

The Chosen People

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Jewish Ministry in Far East Russia

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to Russia with love



(left) Louise Hirsch with a Jewish believer. (right) The Australian team that visited Birobidzhan.



Dear friend,

Shalom in His grace!

It is difficult for me to believe that I have been privileged to lead Chosen People Ministries for what will be ten years at the end of this month! I can only look back with amazement and awe at how faithful the Lord has been and how much He has accomplished through our staff and volunteers. Zhava and I have never felt more blessed than we do now, and we look forward with great anticipation to what He has for us next.

By His grace we re-established your Mission to the Jewish people in New York City—the heartland of Jewish America—purchased a Center in Jerusalem, tripled our staff in Israel, and expanded our work to a half dozen new cities in the U.S. and another half dozen

countries across the globe. In general, our ministry has grown to include more than 150 staff workers around the world.

But what really thrills Zhava and me is knowing that thousands of our

Jewish people have heard the Gospel through Chosen People Ministries workers during the last ten years and that hundreds of Jews and Gentiles have come to know Jesus as their Messiah! This is what the work is all about for me and for our worldwide staff family.

Thank you for making the last ten years so wonderful through your faithful prayers and support. We are looking forward to all the Lord has for us in the days ahead. And we cannot do this work without you. So thank you in advance for your partnership as we continue to reach Jewish people for Jesus.

Celebrate Messiah: Our Growing Partnership

During the last decade, I have had the opportunity to know and to network with many people—both Jewish and non-Jewish—who have taught me much about the love of Messiah and commitment to His service. But few have shown me more than my dear friends Lawrence and Louise Hirsch.

I have known Lawrence almost since the day he met the Lord in

1990. Born in South Africa, Lawrence and Louise moved to Australia in 1983. Burdened to reach Jewish people in Australia, Lawrence became the founder and director of Celebrate Messiah Australia in 1995.

In the more than 15 years that we have known Lawrence and Louise, Zhava and I have been blessed to see their family grow to include four lovely children. The ministry partnership that has developed between Chosen People Ministries and Celebrate Messiah, however, is almost a decade old. It began in early 1998—when I traveled to Australia to explore how Chosen People Ministries and Celebrate Messiah could work together to reach the Jewish people there. It was a particularly fruitful season for Jewish evangelism. It makes me smile even now to remember how our partnership began to develop.

The Jewish People of Australia

The history of the Jewish people in Australia began with eight Jewish

1997-2007
Celebrating
Dr. Mitch
Glaser's
Ten-Year
Anniversary

convicts from England who arrived at Sydney Cove with the First Fleet in 1788. By 1830, an organized Jewish community had started to exist. The next dramatic change came more than 100 years later. Jewish persecution in Europe, followed by World War II and the Holocaust, led to the arrival of displaced Eastern European Jews.

Today, Australia has a growing Jewish population. The official number in 1991 was 75,000. However, this has risen sharply to perhaps as many as 120,000 due to the significant number of Jewish people from the former Soviet Union who have arrived in the last twelve years or so. In fact, Melbourne, the location of Celebrate Messiah's headquarters, currently has approximately 75,000 Jewish people, of which 25,000 are from the former Soviet Union.

As in other countries such as Germany, the United States and Israel, the Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants have provided a rich opportunity for the spread of the Gospel—and this is what created the original impetus for the rich partnership that has allowed Chosen People Ministries to expand its work.

The Hirsches' work among Russian Jews began in 1997 when Lawrence met Victor Zander, the pastor of the Slavic Baptist Church in Malvern, Australia. Pastor Zander was reaching out to new Russian immigrants in practical ways and, over the course of this ministry, discovered that many of them were Jewish. He gave Lawrence a list of some of the Russian Jewish people whom he knew, and Lawrence followed up by starting a Bible study in the home of a prominent Russian Jewish businessman.

Although the group started slowly, often with only a couple of people present, it began to grow and a total of 27 Russian Jewish people came to

faith that year. This encouraging start set the stage for more to come.

Chosen People Ministries sent Klaudia Zhelezny, a gifted Jewish missionary originally from Ukraine, to help Lawrence in an outreach in Melbourne. For two weeks, Klaudia worked tirelessly with Lawrence leading Bible studies, conducting special evangelistic services and visiting with individuals and families. By the end of Klaudia's visit, 40 Russian Jewish people had received Jesus as their Messiah.

After this, we continued to pray. Then Lawrence and I—and the boards of our respective missions—decided that we should make our partnership official. And so we did! Celebrate Messiah is now part of Chosen People Ministries' global network, which serves in countries representing 96% of the world's Jewish population.

Lawrence estimates that only about two-tenths of one percent of the Jewish people in Australia are believers in Jesus. I'm sure you agree that this represents quite a challenge!

Ministries in Messiah in the Land of Oz

"The Land Down Under" is a quirky place. After all, you won't find a duckbilled platypus or a kangaroo just anywhere. Natives call Australia "Oz" because of the striking differences between it and the rest of the world.

But people are people wherever you go—and all have the same need for the Gospel of forgiveness. As elsewhere, Jewish evangelism depends to a large extent on building trusting relationships and establishing credibility through sincere and loving action. Celebrate Messiah engages in various forms of Jewish evangelism, such as street work and personal ministry. Lawrence has been instrumental in planting two Messianic congregations—one for

English speakers and one for Russian speakers—and the vision is to expand the outreach to Jewish people living in all of the major cities in Australia.

Of course, Lawrence and Louise couldn't do it alone. In addition to a conscientious board of directors, the Hirsches have a team of staff and volunteers who are as committed as they are to ministering despite the difficulty of the work and the sometimes open opposition of some sectors of the Jewish community.

Most recently, the Hirsches have pioneered a new work among the "Forgotten Jews" of Far East Russia in the region of Birobidzhan (the Jewish Autonomous Region).

This is a very exciting open door, and I hope you will enjoy the articles about this new chapter in our ministry.

A Final Note

Thanks again for helping make the last ten years some of the most fruitful and enjoyable of my thirty-plus years of ministry. I believe Chosen People Ministries is as strong as ever and as focused as ever on bringing the Gospel to our Jewish people around the world. This was the vision of our founder, Rabbi Leopold Cohn, and we have not wavered from the task throughout our 113-year history. I believe the best is yet to come, and I am so grateful for your partnership in reaching His chosen people for the Messiah!

Enjoy the rest of the issue—especially as you learn more about the amazing way the Lord is reaching Jewish people in far-off places like Birobidzhan!

Your brother,


Mitch



Dr. Mitch Glaser
President

Reaching out to the “Forgotten Jews” of Far East Russia



Lawrence Hirsch meets with Jewish residents of Birobidzhan

answer, of course, was an emphatic, “Yes!”

The Jewish People under Communism

At first, hopes were high after the Russian Revolution. Didn't the newly penned constitution guarantee all of Jews the civil rights they had been dreaming about? Unfortunately, those promises were never kept. Yet for a single tantalizing moment, Josef Stalin's solution to the “Jewish Problem” brought the Jewish people closer to a dream of a homeland than they would come until the establishment of the Jewish State in 1948. It was called the Jewish Autonomous Region, centered in Birobidzhan, just north of the Chinese border, farther east than even Siberia and Mongolia.

Stalin's experiment had mixed results. Like so many other schemes that have been hatched in ignorance of the Lord of Creation, it began with a measure of success, only to fade away. Stalin began to crack down on Jewish culture, and pogroms broke out. By 1948, the Jewish population of the area had peaked at 45,000, and had Yiddish schools, theaters, publications and



Josef Stalin

synagogues. But since the fall of Communism in the early 1990s, many Jewish people began to leave the region to *make aliyah* (immigrate) to Israel.

However, in these times many Jewish people have decided to stay in the Far East of Russia

because of the volatile situation in the Middle East. Today, the combined Jewish population of the cities of Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Birobidzhan totals about 70,000.

These are the people that Lawrence and Louise Hirsch, together with Rita Ivenskis and their team of volunteers, seek to reach for the sake of Messiah.

Ministering to the Jewish People of Birobidzhan

It is our vision to reach these “Forgotten Jews” of Far East Russia with the Good News of Yeshua the Messiah. Most of these Jewish people have never had a chance to hear the Gospel in a way they can understand.

The project all started at the prompting of Chris and Nicole

The Jewish people have a long history in the lands of the former Soviet Union, perhaps even to the end of the Babylonian Captivity (539 BC) and certainly to the period before Jesus. From the 12th century onward, the Russian Jewish



Birobidzhan's city square

community has played an important role in Jewish history.

It has been a troubled history, however, punctuated by periods of relative tolerance followed by horrific persecution. Literally hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed in the pogroms that took place from the 1880s to the early 1900s.

Like many people in Russia, the Jewish people looked to the Communists for deliverance from the Czarist regime. “Could things have been worse?” they reasoned. The

Birobidzhan- the Soviet Jewish Homeland

The Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan, Josef Stalin's solution to his "Jewish Problem," was established in 1934. After the Russian Revolution, the Jewish people—many of whom had harbored high hopes for the rise of Communism—found themselves mired in the same crushing poverty and persecution as before.

Stalin decided to kill three birds with one stone: make the Jews into cheerful and hardy agricultural workers, populate a buffer zone that would keep China and Japan in check, and score a diplomatic coup by giving the Jewish people their first homeland in almost 2,000 years. The region of Birobidzhan was the solution—an area in Far East Russia about twice the size of New Jersey. At its height in the late 1930s, the population of the region was 109,000.

However, the Jewish workers' paradise was doomed to failure. Poor soil, inadequate planning, and Stalin's later

purges of the Jews and other minorities ended this odd footnote in Jewish history.

A remnant of the Jewish community is still there, however—and is now being offered a homeland in eternity through the message of Messiah that is finally reaching them. Please pray for this Jewish community as we continue to reach out with true friendship and the hope of the Gospel.

For further reading: *Stalin's Forgotten Zion*
www.swarthmore.edu/Home/News/Biro



M., their friends and their supporters, who had a burden for Far East Russia. Then, in September 2004, we took a missions team to this remote region. The mission began in Vladivostok, then went on to Khabarovsk and finally to the Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan. During that first visit, the team identified key people for a future Messianic ministry in the

A synagogue in Birobidzhan



region and made significant contacts with prominent people in the Jewish community. One such contact was a Messianic Jewish couple, André and Valeria, who have opened their home for Bible studies,

have made home visits with Jewish people across the region and have hosted Messianic outreaches on Saturday mornings.

In addition to fellowship and encouragement, we also have gathered and given practical aid, such as the sum of \$10,000 to purchase a minivan used to distribute food parcels to families in the district and to pick up people for services.

This warm relationship proved to be the foundation of more to follow. Late in 2006, Lawrence and a ministry team returned from a truly remarkable time of evangelism in Vladivostok, Birobidzhan and Magadan, where millions of people were killed through Stalin's *gulags* (work camps). In Birobidzhan, where we have a permanent ministry, ten Jewish people came to the Lord at an outreach meeting. In Magadan, a port city of more than 100,000 people, Lawrence and the others encountered a vibrant church led by a Messianic

Jew. They also had the opportunity to proclaim the Word among the Jewish community there, leading two Jewish people to the Lord right in the Jewish community center. They saw 18 people—14 of them Jewish—come to the Lord on that trip. In addition to this, Lawrence made contact with dozens of pastors from across the region who expressed a commitment to reaching Jewish people in their villages.

This year, we will once again visit these three cities to follow up the ministry and continue to establish Messianic outreaches across the region. We also are hoping to visit Kamchatka and Sakhalin, where there are still small, isolated Jewish communities that need to hear the Good News. Please pray for André and Valeria, our missionaries in Birobidzhan, as well as for the team from Australia, as they continue to reach out to the "Forgotten Jews" of Far East Russia.

See the THROUGH JEWISH EYES Bible

by Daniel Goldberg, Th.D., D.D.

DAVID'S REPENTANCE AND GOD'S MERCY



David penned five of the seven Repentance Psalms (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). Psalms 32 and 51 specifically tell of David's repentance, forgiveness and justification by faith.

THE PERSONAL EFFECTS OF SIN

When the prophet Nathan confronted King David after his sinful relations with Bathsheba, Nathan told a story about a poor man's lamb stolen by a rich man to provide a feast for a passing guest. David reacted instantly to that story of injustice (2 Samuel 12:1-14)—and was found guilty even by his own standards.

For nearly a year, David was miserable due to his sin. *"When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah"* (Psalm 32:3,4).

When David kept silent and refused to confess his sins to God and to repent, he was under the heavy hand of God. He lived in a state of spiritual drought that took its toll upon his body (Psalm 51:2,8). Then he prayed, *"Do not cast me away from Your presence..."* (51:11). *"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation..."* (51:12).

DAVID'S CRY OF CONFESSION

David's confession is a catalog of a fallen nature that is with us even now. *"... Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin"* (Psalm 51:1,2). *"Blessed is the man. . . in whose spirit there is no deceit"* (Psalm 32:2). Four important terms for sin are employed:

- (a) Transgression – a deliberate revolt against divinely constituted law.
- (b) Iniquity – the perverseness of human nature.

(c) Sin – falling short and missing the mark.

(d) Deceit or Guilt – sin deceives others and even ourselves.

David then acknowledged the source of sin: *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me"* (Psalm 51:5). The word *sin* here is a reference to the "old nature," which Adam passed on and with which each one of us is born. That nature is the root of sin, and we are responsible for the fruit of sins committed when we permit that fallen nature to govern our lives.

In Psalm 51:16 David prays, *"For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it. You do not delight in burnt offering."* David was guilty of adultery and murder, both of which are capital offenses under the Mosaic Law. No provision was made for presumptuous sins of this magnitude. No animal sacrifice would suffice (Deuteronomy 17:12).

DAVID'S RESTORATION

Looking past the whole ritual system to God alone, David cast himself, in repentance and remorse, upon God's mercy. Nathan declared, *"... The LORD also has put away your sin..."* (2 Samuel 12:13). Consider that there was no lamb, ox or sin offering—just the pure grace of God.

The grace that was extended to David is fully realized for us in Messiah Jesus' supreme sacrifice of Himself. He died as the "Lamb of God" for the sins of David and the sins of the whole world (John 3:16). We can rely on Him alone for the forgiveness of our sins. ✠



SPRING BREAK FOR MESSIAH'S SERVICE

Although many college students seem to find mischief during spring break, Rachel G. worked last month with two groups of students for two weeks each in New

York City. The students took part in a ministry program focused on training, outreach and cultural exposure to the Jewish people. Among the activities they engaged in were outreaches in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens, as well as a prayer walk in an Orthodox Jewish

neighborhood. And, of course, what experience in New York City would be complete without lunch at a Jewish deli? If your church group would like to participate in an outreach to Jewish people in New York City, contact Rachel G. at 212-223-2252.

IT'S GOOD TO MAKE A LIST!

It sometimes takes creativity to form partnerships in Israel. Staff member Victor B. tells about a new initiative that his congregation is implementing. It is a list that comes from the film about the German industrialist Oscar Schindler, who saved the lives of hundreds of Jewish people, registering them all on his well-known list of "necessary" workers for his factories. Now, Victor and his brothers and sisters in Messiah are making another kind of list. They are gathering the names of relatives, friends, colleagues and acquaintances who need the Gospel. They have started praying for every single person on the list. Praise the Lord; they have had wonderful fruit already. Elizaveta, a woman on the list for whom they have prayed, has received the Lord.

"FUN IN THE SON" IN FLORIDA

Chosen People Ministries in South Florida had a successful six-day ministry in February called "Fun in the Son." Worship services were followed by two seminars and a concert night with Messianic musician Ted Pearce. The team also had fruitful evangelistic outreaches in Miami Beach and in the Palm Beach area of Delray Beach. While ministering on the beach for three hours, participants found people to be more and more interested in the things of the Lord. Please pray that the seeds that were planted will grow into a harvest for Messiah.

PRAYER ALERT

The building where our Tel Aviv congregation meets every Saturday has been sold. For more than six years, it was a place of refuge and home for seven congregations and 20 different ministries. Now they must all relocate. Apart from the disruption this will cause, it is not easy to find a facility that will rent to a Messianic ministry. Please pray that the Lord will open up the right doors for a new ministry home.

MESSIANIC CENTER IN BERLIN EXPANDS ACTIVITIES

Our Messianic Center in Berlin is continuing to expand its outreach programs. Vladimir Pikman, who directs our work there, reports: "We attract more and more new people with our seminars, conferences and concerts." Vladimir's wife, Inna, recently started teaching

a course in Biblical Hebrew at the Center. More than 60 people signed up, including some Jewish seekers. Inna now teaches three groups and is enjoying this ministry a great deal. Please pray for her and for the participants to know the Messiah through their studies.



POSITION AVAILABLE IN NEW YORK CITY

Full-Time Personal Executive Assistant to the president of Chosen People Ministries, Dr. Mitch Glaser. Must be well-organized, have excellent personal skills and writing abilities, and have good references and a strong recommendation from a pastor or congregation elder. Position is available beginning May 1 in New York City. Salary is commensurate with experience. Preference will be given to those viewing this job as a career position. Enjoying bagels, Jewish humor and the everyday camaraderie of fellow believers is a plus! Please send résumé and all inquiries to Julia Sedaca (jsedaca@chosenpeople.com) 212-223-2252.

Summer Training & Evangelism Program

STEP is an exciting week of in-depth training, engaging evangelism and Jewish cultural excursions.

Jewish Evangelism

- Minister among Russian Jewish immigrants.
- Be a part of our Brooklyn and Upper West Side congregation plants.
- Prayer-walk through Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods.
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Training Seminars

- Share the Gospel with your Jewish friends.
- Understand the Jewish roots of your faith.
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Jewish Cultural Experiences

- Take a walking tour through the Lower East Side.
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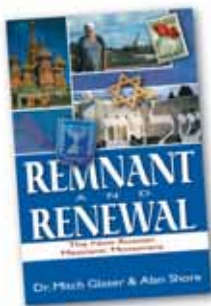
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Please remember Chosen People Ministries in your will. "I will bless those who bless you." (Genesis 12:3)



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