

15. Maron Raheb

Maron's story from his website *Holy Land for Jesus* told in his own words¹

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... My family were originally from Ramleh. Then in 1948, during the war here, they escaped from Ramleh and went to live in the Old City of Jerusalem. My parents used to own land in Ramleh; so after the fighting had stopped and things were a little calmer, my parents returned to see their land only to find it had been confiscated by the Israeli government. My mother went to the Israeli authorities to ask for this land to be returned to the family, but she was informed that they could not give her the land as it now belonged to Israel. She was told that if she wanted the land again she would have to buy it. But my parents didn't have that sort of money and so she left and came back to Jerusalem to start a new life. It was a difficult time.

We were a nominal Christian family. I had seven sisters and two brothers and we all lived together in one room that measured three square metres. We had no electricity and there was often friction. And many times I had nowhere to sleep, so I slept outside in the street. And so it was that I grew up as a refugee.

We were very poor at that time and my father didn't have a profession. He searched for work to try and earn a little money, but the doors were usually closed in his face; life just after the war was very difficult. But eventually he found work as a cook in a hotel. Then he got a job with some Israelis, working as a security guard, and they gave him a gun. They gave him a gun - he was an Arab, and they gave him a gun! ... As a teenager, I was always fighting with my father. I had a bitterness in my heart towards him - I didn't like him. He was a tough man. He often beat me and would throw me out of the house. Sometimes in the winter I had nowhere to sleep. I couldn't go home. I was cold.

Then one day, when I was looking for somewhere to sleep, I met somebody who I had known from school. He told me he was sleeping in a hotel and he invited me to join him. I was so grateful to him for offering me accommodation that I jumped at the opportunity. However, I soon realized that he was taking hard drugs. I watched as he injected himself, and soon after I started to use the drugs with him. I was twenty-three years old.

Looking back, I can only say I felt in such a hopeless situation. My father used to tell me I was no good; even as a young child I was told I was no good. It seemed as though he was always shouting at me, saying I would never succeed in life. In fact, when I was small, they put me in an orphanage - they gave me away. But I escaped. It was a difficult life then; there was nothing to give me hope or encouragement. I had no expectation for my life, and I had such hatred in my heart towards my father. I didn't like him and he didn't like me.

I am sometimes asked if I hated my father more than the Jews when I was growing up. After all, I was told time and time again that it was the Jews who had robbed my family of their land and caused us so much hardship. I remember being with my friend, when we were teenagers, and we would often speak about the Jews and what they did to our families, how they destroyed many things and how they made our lives miserable. We

<sup>1</sup> From Maron's Website "Holy Land for Jesus", "Maron's Testimony", <http://www.holylandforjesus.com/> Read about the ministry of Maron and his wife at this site.

always spoke negatively about the Israelis and many times I tried to write things against them on the walls of buildings. Sometimes we would go out on to the streets to throw stones at them and do bad things to them.

One day I was walking along the street and a group of Israeli soldiers noticed me. Now on this occasion I wasn't doing anything; I was simply returning from my job. But one of the soldiers took hold of me and started to hit me and to beat me and I didn't know why. Other soldiers came to join him and they all started to beat me and they broke my face with their beatings. After that experience, the hatred that was already inside me started to increase and increase and I vowed I would never love those people because they were my enemy. They did wrong things to me. It was too difficult for me to love them.

Things went from bad to worse. I hated my father. I hated Jews. I was a heroin addict. I drank a lot of alcohol. I took any drug I could get my hands on. I used to steal and did a lot of bad things to get the money. I needed to buy drugs. I was very skinny and looked close to death. I later heard that my mother was told by people who knew me, to prepare for my burial. I had reached the lowest point in my life. I was arrested and sent to prison — many times. But each time I was released after only a few days and went straight back to taking drugs, more and more and more.

Looking back on my life now, I think one of the biggest problems faced by Arabs is that they believe they are not loved. Here in Israel, so many Christians come who have a love for the Jews, and Arabs are left with the impression that there's nobody who is really interested in us Arabs. So we ask the question, "Does God have favorites?" I can remember watching television reports about trouble in Gaza or the West Bank and wondering why God was allowing the Palestinian people to suffer so much. It made me so angry.

My view on life started to shift when my father became a Christian and I saw a huge change in him, which surprised me. He died shortly afterwards, sadly before he saw a change in me. But seeing him mellow and become so sweet-natured really shocked me and I started to wonder about my own life. Could I change too? Could I make something of my life? Could I ever kick the drug habit and be somebody, and do something worthwhile?

And so it was that shortly after my father died, I agreed, reluctantly, to visit a rehabilitation centre (House of Victory) in Haifa run by believers, and it was there that I met the Lord, and there that the Lord changed my life. It didn't happen all at once; when I arrived and looked around I thought I would stay for one week and then escape! But you know, the Lord kept me there, and started to change slowly my life.

I was in for many more surprises. Shortly after this, it was for the week-long Biblical Feast of Tabernacles . . . Danny<sup>2</sup>, who was Jewish, asked me if I could help him build one of these shelters in the garden. Without a moment's hesitation I happily agreed. When I was working with him, I realized I was finding it a pleasure. It occurred me that previously, before I had become a Christian I would have wanted to destroy this Jewish guy - now I loved him like my own brother. I asked myself how this could be I had realized that since I had given my life to Jesus Christ, he was living in me and changing my attitudes in a radical way. . . .

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2 See Danny's story in the list of Jews: "Danny of Beit Nitzachon (House of Victory)"