblical methods to collect people into their realm. They go after the weak and the poor, and have not educated or taught them. They have used material means to pressure them to become members of their churches. And that is not good.
- 3) I think the Jewish people will be able to deal with Jesus, the Messiah much better alone, because I feel that Jesus needs to become a household word for Jewish people, without mixing the the Gentiles into

the picture. In the story of Joseph, when he wanted to reveal his identity to his brothers, he told all the Egyptians to go out. "I want to be alone with my brothers". And I think that is what is going to happen in the end - that Jesus is going to reveal himself to the Jewish people within a Jewish context, without the interference of Christian denominations.

We all appreciate what the missionaries have done. Most of the Jewish believers in my generation became believers through a Christian missionary, pastor or individual. And we appreciate it very much. But now we have matured. But the Christian missionaries have never said "now you are on your own, you can make your own decisions, we trust you". That has happened in Africa, in China, but not with the Jews. So the best thing is that they go home now. And I believe that we can present Jesus to our people just fine.

But I would very much like for Christians to come to Israel! I think that that is absolutely necessary for Christians to come for pilgrimages and see the land, learn from the Jewish believers and have fellowship with them, and give them political, spiritual and emotional support. These things are absolutely necessary and important. I think it is a primary thing, for Christians to support Israel, but is a different thing than sending missionaries, dominating the local believers but rather dealing with them as brothers in Yeshua.

All the Jewish congregations are growing, not only numerically (now over 100 congregations), but spiritually, and the unity is growing among all the Jewish believers in the land. I believe this is only a beginning. When I became a believer in 1962, there were less than 50 Jewish believers. Today we are talking about 7,000 - at least! That is tremendous growth. If this will continue for the next 20 years, we will have millions of Jewish believers in Israel!