

## **Some flashlights from Romania**

### **Possibilities of cooperation in Europe**

**By Florin Suci**

The territory of present-day Romania was known in antiquity as Dacia. Jewish tombstones dating from early times have been found there. The Romans invaded Dacia in 101 AD and the Jews may have come as merchants or other capacities with the Roman legions that settled the country.

Another wave of Jewish immigrants spread through Wallachia (a Romanian principality founded around 1290) after they were expelled from Hungary in 1367.

After the Spain's expulsion of the Jews in 1492 many came through the Balkan region and settled in Wallachia. There were few who served as physicians and even diplomats at the court of the sovereigns of Wallachia.

By the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, their number again increased by immigrants fleeing from Cossack uprisings in Poland and Ukraine. During the domination of the Turks the Romanian Jewish Community developed into a prosperous middle class in charge of most of the country's trade.

Since it was on the trade routes between Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire many Jewish merchants traveled through Moldavia, the second Romanian principality (in the North East of the country). Some Jews settled there and were favorably received by the rulers of this underpopulated principality.

Following Transylvania's return to Romania, after WW I, the country's Jewish population rose from around 240,000 to approximately 750,000 souls.

Before the WW II the number of Jews in Romania was somewhere between 800 000 and 1 million people.

After the WW II, due to extermination during the Nazi occupation, emigration to Yisrael and other countries leveled the Jewish population so that at present there are about 12,000 people.

Romania is home to more than 800 Synagogues and many cemeteries. Synagogues are still used by the small Jewish communities scattered throughout the country. Jewish heritage sites of particular interest are located in the following cities: Bucharest, Constanta, Braila, Galati, Ploiesti, Iasi, Bacau, Roman, Piatra Neamt, Botosani, Targu Neamt, Dorohoi; Cluj, Oradea, Timisoara, Arad, Sighetu Marmatiei, Satu Mare, Baia Mare, Brasov etc.

Most of the Romanian Jews were Askhenazim, but at one time many Sephardim lived within the Romanian border. The few remaining Sephardim in Romania were assimilated by the Askhenazim, and now the Sephardic cemetery in Bucharest is one of the many signs of their former presence.

### **HISTORY OF MESSIANIC MOVEMENT IN ROMANIA**

Before WW II, during the 30's, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission for the Jews started the work in Romania, led by the Lutheran priest Magne Solheim. He preached the word of God to the Jews in Galati, visiting them to their stores, in the concentration camps or at home. Small Messianic Communities started during this time in Bucharest, Galati and Iasi. During this time Isaac Feinstein

comes to faith in Messiah through the Plymouth Brethren. Shortly afterwards he gets fully involved in sharing the Good News to the Jews around him. He receives a year's education in Warsaw, Poland, and when he gets back to Romania he is employed as a missionary by the Norwegian Israel Mission.

When WW II broke out he was only 37 and was pastor of the Messianic Congregation in Iasi from where he traveled to other places with the Good News. A Norwegian deaconess, Olga Olausson, worked also in Iasi during the war and after Feinstein's death she cared for the Christian Jewish girls who survived the pogrom in Iasi.

In 1937 Richard Wurmbrand comes to faith in Christ through an old German carpenter from a remote village in Romania. Soon after Sabina Wurmbrand comes to faith and through them many souls get to hear the Good News and thus started the "Church of Love" which was open to all denominations. In 1948 Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned by the Communists for about 14 years.

During the communist regime there were Jews who believed in Jesus as Messiah, Dutiu Moscovici, Richard Wurmbrand, Nicolae Steinhardt etc., but they were part of the Christian traditional or Neo-Protestant churches, most of these churches functioning as underground congregations.

In the Spring of 1999 started the Messianic Congregation Bat Tzion in Oradea, under the leadership of David Nagy and in 2000 started Shaarey Tzion in Bucharest, under the leadership of Teo Smilovici. Only in 2002 these two Messianic Congregations found out about each other and started to collaborate and organize different meetings for the leaders.

There is a small church in Bucharest that started in 1999 with the focus on reaching out the Jews with the Gospel. 96% of the attendance is over 60 years old. Every Saturday the people attending the service get a snack and for the Jewish Feasts they get a package of food.

In the Spring of 2005 Daniel Stanger, a Jew by birth, who at the time was the pastor of a Baptist Church, had the vision to begin a Messianic Congregation, and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2005 started the Messianic Congregation *Mashiach Yisrael*.

At the end of 2007, Daniel Stanger with his wife and two daughters made aliyah to Yisrael. After Daniel Stanger's departure I was appointed to lead the ministry.

The Messianic Congregations from Romania are made up of Jews and non-Jews who worship God in a Jewish way: keep the Shabbat, Hebrew liturgy, High Holidays observance as well as popular holidays, traditional Jewish songs, sounding of the Shofar; components which serve to proclaim the Messiahship of Y'shua (Jesus) and the preeminence of God's Word.

*Mashiach Yisrael* and *Beit Hasdo* are the two Communities from Bucharest, both active in reaching out the Jews around. How do we reach them? At first we started to attend the synagogue services and be part of different activities at the Jewish Community Center (JCC). In time we came to be known as the "messianic group" and were kind of avoided. Yet we offered our help where we were allowed, serving them in a praying spirit. In September 2009 the JCC leaders had the idea to have their own choir. 10 messianics offered to be part of it, to meet weekly for rehearsal and then perform to different events. Among other things the choir was invited to perform at the Jewish Old Folks Home, where there are about 100 people, most of them over 65 years old. Through this opportunity we started to visit them regularly, at least once a month, and bring them whatever we can. A small

door has opened for us and we want to use it. The agreement with the Jewish authorities is that we don't do any proselytism or the door will be closed. We usually sing for them, read something, give them some fruits, sweets etc. We know that some are not going to be there the next time we visit, so we do the most we can for them. Some of them are just skin and bone, unable to move, just laying in bed and waiting to breath their last, it breaks one' heart to see them. There are many who don't have anyone to visit them. When talking to them and urging them to pray to God their answers are: Why pray? What can God do for me? Many of them don't even believe in God. Your prayers are much needed.

For about two years we've been praying for the Jews who live in Cluj County. At the end of 2008 the Congregation from Oradea started to get involved in Cluj (there was no messianic congregation in Cluj). Twice a month they go there for the Shabbat service. Other towns targeted by the Community from Oradea are Timisoara and Arad.

Iași is a town where once stood a flourishing Messianic Congregation. We've been fervently praying for the Jews who live there. We have a contact person there who is active in the synagogue and from May we'll visit there once a month in order to reach out with the Good News. Galati is another town where before WWII there were many Jews who believed in Jesus as their Messiah. We are praying for an open door there as well as for the Jews who live in Braila.

The lack of human and financial resources has been the main hindrance in advancing the work. David Nagy from Oradea is the only one who is full time in ministry, being supported by the Congregation he leads. The leaders of the three Congregations from Bucharest that are related to the Jews are part time in ministry and have a part-time job in order to support their family. For the time we do what we can, with what we have where we are.

In 2007 was created the Federation for the Messianic Jewish Communities in order to bring together all the Messianic Communities and together have a strategy to reach out the Jews who are in different parts of Romania. The leaders of the local Communities meet together regularly to pray, plan, fellowship, share experiences for the advancement of the work in Romania.

Here I will have a short Power-Point Presentation for the attendance.

Registered members of different Jewish Communities from different towns of Romania:

Bucharest – 3706 members

Iasi – 492 members

Bacau – 281 members

Galati – 222 members

Braila – 167 members

Focsani – 165 members

Piatra Neamt – 162 members

Ploiesti – 109 members

Botosani – 96 members

Constanta – 59 members

Timisoara – 725 members

Oradea – 660 members

Cluj – 496 members

Arad – 350 members  
Brasov – 270 members  
Târgu Mureş - 242 members  
Satu Mare – 159 members  
Deva – 144 members  
Sighetu Marmatiei – 110 members  
Baia Mare – 83 members

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