

THE STORY OF A MODERN MISSIONARY TO AN ANCIENT PEOPLE

by

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CHAPTER TWO

START FOR AMERICA

I went to a distant town and consulted a noted rabbi, who looked at me in surprise and seemed to grasp the situation.

I think he knew something about the Lord Jesus and His claims and did not want to discuss the matter, saying that if he thought and talked about the subject of the Messiah he would be discharged from his position. "But," said he, "my advice is that you go to America, there you will meet plenty of people who will tell you more about the Messiah."

So intent was I upon relieving my mind of this burden that I at once set sail for America, determined to find the Messiah at any cost. I did not even return to my home to inform my family that I was going.

About the middle of March, 1892, I found myself in the great city of New York.

My countrymen, many of whom knew me personally at home, others by name only, gave me the kindest reception, some even leaving their business to welcome me, when they heard of my arrival.

I soon went to a rabbi of my own countrymen, to whom I had a letter of recommendation. He received me very kindly, offering me temporary service in his Synagogue and promising to procure a congregation where I could be the rabbi. It was a busy time with the Jews, the time of preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or the Passover.

Discoveries in New York

On the third Saturday after my arrival, I went out for a walk, musing and thinking again about the Messiah, and passed by a church where there was a sign with Hebrew letters saying, "Meetings for Jews."

I stopped, became curious and desired to enter. At my first step toward the door, however, I saw a cross at the top of the building. I was pulled, and began to reason thus, "If this is a Christian Church, what does that Hebrew writing mean? And what connection have they with the Jews?"

“How can a Jew enter a building on which there is a ‘cross,’ that object which the so-called Christians in my country worship? And how are the Jew and Christian, between whom there is such great hatred in my country, here united?”

As I stood musing and absorbed in these thoughts one of my friends passed by and said, in an awe-inspiring tone: “Mr. Cohn, you had better come away from there.”

“Why?” asked I.

“Just come, please,” said he, and was so persistent that I had to follow. We went a few steps when he said, “There are some apostates in that church who mislead our Jewish brethren.”

“How, how, I pray?” for he made me only more anxious to know.

He told me at last. “They say that the Messiah has already come.”

When I heard that, I was nearly bewildered with joy and surprise, for this confirmed my discovery. I longed to enter that church to hear their ideas, but how could I get rid of my companion? I had already taken a lesson in my country not to speak about such things, so I freed myself from him by saying, “Good-bye, friend, I have to go somewhere.”

Glancing back until convinced of his disappearance, I ran hastily into the church, in spite of the cross at the top. But alas! what a scene! The preacher on the platform, as well as the audience, all bare-headed! What a sin, specially for a rabbi to be bare-headed. I turned quickly and went out, but the janitor, noticing all this, after an interview, gave me the address of the preacher.

My First New Testament

The following Monday, I called on the minister and found him a Hebrew-Christian with a most interesting, winning way. He was educated in Talmudic literature and when he told me that he was a descendant of a certain well-known rabbi, he gained my confidence and love at once.

Seeing my utter ignorance of the Christian faith, but also my great earnestness, he gave me a Hebrew New Testament, asking me to read it. I opened it at once and read for the first time in my life: “**This is a book of the generation of Yeshua, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.**” My feelings could not be described!

For many years my thoughts had been occupied almost continually with the coming of the Messiah. For that reason I had suffered and left my wife and children for a strange country, which I never expected to visit. I had inquired of several rabbis, searched the Scriptures, prayed and thought; my whole being was wrapped up in this one subject. And now at last here was a book that would tell me about the Messiah.

“Surely,” I thought, “this book has come to me directly from above. God has sent it to me, and it will give all the desired information and lead me to the Messiah.”

The words, “**Yeshua, the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham**” were sweeter to me than angelic music. I forgot all about my troubles and became very happy, and running as fast as I could to my private room, the doors of which I locked behind me, sat down to study that book. I began reading at eleven o’clock in the morning, and continued until one o’clock after midnight. I could not understand the contents of the whole book, but I could at least realize that the Messiah’s name was Yeshua, that He was born in Bethlehem, that He had lived in Jerusalem and talked to my people, and that He came just about the time indicated by the angel’s message to Daniel. My joy was unbounded.

Trials Begin

In the morning, I ran quickly to my rabbi friend, who by that time had already a prospect of securing a rabbinical charge for me, and told him of the book and my discoveries. I had not identified this Yeshua, the Messiah, with the name Jesus; I did not see at that time that this Messiah is the same of whom gross caricatures had been presented in my country, neither could I think of Gentiles believing in the Jewish Messiah. Had that been the case, humanly speaking, I could not have been reconciled to that hated Crucified One. I thought that this Yeshua, the Messiah, must be somewhere in this country, ruling as the King, having His people, perhaps the lost ten tribes, as His subjects, and what happiness it would be for me to join them and to be under His rule!

Such impossible dreams were in my heart, and when I suggested them to the rabbi, one can imagine what followed. Vehemently and with terrible curses, he threw the book to the floor, stamped upon it, and in very unkind expressions, denounced me and said that that was the book which the Crucified One had made and it was the cause of all Jewish troubles. “And now,” he said, “A Jew like you should not handle that book, or talk, or think of it.” I fled from his wrath with new struggles in my heart. “Is it possible that Yeshua, the Messiah, the son of David, is the very same person whom the Christians worship? Why, that is idolatry! How can I have anything to do with that?”

For several days my heart ached with sorrow and depression. Then I renewed my studies and began to see the truth more plainly, as the sufferings of the Messiah were revealed to me. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah was a most wonderful revelation, but what of it? How could I love that hated One? How could I take His name upon my lips since He is the Crucified One and since His followers in every generation and in every country have hated my people, robbed my brothers of all that was good and fair, killed, tortured and degraded them? How could I, a true Jew, join myself to such a band of the enemies of my own flesh and blood? But a small voice seemed to whisper in my heart, “If He is the One of whom the Scriptures write, then you must love Him. No matter what others do in His name, you must do as He teaches.”

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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