

"HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF
THE AMERICAN MESSIANIC FELLOWSHIP"

PRESENTED TO THE LAUSANNE CONSULTATION
ON JEWISH EVANGELISM
APRIL 4, 1989

November 4, 1887 found a small band of believers gathered in the offices of Mr. Benjamin Douglass at 167 LaSalle Street in Chicago. The resolution passed that day reflected their intent:

Whereas we recognize the obligation and duty resting upon us Gentile Christians to give the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to God's ancient people Israel, and

Whereas there are said to be 40,000 Hebrews in Chicago, and

Whereas we hail with gratitude the effort of the Rev. Jacob Freshman, pastor of the First Hebrew Christian Church in New York City, to establish a branch of his work in this city,

Therefore, we the undersigned agree to act as an advisory committee to him in establishing such work here.

Signed

William E. Blackstone
Edward P. Goodwin
Cha's Edw'd Cheney
Samuel Ives Curtis

Benj. Douglass
John H. Barrows
C. E. Mandeville
H. M. Scott

These men represented different denominational churches in Chicago, making the work nondenominational from the beginning. Men of no small influence, they were united in their desire to see the message of Messiah brought to the Jewish people of their city. (Though the goal of establishing a branch of Freshman's work never materialized, through their continuing efforts a thriving independent ministry would be founded.)

Also in attendance at that organizational meeting was a young Jewish believer, Bernhard Angel, who shared the story of his journey to faith. Raised Orthodox in Bucharest, he had moved to New York City where he met and married a Catholic girl. His wife began attending the Protestant Olivet Mission, and soon a number of believers (including Jacob Freshman) began witnessing to Mr. Angel. Sometime later, he believed and was baptized at the Olivet Mission. He had now come to Chicago to study at the Chicago Theological Seminary, and was the prime candidate to serve as the first missionary of the fledgling organization.

A second meeting was conducted the following day, November 5. In short order, it was determined to 1) organize as the Chicago Committee for Hebrew-Christian Work; 2) rent two

furnished rooms for \$12.00 per month; and 3) empower the chairman and secretary to "solicit funds, furniture, etc.," arrange to open a Reading Room, and employ a missionary.

Further, there was an expression of appreciation for the work of the Lutheran Mission in Jewish work in Chicago which had recently closed. Rev. S. D. Berger, a Jewish believer and Lutheran pastor who had served that work for two years, read Psalm 30 in Hebrew, and a prayer of dedication for the rented rooms was offered. In addition to Berger and Angel, a third Jewish believer was also in attendance at this meeting, Rev. J. W. Marcusson. Bearing the intriguing appellation "Father Marcusson," he would serve as the third superintendent of the work eight years later.

The third meeting, conducted December 5, 1887, initiated the search for missionary staff. Mrs. E. C. Rice agreed to assist Mrs. Bernhard Angel in opening a work for Jewish girls and children. The first treasurer's report reflected the state of affairs for many faith missions over the years: Receipts - \$50.00; Disbursements - \$49.50; Liabilities - \$30.00. (On December 29, Mr. Angel would draw \$15 for 3 weeks' labor.)

By the 5th of March, 1888, missionary Angel was able to report on the progress of the work, including the desire of four persons to be baptized. The secretary noted Angel's remarks on the Friday evening Bible studies were "especially interesting." Motions prevailed to establish a committee to examine applicants for baptism, and to investigate property for a "permanent location" of the work. (Given the number of moves in the more than 100 years of history following, the idea of "permanent" quarters is somewhat quixotic. Insiders know "AMF" as the acronym for "always moving furniture.")

Secretary William Blackstone was appointed to represent the work at the London general missionary conference to be held that June. Mrs. T. C. Rounds was appointed secretary pro-tem in his absence. (This pattern was repeated when she replaced then-superintendent Blackstone as "superintendent pro-tem" in 1897, a position which she more than ably filled until 1919!)

The key role played by William Blackstone in founding the work cannot easily be overestimated. Known outside Hebrew-Christian circles primarily for authoring the book Jesus is Coming (which in humility he published only under his initials, W.E.B.), Blackstone proved in his actions to be a true friend of Israel. The list of his deeds is too long to detail here and extends to the expanse of world missions, but those engaged in Jewish mission work today would do well to become acquainted with his efforts -- both to document the historical support of Christians for Jewish people and to serve as an example of taking our pleas on behalf of Israel to the highest offices.

We note here only the following of Blackstone's achievements: organizing the first conference between Jews and Christians, "The Conference on the Past, Present, and Future of Israel" (November 24-25, 1890 in Chicago); and the circulation of what came to known as the Blackstone Memorial ("Palestine for the

Jews") of 1891, signed by 413 prominent Jewish and Christian leaders, both clergy and laity, and submitted to U.S. President Benjamin Harrison. (For more information on Blackstone, see AMF's centennial history book, 100 Years of Blessing, and The Encyclopedia Judaica under "Blackstone" and "Zionism, Christian.")

For those who may be interested in documenting not only the unfolding history of America's oldest independent outreach to the Jewish people but also gaining insight into the influential individuals and issues which shaped the past, AMF's past publications provide a wonderful resource. "The First Annual Report of the Hebrew Christian Mission" was released in November 1888. By January 1892 "The Jewish Era: A Christian Quarterly" established the format which would be followed for decades. (The name Chicago Hebrew Mission grew out of the decision at the committee's twelfth meeting [September 10, 1889] to reorganize; formal organization and adoption of a new constitution took place at the December 9, 1889 Second Annual Meeting.)

From an article entitled, "Present State of Jewish Missions," (November 1888 First Annual Report) the following statistics are culled:

COUNTRY OF SERVICE	NUMBER OF MISSIONARIES
Great Britain and Ireland	312
Germany	13
Switzerland	1
France	1
Low Countries	2
Scandinavia	6
Russia	8
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	343
North America	
Episcopal	25
N.Y. Hebrew-Christian (Freshman)	3*
Missouri Synod Lutheran	1
Zion Association	2
Methodist Mission	1
Wesleyan Mission	1
Hebrew Christian Mission (our work)	1
	<hr/>
	34
TOTAL	377

[*No figure is given for Freshman's work, but 3 must be assumed if the stated total of 377 is correct.]

The article concludes, "Thus there are three hundred and seventy-seven missionaries at work among the 6,400,000 Jews in the world, or one missionary to every 16,796 Jews."

"The Jewish Era" covered a wide scope of interests from its earliest issues: testimonies of Jewish believers; current news affecting Palestine or the Diaspora; biblical exposition;

exposure of anti-Semitic activity in the world; Jewish holiday explanations; prophecy; and what might be described as "historical tidbits" (e.g. "The First Jewish Christian in North America. Judah Monis."; series beginning 4/15/01).

History buffs will appreciate the connections between the Chicago Hebrew Mission and people like Jane Addams (member of CHM's executive committee who allowed the utilization of her Hull House property by the mission for a time). D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, and James M. Gray were counted as friends by those in leadership of the mission. Charles Blanchard, then president of Wheaton College, served as CHM's third president. Jewish believers David Baron and Alfred Edersheim's articles were carried in "The Jewish Era."

By the 1900's the mission was going ahead at a frenetic pace. Open air meetings, reading rooms, and personal evangelism were the methods employed in presenting the gospel. But from the beginning there was a concern for the social needs of the many Jewish immigrants flooding Chicago. Mothers' meetings, an industrial school, sewing classes, day nurseries, a visiting nurse, relief work, and a "Converts' Home" were instituted.

In 1913 the mission's first overseas connection was begun with aid sent to John Resnick in his work among the Jassy, Roumania Jewish population. Prophetic conferences held in America helped focus attention on Israel's role in God's program, stimulating further interest in Jewish outreach.

The 1920's saw the continuation of home and shop visitation, street meetings, and Bible studies, as well as the mission reading rooms. A new strategy of "cultivation" was initiated, whereby CHM workers went out two by two into cities with sizable Jewish communities yet unreached by organized groups. Most efforts centered on the states surrounding Illinois, but workers went as far west as Washington. Affiliate missions were established in New Orleans and St. Louis. In 1938 the first official branch opened in Milwaukee.

1940 saw Milton Lindberg installed as general superintendent. He would have an extensive writing ministry, and would also lead the mission through the horror years of World War II. "The Jewish Era" was not silent in chronicling the plight of European Jewry, and CHM's leadership persisted in appealing to U.S. officials to take action on their behalf. Prayer vigils for Israel were organized. And with the war's end, Menno Blum settled in Jerusalem just in time to see the State of Israel inaugurated. His Hebrew radio broadcast, Kol Tikvah (Voice of Hope), was broadcast by WTAN, Radio Tangiers, into Israel beginning in 1956.

The '50s brought significant changes to the old Chicago Hebrew Mission. Not the least of these was the alteration of name to American Messianic Fellowship in 1953. The mission, which had been housed on Chicago's west side since its inception, relocated to 7448 N. Damen Avenue on the far north in 1954. For the next 32 years this site would serve as headquarters, staff housing, and training center. Youth work, including kids' clubs,

was a prime focus during the early years on Damen.

South Florida became a field of endeavor for the mission during the 1960's when the already established Hebrew Christian Fellowship of Florida merged with AMF. In 1962 Archie MacKinney was named superintendent of the work. Toward the close of his tenure a new summer training course was begun. Since 1970 more than 200 believers have spent six weeks in the Student Involvement Program (SIP). The lives of many Jewish people have been touched as a result, and a number of the students have gone into vocational Jewish evangelism with AMF or other boards.

An internship program was instituted in the mid-'70s under present General Director William Currie, who took up the post in 1973. The foreign fields also expanded with the opening of works in Iran and Mexico and additional workers sent to Israel. Music teams (Ehad and Isaiah 53) flourished during this time, and a coffee house ministry opened on Miami Beach.

Training continues to be an emphasis of AMF. In 1988 GROW (Gleaning for the Remnant Outreach Workshops) seminars were introduced as a vehicle for bringing the challenge of Jewish evangelism to schools and churches.

For an organization to move forward through times of change, adaptation and innovation are essential. In 1986 AMF once again took a major step in relocating its headquarters to south suburban Lynwood, Illinois. The new facility has greatly improved office conditions, and affords a marvelous training center. The growing Jewish communities on the south side offer fresh challenges for outreach. A new Bible study is already being rooted in Hammond, Indiana.

After more than a century, the vision of Blackstone and the Chicago Committee for Hebrew Christian work is still alive. Though the years have brought changes of name and location, the original purpose of bringing the gospel to the Jewish people remains unchanged -- a living legacy to the godly men and women who have prayed, wept, and labored for the salvation of God's beloved nation, Israel.

Respectfully submitted,



Wesley N. Taber,
Associate Director

NOTE: Copies of AMF's 50-page centennial history are available upon request. Ask for "100 Years of Blessing" from:

American Messianic Fellowship
P. O. Box 5470
Lansing, IL 60438
(312) 418-0020

Discussion

Fruchtenbaum: I was in Israel last summer. There's a new section in Solomon's Quarries that has been opened up, after they dug some stuff out. Written across the wall is the name W. E. Blackstone. I don't know if it was from this era, or some other era. I think we have pictures of it. It's a new section that was just opened to the public a few months before I got there.

Taber: Blackstone was so convinced of the imminent return of Christ that he did a couple of significant things. One, he took hundreds of copies of the Scriptures and shipped them to Petra because he believed that the Jewish people who were going to flee the coming persecution would end up there, in the caves. What happened, of course, is that the bedouin got in there and rolled their cigarettes and started their fires with Hebrew Scripture, which is unfortunate.

Glasser: I'm of considerable vintage because I knew T.C. Rounds. I was in North Carolina, a brand new Christian from the early thirties, and was taken to a place in North Carolina where they said there was a very godly woman. She must have been in her nineties, a real patriarch. The only thing I could do was say, "Pray for me." I got down on my knees before her, and she placed her hands on me.

Nessim: Is there any connection between your organization and the Bronsteins? What kind of connection was there?

Taber: I don't know.

Rosen: The Bronsteins came to the Lord through an Anglican work in Canada. When they moved to Chicago they were under the Chicago Presbytery. David Bronstein.

Taber: There is no official connection. There was no formal interaction between them and our organization.

Glasser: We have a manuscript, unpublished, on W. E. Blackstone. I can't recall by whom. It's about 100 pages as I recall.

Taber: There are several. But maybe there are other things out there that I haven't even seen. I would be interested to know who authored that one, Dr. Glasser.

Rosen: He had two grandsons and to my knowledge they are both living. One is Bill Blackstone and the other is Jim Blackstone. Jim Blackstone came out with a book that really renounced his grandfather's theology. Whereas Bill Blackstone, who for many years was at the Hollywood First Presbyterian Church, did not write a book, he did affirm his grandfather's theology.

Taber: I've met Jim. He's come out and visited us a couple of times. We also have a copy of his new book.

Mulligan: I was interested in one of those early things. When I was in the CMJ/USA office, I had spent a lot of time reading through a work that had been written from

the 1809 founding of CMJ in England to 1909. I think it is very valuable to have this in a meeting by the way, this kind of thing, acquainting us with the history of some of the organizations. In some of my research I unearthed the fact that there actually had been an early CMJ work in the USA. We had been saying this was the first CMJ/USA office in the United States when I opened that office in 1981. But as it turns out, there actually had been one in 1819 in the beginning of what was the Anglican work among the Jews directly affiliated with CMJ London, beginning in about the 1850's, I think. They had quite a number of missionaries working in similar ways that we had in England, and that work lasted until 1904 and then disappeared, died out.

Ice: I ran across an article in the Austin Presbyterian Library noting the phenomenal amount of evangelical Anglicans from 1850 to the early 1900's who were almost unanimously premillennial. I would like to see if there is some kind of cause/effect relationship.

Mulligan: That's very true. In fact, in the statistics and information I got, some of it out of the Austin library as I began to check through, but I was doing research work at that time on Bishop Sherechevsky, First Anglican Bishop of China, who was a Jewish believer, etc. His name appeared on the roll along with something like 48 American bishops supporting CMJ's work of missions to the Jews. That's quite a far cry from what we found when I opened the office in 1981.

Ice: This particular article said, and I find it hard to believe, but it said that by 1875 100%, this is what the article said, of evangelical Anglicans were premillennial.

Taber: Just one other point. There is an article in here by Lewis Myer about the first Jewish Christian in North America. Does anybody know who that is? The statement of the Venerable Increase Mather made May 1, 1722, that "Judah Monis was the first Jew that I ever knew converted in New England is true not only in regard to New England, but probably in regard to North America. A most careful investigation, carried on through six years has not been able to discover the traces of any other Jew publicly baptized in North America prior to 1722." I'm reading from the April 15, 1901 Jewish Era. This is Lewis Myers' article called, "The First Jewish Christian in North America." There's a lot of historical data in these early Jewish Era's and a lot of current events of that time, of course, are historical to us now.

REPORT: Planting Jewish Congregations: Chosen People Ministry Approach - Roy Schwarcz