

THE STORY OF A MODERN MISSIONARY TO AN ANCIENT PEOPLE

by

Leopold Cohn

Copyright © 1908

CHAPTER SEVEN

RETURN TO NEW YORK

A year later an urgent call came to me from New York to go back and preach the Gospel to the Jews who persecuted me in that city. It was with great difficulty that I could accept. My dear wife did not wish to leave Scotland where we had very warm friends, from whom it was hard to separate and go again to a strange country, but some of our dearest friends there and some of the professors of the college brought their influence to bear upon us until Mrs. Cohn consented, and finally we reached New York, October, 1893.

After having labored in New York for nearly a year, a call was extended to me from a Board in Toronto, to be their missionary to the Jews.

John Wilkinson of London ("*Israel My Glory*"), who was at that time on a visit here, came to Toronto for the occasion, to inaugurate the Jewish mission there; but after I had been in the city for a week, holding meetings for the Jews, I was led, I believe of the Holy Spirit, not to accept the call, and so returned to New York.

Soon after that, a Jewish friend took me for a visit to Brooklyn, and on going across the river by ferry boat, I was surprised to see the large crowds of Jews accompanying us. I started a conversation with some of them and asked if they knew of any mission work being done in Brooklyn. They did not even seem to know what kind of a creature a missionary was. Then a forcible thought came into my mind and heart that it was the place where the Lord wanted me to work.

It came so suddenly that it made a tremendous impression upon me and I went home and told my dear wife the new thought that the Lord had given me and that I believed that it came to me directly from above. I had no rest day or night, for at meals and other times, that thought was almost talking to me: "There is your place."

First Brownsville Meeting

While working in New York, the friends from Scotland liberally supported me as their missionary, but the minute I severed my connection with that mission, I had no prospect of any support.

Mrs. Cohn used that as an argument against the thought of going to Brooklyn, but it did not convince me, and consequently, we moved to Brooklyn. Having no Christian friends in Brooklyn, nor as for that matter, in New York, for my time was filled with the work, I had great difficulty in deciding where to start the work and how to provide necessary means.

One afternoon I went out from my house aimlessly and walked until I reached the then lately-founded Jewish colony in a suburb of Brooklyn, which is called to this day "Brownsville." There were no cars running there; the roads and streets were muddy; and not even sidewalks were laid at that time. A few houses were seen here and another group of houses there with only vacant lots between them. I felt impressed that I should rent a store there and begin holding meetings.

Just then I met a Jew with a pack of garments on his back hurrying across a vacant lot. I stopped and asked if he knew of a store for rent. As the Jew is always inquisitive, he queried why I wanted a store. I told him, "For a mission."

He did not know what that was so I explained and told him about the Lord Jesus who can save him as well as all the Jews in Brownsville from their sins. There were some geese, chickens and a few goats on the vacant lots around us and I thought that I was fulfilling the command "**preach the Gospel to every creature**" to the very letter.

Then this man showed me a store not far away and I rented it. The following Saturday I held a meeting there and my acquaintance of a few days before was present. Seven other Jews came in and wanted to fight when they heard me mention the name of Jesus, but soon they became quiet and listened to the preaching of the Gospel with interest. Next Saturday, sixteen Jews attended the meeting, and next, many more. So the attendance kept on increasing until all the chairs were filled.

There was not a single Christian to help me in that pioneer work, financially or otherwise. During week days, I had the mission open daily for a reading room, while in the evenings, I taught the Jews English, by reading the New Testament in English with them. Thus I tried hard to make rapid progress by crowding a great deal into the short days which seemed to flee swiftly away, carrying with them so many Jewish souls without hope of salvation.

Persecuted by My Brethren

The leading Jews of Brownsville, seeing the continuous and steady attendance at the mission, became bitter and started to persecute me as well as the Jews who came in.

Several times, attempts were made to do me bodily harm, but they only once succeeded in decoying and giving me a good beating.

It was done as follows: One afternoon as I was leaving the reading room in charge of another, word was sent asking me to bring a Hebrew New Testament to a certain house. Being glad at the request, I hurried to the given address.

No sooner had I finished my errand, than the Jew, the head of the house, a powerful man, fell upon me, knocked me down and battered me severely with his fists, jumped upon me with his feet and took me by the ears, raising my head and dropping me to the floor many times. When he took hold of my ears, he repeated in Hebrew: "These ears which heard from Mount Sinai, **'Thou shalt not have other Gods beside me'** and which now listen to the Christian god, must be pulled out of his head," emphasizing his words, "pulled out," by a terrible jerk at my ears. But when it was about unbearable, the Lord sent another Jew who came in unexpectedly and my tormentor was startled and stopped persecuting me.

So I gathered myself together and ran out as fast as I could. When I dragged myself home, my dear wife noticed the blood trickling down my face and was greatly shocked, but soon recovered and attended to my wounds, comforted and strengthened me in the Lord and in the blessed hope He gave us.

She did not upbraid or triumph over me by saying: "Did I not tell you not to go to Brooklyn?" A number of times, however, I heard her murmur with a deep sigh, "Oh, why was I so foolish as to leave Bonnie Scotland?"

As a rule, she never complained under straitened circumstances, although she was brought up in wealth in her father's house where she never knew any need or want. Whenever I came home tired, she had a word of cheer, and with a heavenly smile on her face, always lightened my burdens.

The Lord Does Provide

As I had nobody to help me financially when I opened the Mission, one month I had no money to pay the rent. When I told my dear wife about it, she immediately gave her last pieces of jewelry which she had as a remembrance from her mother who died before we were married, and said: "Pawn this and pay the Mission rent."

I said to her that in case we had no money to redeem it, she would lose it and be sorry all her life. To this she replied: "If it is lost here, Jesus will return it to me in heaven." She must now have received it from the hand of the Saviour, for I never redeemed it for her here.

I was determined not to ask money of any man for the work of the Lord. My thought was that since the Lord Jesus led me so wonderfully to Himself, giving me power enough to give up everything for His sake, I need not ask men for financial help, for He is able to give it to me in some way known to Him alone. And He did help me on several occasions in nothing short of miraculous ways, blessed be His holy name.

One day when our children came home from school, there was only a cup of tea for their lunch. Upon explaining to them that there was no money to buy bread just now, one of the boys offered to go to the baker, who, he was sure would give us a loaf of bread on credit. He went and returned without bread but with tears in his eyes; the baker refused to open an account with him and so hurt his feelings. Sadly disappointed, the children had to return to school without having a piece of bread with their tea.

When I realized the situation that I as a father was not able to give bread to my dear children, my heart nearly broke, and I hastened to my closet, shut the door, knelt down and wept bitterly.

Suddenly, the bell rang and the whistle of the letter-carrier shrieked loud, and behold, there was a registered letter with money in it. It was the rent for my dear wife's property, left her from her father, which she entrusted to her brother in Hungary before she left for Scotland.

Her brother refused to send her the money for the previous two years on account of her staying with me. Now he sent it of his own accord. This was followed by a letter from Mr. E. Raphael, a Hebrew Christian in Edinburgh, promising of his own free will, to send us ten pounds monthly for a year. Mr. Raphael is of an excellent spirit and my dear wife used to call him, "a copy of Christ." These things encouraged us greatly in our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and we thanked God.

Help From Christian Friends

Soon after that, T. J. Whitaker, pastor of the Bushwick Avenue Baptist Church, raised in his own church a monthly contribution to pay the rent of the mission.

The pastor was led in a peculiar way to this work. He came to nearly every meeting and saw the progress of the work. He told me later on, that he as well as many other pastors had never thought before of doing mission work among the Jews. When he realized its importance, he tried to help the cause in every way he could. He used to sing for us in the meetings and the audience enjoyed him very much.

The Woman's Auxiliary to the City Mission heard somehow about the new movement and they offered me a lady assistant who released me from teaching English in the evenings. Thus, I noticed that the Lord Jesus can accomplish many things without my asking help of men, and so I took courage and hoped for still greater blessings.

An Early Harvest

As good and as encouraging as these things were to me then, they were not to be compared with the great source of comfort to my soul which lay in the fact that the Jews began to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I used to meet Christian people at church and other places, from whom, when the subject of my occupation as missionary to the Jews was broached, I always heard discouraging utterances. One would say, "There is no use working among the Jews; they cannot be converted," or "Yes, it is a waste of time," and so forth. Now I knew that this was only thoughtlessness on their part, for was not I a Jew and were not Paul and the other apostles Jews? I felt sure that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has the same power today as yesterday, and over the Jew as well as over the Greek. But I thought that since the Jews have been shut out from the Gospel for so many centuries, it would take a long time to make them familiar with it and bring them to confess the Lord Jesus Christ publicly.

I expected that my work would be only to sow the seed and someone else would reap. But, behold, after working for a few months, the Lord began to do wonderful things. Jews continued to come to the meetings in comparatively large numbers; those who were bitterly opposed became reconciled and some of them confessed the Lord Jesus.

There was the case of an outspoken Jewish anarchist who used to come to the meetings, cursing, grinding his teeth and shaking his fist in my face, but before long, that man had to confess before the other Jews that there is no truth but in Jesus. There were several cases where two or three in a family were converted and some whole families.

There was the case of a Jewish lawyer who was converted, his wife and his six children with him. He used to keep an open Bible on his desk, and when his clients came in, instead of talking business with them as usual, he called their attention to what he had found in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah and other passages, showing that Jesus is the Messiah.

He was bitterly persecuted as a result of his confessions and had to leave Brownsville, for on one occasion, they attempted to set fire to his house.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
