

THE STORY OF A MODERN MISSIONARY TO AN ANCIENT PEOPLE

by

Leopold Cohn

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CHAPTER NINE

THE WILLIAMSBURG MISSION BEGUN

Now, at that time when these societies stepped in and one took upon itself the regular expenses of the Mission, about six hundred dollars a year, and the other offered to pay a thousand dollars a year as the missionary's salary, I saw that the Lord was indeed and in reality my living Father and near Friend.

So I said I would not give Him rest; I would ask still greater things.

This little work that was done was only in Brownsville, where there were about 20,000 Jews at that time (now there are about 150,000); but what was that little colony compared with the mass of Jews in another part of the city, in Williamsburg, an old Jewish settlement, then of about 50,000 Jews?

Why not begin to do mission work there? I went down to that neighborhood and on the first visit saw a very nice store, suitable for a mission. I asked for the rent; it was thirty dollars a month, but I did not have the money, and I also needed to buy chairs and to put up a platform, and arrange for gas.

I counted that about fifty dollars was absolutely required to commence. I had a talk with the Lord in my private closet and then gave five dollars as a deposit on the rent, asking the landlord to wait two or three days, and if I did not bring him the rest, then the five dollars would be forfeited and he could rent the store to someone else.

Two days later, a friend told me that a lady who had dined with her recently, gave her a check for fifty-one dollars for the Jewish mission work. My friend had said that she knew of a rabbi who was doing mission work among the Jews, and the lady having never before contributed for Jewish mission work, wrote a check saying, "Give this to your Jewish friend."

What joy it gave me that I could now rent that store and that the Lord had sent in the needed amount. The first time we opened it on a Friday evening, a crowd of Jews came to listen. Then the Lord raised up a friend and his wife, most lovely Christian characters, who have been paying the rent for that Mission, not by promise or pledge, but by mere choice, from month to month, until three years ago, when another friend began to share the expense with them.

Jewish Antagonism

As the crowds that came to the meetings grew larger and their interest in the Gospel became stronger, the Jewish leaders waxed bitter. They tried hard to stop the flow of men to the Mission, but could not prevail against the strong tide, driven by the Holy Spirit.

Jews began to become convinced that Jesus is really the true Messiah. Some of them confessed Him publicly among other Jews and were greatly persecuted. Now and then zealots came to the meetings and in the midst of the sermon, would rise and cry out, "Fire!" and in this way succeeded in getting a large number out of the hall.

Once, these instigators gathered a crowd and came to the Mission, and at a given notice from their leader, began to upset chairs on which they sat, causing much confusion, and actually drove the people out of the meeting. They did this several times till I had to have a policeman, but even then they succeeded once in crowding him in the crush so that he was forced out in the crowd like a bullet from a gun. He fell down, lost his club and his hat. He was an Irishman and was greatly surprised that Jews could beat him so badly. However, the Lord gave me much patience to ignore these excitements, and I continued giving my testimony for Him, having had divine assurance that no evil shall befall those who trust in Him and co-labor with Him.

Commencement of our Sewing Schools

Thus, a very busy time ensued. No help could be secured in the way of personal assistance in two active fields as interest in the evangelization of the Jews was almost non-existent among the dear Christian people.

Just a few months before I opened the Williamsburg Mission, the Lord put it into my heart to gather children in the Brownsville Mission and work among them. I did not want to take them from the streets without their parents' knowledge as that would do much harm to the cause; so I went to those parents who attended the Mission and were somewhat interested in the Gospel and succeeded in getting thirteen girls to form a Sewing School. Now, sewing was a branch of education which I had never pursued, but I thought through Christ and for Him I could do anything; so I tried to teach the girls sewing.

I met a Christian woman and asked if she would not come to help us teach in the Sewing School, but she said she could not go to Jewish children as the Jews are prejudiced and would not learn from a Christian or come to a mission. I told her that I had had one session and the children did come.

"How many did you have?" she queried.

"Thirteen for the first meeting," replied I.

"Well," said she, "I would not come anyhow, because thirteen is a bad number to begin with."

But soon the Lord raised up a few Christ-like women who came steadily and taught the girls sewing and the Gospel, especially two ladies who have been helping ever since that time and have not wearied in well-doing. The Lord is their reward.

The number of children began to increase from the beginning until there were as many as two hundred, so that often we could not find room or teachers for them. Christian work among the Jewish children is a very delicate matter. The children may see the truth in time, but as long as they are with their unconverted parents, they dare not confess Him or speak about Him at home, as they highly respect them. The idea of their parents' supremacy is inborn.

So even if we did not hear of many conversions, their attendance at the meetings at least disarmed their prejudice and gave the girls a chance to learn about the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this way, work among the children has been greatly blessed. There are now scores of mothers that as girls attended our Sewing School in the first two or three years, and they talk to their husbands about Christ.

Once, standing in a street-car, hanging by a strap, I was surprised and embarrassed when a young woman, well dressed, rose and offered me her seat, calling me by name. I did not know her, but she was one of our Sewing School girls and remembered me very well and introduced me to her husband, saying: "This is the Rev. Mr. Cohn of whom I learned all that I told you."

Practical Results

God's blessing has been continued on the work unto this day. Jews and Jewesses, young and old, have been led to confess the Lord Jesus Christ and have begun to live different lives.

One Jew told me that before he believed in Christ, he tried to get rides without paying fare, but now he would never do such a thing. A woman testified that her husband had become a better man since he began to come to the Mission. Before that, he would never take her for a walk, but now he helps with the housework and when through, takes her and the baby out.

Time and space would not allow me to tell about the visible results that beyond my expectation I have been privileged to see. For fourteen long years crowds of Jews have continued to attend the meetings. Numbers of Jews continue to confess the Lord Jesus publicly, heeding not the great persecution to which they are exposed by their words.

The most remarkable characteristic of the converts is that many of them are now preaching the Gospel to their own people in different towns. They have been gathered together and organized into a little Church. Meetings for them especially are held every Monday evening, when nearly all speak, giving brief testimonies and thus strengthening one another's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper is partaken of by these brethren once every month.

The organ of the mission is a monthly paper called "*The Chosen People*." It reports the progress of the work in both mission fields from month to month.

The Lord, in His divine providence, has given us a large band of faithful friends who are indefatigably and untiringly praying for and supporting this Gospel work among Jews, and all of them enjoy the paper greatly. They believe in the word of God, and therefore have the evangelization of the Jews deep in their hearts; we need many more such friends and you may rest assured that you will be most welcome to join this band of the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. **“Come thou with us and we will do thee good.”**

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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