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GLASER

A SURVEY OF THE HISTORY
OF MISSIONS TO THE JEWS
IN NEW YORK CITY
1900 - 1930

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I. Introduction

The Purpose

The research will present an overview of missions to the Jews in New York City from the year 1900 until 1930. Jewish missions went through extensive changes during this thirty-year period; and whereas missions to the Jews was affected by World War I, the impact of the war upon the work in New York City was not as severe as it was upon Jewish missions in Europe. On the other hand, missions to the Jews were totally reshaped by World War II. The intent of this present research is to survey the character and work of missions to the Jews in the earlier part of our century, as after 1930 the Jewish community in Europe began a slow march towards destruction which did affect missions to the Jews in New York City.

The Limitations

The research is limited to the efforts of missions to the Jews, both denominational and non-denominational. This is not a history of fellowship groups or of Jewish believers in general except as that history affects missions to the Jews in New York City.

The efforts described will be limited to the five boroughs of New York City and once again the time period will be limited to the first thirty years of the century.

The sources for information are available on a limited basis, as many missions in the United States, unlike their British and European counterparts, did not keep very good records. Therefore, any insights to the presentation will be regarded as helpful.

The Literature

The literature in the field consists mostly of books, testimonies and reports of particular missions and individuals associated with those missions. The Chosen People Ministry, *a. k. a.* The American Board of Missions to the Jews, has produced two "self histories," one by Leopold Cohn and another by his son, Joseph Hoffman Cohn.

A general summary of missionary work among the Jews of New York City in this century has not yet been written. The most significant effort produced in recent days which presents a corporate picture of missions to the Jews in America during the twentieth century is the dissertation by Daniel Ewearitt entitled Jewish-Christian Missions to Jews, 1820-1935. Ewearitt focuses on the United States as a whole, but emphasizes mission work in New York City. He limits his research to a few of the major missions and concludes the majority of his research prior to World War I. There have been a few books written on particular aspects of Jewish Christian history in this century, but none focus on the evangelization of the

Jewish people through mission work.

Another volume that is especially helpful in understanding and evaluating missions to the Jews in general during this period is the summary of the Atlantic City Conference on Jewish Missions, sponsored by the International Missionary Council's International Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews in 1931. This is the same group that sponsored conferences in Budapest (1927) and Warsaw (1928) which focused on European missions to the Jews during this same pre-World War II period. Material from the Atlantic City conference has bearing on mission efforts among the Jews of New York City mostly in the area of theology, motivation and a philosophy of ministry.

The volume that specifically described the efforts of the missionaries and the attitudes of the Jews towards the church and of the church towards the Jews was the unpublished manuscript by Charles Fahs, the Director of the Missionary Research Library located at Union Seminary in New York City. This was written in 1930 and designed for use as background material for the Atlantic City conference sponsored by the International Missionary Council's Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews in 1931.

II. The Status of the Jewish Community 1900 - 1930

According to Alfred E. Thompson in A Century of Jewish Missions, 60,000 Jews per year were emigrating to the United States, mostly from Central Europe, at the time he wrote his book in 1901 (Thompson:225).

This is plausible, as according to the American Jewish Yearbook of 1930-31, there were 230,257 Jews in the United States in 1880, 3,600,800 in 1920 and 4,228,029 in 1927.

The impact of this population shift from Europe to the United States, with New York City receiving the highest number of immigrants, would shape missions to the Jews in New York City during this period. (American Jewish Yearbook, 1931).

Louis Meyer, a missionary to the Jews, pastor, and early researcher in the field, describes at length the condition of the Jewish people, especially in New York. In an article that appeared in the Missionary Review of the World in 1907, Meyer notes the following immigration figures:

1899	37,415
1903	76,203
1904	106,236
1905	125,000
1906	150,846
1907	200,000

His claims, based upon articles that appeared that year in secular and Jewish publications, delineate that there were two million Jews in the United States, more than one million of which resided in New York City. He states that there

were four large Jewish quarters in New York, the largest a one-square-mile area on the lower East Side of Manhattan containing 400,000 Jewish people. There was a large group of 200,000 on Manhattan's Upper East Side; another large community in Williamsburg, Brooklyn of 150,000; and one in Brownsville, Brooklyn of 75,000.

According to Meyer, the immigrants largely came from Russia and Poland. In 1908, 72.6% were classified as Russian Jews. The next largest group, 13%, came from Austria and an additional 6% from Hungary. These immigrants were often uneducated and many were illiterate. Almost always, they were very poor. They came to the United States in search of a better life, as well as to get away from the poverty and prejudice of the European ghettos (1910: 900-904).

Meyer writes that according to figures released by the New York School Board in 1903, there were a total of 64,605 students in the twenty-eight public schools on the Lower East Side. Of this group 61,103 were Jewish children (1907:892-893)! These were the sons and daughters of the immigrants and most of these children spoke Yiddish as their first language. There were eighty-two Jewish periodicals published in the United States and five daily Yiddish newspapers in New York City in 1907.

Whereas the new immigrants were poor and in great need of help, the Jewish people, according to Meyer, settled quickly. In 1907, 75% of the students at the City College of New York were Jewish, as were 50% of the students at Columbia University. By 1907, there were already 3,000 Jewish lawyers in New York City and five State Supreme Court Judges. Jewish firms employed more than 175,000 individuals in the apparel trade in New York City by the year 1907. By this time, the trade had moved into the present garment district. The Jewish people had also already become entrenched in other fields of commerce as well (1907:895-898).

Religious life in New York City had already declined by the year 1910. According to Meyer, reporting on a committee chaired by Mordechai Kaplan, only 30% of the boys and 12% of the girls in New York City were attending one of the 580 religious schools (inclusive of *cheders*, institutional, congregational and Sunday schools) in New York City. The reasons for the decline are not given, but it may be suggested that the transition between European and American life tended to weaken the religion and religious training of the Jewish people (1910:903).

The Jewish community would undergo significant changes within the next two decades, but essentially, the two most important changes were the slowing of immigration and the assimilation of the Jewish community into American life. The period from 1930 until the war continued these same trends, but slowly the Jewish community of New York became dominated by events in Europe. These changes greatly affected the strategy approach and deployment of the Jewish missions.

III. Missions to the Jews in the Nineteenth Century

The story of missions to the Jews in New York City during the nineteenth century is best told in the book, A Century of Jewish Missions, by Alfred E. Thompson.

The History of Missions to the Jews in New York City, 1900-1930, p. 4

This volume, produced in 1901, is the only volume dedicated to providing an overview of mission work among the Jews during the last century. Thompson's section on missions to the Jews in New York City is brief, but does relate how missions to the Jews began there and how they operated until the turn of the century. He also compiles a list of missions to the Jews which includes efforts in New York City.

Daniel Evearitt's work provides some insights as well into the early beginnings of missions efforts among the Jews in New York City. He dedicates a portion of his dissertation to this subject.

The father of missions to the Jews in the United States and in New York City in particular was Joseph Samuel Christian Frederick Frey. Frey left England in 1816 and set sail for the United States after beginning the London Jews Society. The Jewish population of New York City was small, but growing; and after starting a general missions work in New York City, Frey began the Society for Evangelizing the Jews in 1819. The New York State legislature would not permit Frey to operate as a mission as they said that proselytizing was against the Constitution of the United States.

Frey worked around these problems and renamed the organization the Society for the Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews and they received their charter in 1820. Frey resigned after leading the organization for six years. The mission continued, but went out of existence in the mid-1850's (Thompson:258-259).

The Episcopalian Church began work among the Jews of New York in 1842 in association with the London Jews Society. An independent American work emerged in 1859 and was named the Church Mission to the Jews. The society was reformed in 1878 and renamed the Church Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews in America. They had more than 700 baptisms recorded since their inception and the turn of the century, with New York as their chief station (Thompson:230).

The Baptist Society for the Evangelization of the Jews was organized in New York in 1845. G. R. Lederer, who became a believer through the Scottish Missions to the Jews in Budapest, was its most notable missionary in New York City, serving from 1855-1876. The first person he led to the Lord was Joseph Schererschewski, who later became an Anglican Bishop and the translator of the Bible into Mandarin. Schererschewski had been in dire straits on the streets of New York when Lederer led him to the Messiah (Thompson:230-231).

The growing waves of immigration from Central Europe gave impetus to a movement of new missions to the Jews. This massive immigration of Central European Jews to the United States had some effect on missions to the Jews in Europe. It had a profound effect upon missions in the United States, especially in New York City, which was the first home for many of the immigrants.

It is a missiological principle that immigrants show a high degree of openness to the Gospel. The Church, unfortunately, rarely stays ahead of social trends and usually has to "catch up" with the events of the day. The churches in New York

City were unprepared for the massive number of immigrants arriving in New York City and were also unprepared for their surprising openness to the Gospel. As a result, missions to the Jews in New York City emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and continued to proliferate into the early part of the twentieth century.

According to Thompson, the Church Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews was the only mission organization in operation prior to 1880, which marked the beginning of the massive immigration of Eastern European Jews to the United States. The new movement of Jewish missions began with the arrival of a second generation Jewish believers from Montreal.

Jacob Freshman, the son of a Jewish Christian Methodist minister from Quebec, arrived in New York City in 1881 and began the Hebrew Christian Mission. In 1885, the mission moved into quarters at 17 St. Marks Place. Eventually the facility on St. Marks Place was incorporated as part of the New York City Mission and a new worker was employed who had been trained in Scotland: Herman Warszawiak. Warszawiak preached at De Witt Chapel, at 280 Rivington Street on the Lower East Side, and drew hundreds and thousands to hear him preach. He also held forth at a preaching center at 424 Grand Street. Ultimately, he would lead Leopold Cohn and Benjamin Schapiro to the Lord. Bernard Angel, formerly of the Chicago Hebrew Mission took over for him in 1895 (Thompson:243).

Additional works, sponsored by Lutherans, Methodists and non-denominational groups, continued to emerge during this period. Between 1880 and the First World War approximately eighteen missions to the Jews began work in New York City. The majority of these began before the turn of the century in response to the growing immigrant Jewish population in New York. Another dozen began between the Wars

IV. The Missions

Lists of Missions

There were a number of lists identifying the various missions to the Jews worldwide and in the United States in particular. These lists note the missions operating in New York City during the period from 1900 until the early 1930's and will guide this study.

Alfred Thompson produced a list in 1901 which detailed the missions operating up until that year. Thompson collected a list of missions to the Jews operating throughout the world as of the turn of the century and included this material in his appendices. He estimates that there were forty-seven missions or centers in the United States at the turn of the century, employing eighty workers and utilizing a combined budget of \$54,950 (Thompson:263).

Approximately thirty of these workers served among the eleven missions in New York with a combined budget of \$25,000. Thompson concluded that at the start of the twentieth century there were ninety societies worldwide, employing 648 missionaries, working on 213 mission stations with a budget of \$673,000

(Thompson:265).

By way of comparison, according to a table of figures compiled by S. B. Robold in the Missionary Review of the World in December of 1913, there were 107 Jewish missionary societies worldwide, employing 825 workers, with a combined income of \$738,000. Of these, forty-five were working in the United States, employing 124 workers with a combined income of \$102,000. There were perhaps as many as one dozen societies working in New York City (Robold:891).

Another list was produced by Louis Meyer and is entitled The Directory of Protestant Jewish Missionary Societies and Centers Throughout the World. This booklet was published by the Chicago Hebrew Mission in 1912. Meyer's list includes missions to the Jews in New York City.

Meyer presents figures much higher than Thompson. He claims that there were 119 missions operating around the globe at the close of the century, employing more than 800 missionaries on 246 mission stations. Of these societies, according to Meyer, there were thirty-seven in Great Britain, eighteen in Germany, five in Scandinavia, four in the Netherlands, two in France, seven in other parts of Europe, two in Africa, six in Asia, four in Australia and again thirty-four in the United States (1901: 616). The reasons for the differing figures between Meyer and Thompson are difficult to determine.

According to Meyer, there were thirty-four missions to the Jews and two auxiliary groups operating in the United States in the fall of 1901. These thirty-four groups had forty-two missionary centers in the United States as of that date. New York City, according to Meyer, had nine mission groups and two adjunct agencies working within the five boroughs (1912:24).

Another extensive list, compiled twenty years later, was produced by the Secretariat of the International Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews for their meeting in Digswell Park, England, June 13-14, 1932. This list also included missions operating in New York City which, according to the committee, numbered thirteen.

Another list was produced by Charles Fahs. His list follows closely to the Digswell list, but focuses on North America. Fahs lists sixty-two centers and fifty different agencies operating in the United States in 1932. Ten of these are noted as active in New York City.

The Appendix contains a combined list of the missions serving the Jewish people of the New York City during the period under consideration. There were approximately thirty missions to the Jews or branches of missions to the Jews operating in New York City during the thirty-year period under consideration. Not every work continued through the period. There was, however, a quickening in the establishment of missions both at the end of the century and in the mid- to late 1920s.

Unfortunately, not every list contains equal information and the story of some missions is more readily available than others. Where the information is known,

it is listed; where it is not, let it be noted as questions to be answered in further research.

The Character of the Work

The character of missions to the Jews changed significantly during the thirty-year period under consideration. There were really two major periods within the thirty years: the years of massive immigration and the years of assimilation. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact year that immigration slowed, but 1920 is the usual date suggested by demographers.

The First World War temporarily halted the immigration of Jews from Europe, but it picked up its rapid pace once again after the war. The first twenty years of the century were a time of rapid missions growth and saw the development of ministries primarily directed at immigrants. There is no compiled overview of Jewish missions work during this first period, nor are there surveys of the work in general. This makes compiling a complete picture of what occurred during these two decades to be all the more difficult. Most of what may be reported is found in sources provided by each particular ministry.

In contrast, work from the 1920s through the early 1930s is easier to review, as a rather extensive survey of the work was done. Charles Fahs surveyed sixty-five Jewish missions and centers in North America, both denominational and independent, as part of his preparation for the International Missionary Council Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews conference held in Atlantic City in 1931.

Of this group, ten missions to the Jews in New York City responded; or, if they were part of a national movement, the director of that group answered on their behalf.

Two significant non-responders were the American Board of Missions to the Jews and the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Ewearitt suggests that the reason they did not respond was because the survey was suspected as being backed by the wing of the church which was more sympathetic to theological Liberalism (Ewearitt:324-326). The Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy was in full swing and affected missions to the Jews as well. The International Missionary Council and its related groups were considered more liberal by the more fundamentalist groups like the American Board of Missions to the Jews.

In the case of both the American Board and the Alliance works, Fahs sent individuals to do "on sight" visits and record their results.

The missions which responded were:

- Christian Witness to Israel
- East New York Neighborhood House
- Hermon House
- Holy Comforter House

New York Gospel Mission
Rainbow Institutional Mission
Zion Society

Both Beth Dor'she Emet (an Alliance work) and the American Board of Missions to the Jews are included in the survey as a result of the information gathered in personal visits (Fahs:8-13).

Fahs' survey reflects the character of the work among the Jews of New York City during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Unfortunately, there is no known survey of the earlier parts of the century and thus the information presented regarding the first twenty-five years is sketchy and gathered from the reports of the various missions operating in the New York area. The conference material from Atlantic City itself is also helpful in determining the character of the work during this period.

A Ministry to Immigrants

The work among the Jews of New York City was essentially a ministry to immigrants. The majority of the immigrants resided in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn and therefore the missions to the Jews located mostly in these two regions of New York City.

Jewish missions in the United States and in New York City in particular were built upon a ministry to immigrants. Most of the Jewish Christians who rose to prominence in the work were immigrants when they accepted the Lord. These would include Leopold Cohn and most of his contemporaries.

The Jewish population grew by 3.25 million people between 1880 and 1920. Between 1920 and 1930 an additional 750,000 Jewish people came to the United States, mostly from Eastern Europe. Most of these people found their port of entry in New York City and many stayed. This wave of immigration gave the missionaries unprecedented opportunity as they found the immigrants ready to escape the ghetto and explore the new world. This attitude of openness to the new world, along with the difficulties of immigrant life, caused the new Americans to be open as well to the Gospel message.

Meyer wrote in 1911, "God is bringing multitudes of Jews to our shores. What is the purpose? We doubt not that it is His purpose to give us the opportunity and privilege of offering unto them the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jews first and also to the Greek" (1911: 908).

The American Board of Missions to the Jews became the strongest of the missions. This organization began as a ministry to immigrants as Leopold Cohn was a Hungarian immigrant himself. He began work in Brownsville and moved to Williamsburg, following the demographic shifts of the Jewish immigrant population.

According to Fahs' survey, the majority of those to whom the missions ministered

were from Poland, Russian and Romania, with some coming from Hungary as well (Fahs:141). By 1930, more than half of the missions in New York City were conducting ministries to the children of immigrants, although this was obviously not the case in the earlier part of the century. By way of comparison, apart from modern missions to Russian Jews, the missions in New York City today are mostly speaking to second, third and fourth generation Jewish immigrants.

A Ministry to the Social Needs of the Jewish People

The missions in New York City evidently modeled their works on the British and Scottish missions. They started English classes, distributed food, and provided the immigrants with medical services and vocational training along with preaching the Gospel and teaching the Scriptures.

A report in 1904 by Louis Meyer describes the work of the New York Mission and Tract Society. He mentions that a Miss Schabka ran a sewing school for girls out of De Witt Memorial Church on Rivington street and that "crowds of girls were attending the class and learning the story of the cross" (1904:865). The missions usually made it clear that they offered all social and vocational services in the name of the Messiah.

The missions involved themselves in meeting the social needs of the Jewish immigrants. The New York Church Extension and Missionary Society employed Dr. Harry Zeckhausen as Director of their mission. He was a medical doctor and established a medical dispensary.

Leopold Cohn also began a dispensary and attempted to meet the vast social needs of the immigrants. According to reports of the Chosen People magazine, the doctors at the dispensary were seeing 20,000 individuals per year (1913:1). In the Chosen People magazine, Cohn describes his work on behalf of the needy immigrants:

A free medical dispensary is maintained to assist the poor Jews who need such care. The Poor fund enables the workers to relieve the distress and poverty of deserving Jews, and in this way we give to the Jews a practical demonstration of Christian love, of which they see so little (1907:1).

Cohn also maintained children's classes, sewing classes, and even taught English himself a number of evenings a week at the start of the mission. By 1913, Cohn had a faculty of seven volunteer workers in the sewing school in Williamsburg and another five in Brownsville.

As the Jewish population became more integrated into the American culture, these ministries became less and less important, but a number of the missions continued to meet the needs of the immigrants.

According to Fahs, Beth Dor'she Emet had an active training school with five instructors and 183 students as of the 1930 survey. They also had an active language school in the evenings.

The East New York Neighborhood House had three teachers and 317 students and was still conducting industrial classes and providing money for the poor. They also had extensive camping programs and clubs for young people, which gained the workers entrance to the homes.

The Holy Comforter mission had 45 students enrolled (Fahs:150). Children's ministries and classes was also a large part of the outreach and a few mission schools were established (as the British were fond of doing in other parts of the world).

By the beginning of the 1930s, due to the decline of Jewish immigration, not many English classes or medical dispensaries were in operation among the missions of New York City. These ministries slowly disappeared as the social services in New York City improved and as the Jewish community took upon more of the social burden. The Jewish community also became less and less needy as they assimilated.

A Fortright Gospel Testimony

The immigrant believers were not afraid of the more entrenched German Jews who were at the heart of the opposition to the work of the missionaries. The immigrant Jewish believers were willing to proclaim the Gospel publicly. Literature ministry was important to the work in New York City. Door to door visitation, auditorium meetings, outdoor preaching and the distribution of Bibles were also a major part of the outreach.

Numerous evangelistic meetings were held both on a large and small scale in New York City throughout this period. Bernard Angel, serving with the New York City Missions and Tract Society, had three Gospel meetings each week at De Witt Chapel with increasing attendance, according to a report of Meyer in 1904 (1904:865).

Leopold Cohn published his meeting schedule in almost every issue of the Chosen People magazine:

Sunday night	Russian meeting Meeting for Girls Gospel service
Monday night	New Converts' Meeting
Wednesday	Mothers' Meeting
Friday night	Gospel Service
Saturday	Young People's Society

By the 1930's, according to Fahs' survey, most of the missions and centers focused on evangelistic work, literature distribution and the publication of literature. As mentioned above, only a few missions continued to maintain English classes, citizenship classes or medical dispensaries. The missions, however, placed a heavy emphasis on educational work and the operating of social clubs for the purpose of fellowship and outreach.

The History of Missions to the Jews in New York City, 1900-1930, p. 11

The missions understood the value of house-to-house visitation. For example, Fahs lists the number of workers and the number of persons visited in 1930:

East New York Neighborhood House	two workers, 1,446 homes
Beth Dor'she Emet	five workers, 6,579 homes
Holy Comforter House	two workers, 1,500 homes

Figures for most of the other missions were unavailable from Fahs (Fahs:150).

A Ministry in Yiddish

The language of evangelism was Yiddish. Most tracts were written in Yiddish, although a fair amount were written in English, especially in the years after World War I. According to Fahs' survey, even in 1930, the language mostly used in the home of Jewish people was Yiddish. Therefore, most missions, to be effective, conducted their ministry in Yiddish. This was especially true of the missions in New York City (Fahs:143).

By 1930, mission services were held primarily in English, although Yiddish Bible studies and services were still available.

A Ministry through Literature

The writing, production and distribution of Christian literature for the Jewish people was important to the missions operating in New York City. The American Board of Missions to the Jews produced the Shepherd of Israel, which was both an English and Yiddish language evangelistic publication. This effort was well supported for many years and they sent out more 50,000 every other month at the height of its circulation. According to Fahs, the New York missions and most others in the United States were eager to sell Bibles and Scripture portions. Other Christian materials as well were sold among the Jewish community.

The mission centers also distributed large quantities of literature. Whereas in the earlier portion of the century almost all of the literature was composed in Yiddish, by the 1930s this figure had dropped to between 25 and 50%. This reflects the changing demographics of the New York Jewish community (Fahs:144).

A Ministry of Both Denominational and Independent Missions

The mainline denominations were interested in work among the Jewish people and of the thirty missions and centers operating in New York City during this period, a dozen were under the auspices of a mainline Protestant denomination.

At the turn of the century there was no large mission which dominated the landscape. By the start of World War II, the majority of missions in the United States and in New York City were small, "mom-and-pop" missions and were local in their focus. The American Board of Missions to the Jews was comparatively a large mission, both in its New York ministries and in ministries in other areas. The Presbyterian work was also growing larger.

By the 1930's the "Good Will" movement began to gain a foothold in missions to the Jews through the Presbyterians and others. This movement was more of a "friendship" and "dialogue" approach than a direct evangelistic effort. This method was appreciated by some Gentile missionaries to the Jews and many of the Jewish believing missionaries saw it as reflecting a weakened commitment to evangelism.

A Ministry to and through the Church

The missions were active raising funds among the churches. The denominational missions received much of their support from their denominations. Both the East New York Neighborhood House and Beth Dor'she Emet received 76% and more from their sponsoring denominations (Fahs:152). The independent missions had to raise their own support.

Most of the missions in Fahs' survey declared that they had some viable means of raising support (Fahs:151). In 1930, the missions raised the following levels of support:

Holy Comforter House	\$6,000
The New York Gospel Mission	\$14,074
Hermon House	\$19,934
The Christian Witness to Israel	\$20,071
The American Board of Missions to the Jews	\$30,000 for the first six months of the year in 1931.

A number of the American missions, including the American Board of Missions to the Jews, were active in soliciting bequests as well.

A Ministry in Conflict Within

The missions to the Jews were at times in conflict with one another. One of the classic cases involved Leopold Cohn and Rev. Spievacque of the Brooklyn Christian Mission to the Jews. The incident is described in a most interesting book, The Strange Case of Dr. Cohn and Mr. Jozzovic written in 1919, by Alexander Bacon. Alexander Bacon, a prominent New York lawyer and a Christian, was the attorney for Mr. Spievacque and was on the Board of Directors of the Brooklyn Christian Mission to the Jews founded by Benjamin Schapiro. Bacon was convinced that Leopold Cohn was a fraud, in that he was never a Rabbi and that he fled Hungary because he had been convicted of land theft. Bacon believed that the Christian public needed to be warned of Cohn's alleged deceptions.

Bacon's book includes actual court transcripts from six different legal actions involving Leopold Cohn, founder of the Chosen People Ministry, *a. k. a.* The American Board of Missions to the Jews:

Abraham Feinberg vs. Leopold Cohn (1910)
Sheffield vs. Leopold Cohn (1912)
People vs. Neuowich and Spievacque (1913)

Neuowich vs. Leopold Cohn (1913)
Spievacque vs. Leopold Cohn (1917)
Neuowich vs. Leopold Cohn (1917)

Cohn tells his side of the story in the Chosen People:

From the many letters which have contained expressions of sympathy for us in the persecution going on now, I perceive that you are interested to know further about the matter. Perhaps few believe that Satan's devices are just as keen nowadays as in the time when the apostles referred to them, but we find them so.

As I told you in the last issue, after a number of the persecutors had been arrested, they ceased from their methods of disturbing the meetings, and laid new plans to reach Christian people by circulating false stories against me. This was rumored, but we did not know what special form it was to take. About three months ago the offices of the Mission were one night broken into by unknown persons, some money left in a locked desk was stolen, and a number of the names and addresses of our friends and supporters were copied. Although not known to us at the time, this was but a preparation for darker works.

Then a band of five or six Jews went to different Jewish girls in this city asking them to join with them to ruin my character, and the mission, because that through converting the Jews I broke the hearts of so many persons. When the girls asked how they could help destroy the mission they were told substantially the following story: We will give you a lawyer without charge, if you will tell him that you want to sue Mr. Cohn for breach of promise. We will get four or five other Jewish girls to do the same, and when the case is brought up in court, it will be published in all the papers, and then Christians will leave Mr. Cohn severely alone. Now come, do this service for God.

Some of these girls who had attended the Mission, and confessed faith in Christ, utterly refused to have anything to do with such a scheme, and sent me word of the plot. After prayerful consideration and consultation it was concluded, for the sake of the work and as a loyal citizen, whose duty it is to expose such wickedness for the good of the country, to take legal steps to prevent such a Satanic act. Warrants were therefore taken out and two men arrested, the others having fled the city or being in hiding. The two arrested were Philip Spievacque, who claims to have a mission to the Jews in Brooklyn, and A. H. Neuowich, who had professed to be my friend and a Christian.

At an examination before a Jewish magistrate in the Essex Market Court, of New York, one girl who had been in this country only a year, confessed on the witness stand that these men had been her advisers. The judge was very fair and just and held the case for the

court of Special sessions, also increasing the amount of the bail of the accused men.

These details will show you, what powers of darkness a missionary to the Jews has to encounter if he is earnest and sincere, and means business, even the business of the great King, our Lord Jesus Christ. False brethren have existed in every generation and will continue until our Saviour comes (1913:6:3-4).

Two years later, Cohn continued to warn his donors about giving to other missions that he felt were competing with him:

In response to our warnings we have received numerous inquiries from our friends concerning individuals who claim to be conducting Jewish missionary work or to be Jewish evangelists. Some have sent us literature which they received from such individuals and in one case where the individual in question is a rank wicked fraud, our correspondent remarked, "I cannot see how he can be a fraud when he writes such beautiful things, and his literature sounds so holy!" In these days of deceiving and being deceived, will you not bear in mind that the devil himself puts on the garb of a saint and tries to deceive the very elect. Let us give you one or two suggestions how you yourself can detect a fraud in Jewish work. The first thing for you to find out is whether the person claiming to do Jewish work has a group of responsible Christian men who are vouching for him; if he has, you ought to write to them and find out for yourself just exactly what they think of him. Secondly, you should search diligently to see if he gives an honest report of all moneys received and spent, or if he keeps these things hidden. We are told by the apostle to provide things honest in the sight of all men and this is one of the relentless tests upon which you should insist. It is an easy matter for a fraud to print an account of expenses and receipts, but you should find out whether some responsible people have vouched for that account. You will also find that a fraud is usually vague in his statements and often extravagant in his claims; of such be very, very careful. Find out exactly where such a one is doing his work and whether he really does have meetings for Jews. If there is the least suspicion in your mind it will be far safer for you not to give, than for you to encourage deception.

All these things we, as a mission, have faithfully tried to observe; we have, through God's grace, done our part in building up a work which can command the confidence of every thinking man and woman, a work which is carried on openly, concerning which you can find out every detail whether it be in matters spiritual or in matters financial; our books are open to any contributor to our work at any time. Any friend of our work or any prospective friend may write at any time to any representative Christian leader anywhere in this country and will receive a word of commendation concerning our work; this rule is almost invariable. We take great pains in

things financial to acknowledge publicly through the columns of *The Chosen People* every dollar that is received, and this we do in spite of the protest of some friends who feel that we are wasting space in doing so; it is simply in accordance with our policy to provide things honest in the sight of all men. You can realize therefore what a disappointment and grief it is to us and to others, who like us have striven faithfully to maintain an honest work, to see our friends sometimes led astray and in their earnest zeal to do God's will become deceived by someone who ought not to have a bit of their confidence.

We are grateful to the many friends who have already made use of our Investigation Department and we want again to urge you, do not give to any Jewish mission appeal until you know absolutely that such appeal is worthy. Write us freely concerning any inquiries you wish to make; we shall be glad to serve you. (1915:4:4-5)

Along with the competition between missions, there were also attempts to produce unity among the workers. The Department of Immigration of the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions held an all-day conference on Thursday, December 10th, 1908 at their facility on 156 Fifth Avenue. About thirty workers in the field of Jewish missions from the New York area and beyond attended the meeting. The topics of discussion that day were listed in the *Missionary Review of the World*:

- The Training Needed for Successful Work Among the Jews
- The Best Method of Approach in Personal Word Among the Jews
- The Conservation of Results in Jewish Missions
- What Should be the Relationship of the Jew to the Gentile Christian Church?
- What Should be the Relationship of the Jew to the Mosaic Laws and Ceremonies?
- How to Create a More Brotherly Feeling Among Jewish Workers and Converts
- Are Jewish Ethical Conceptions a Barrier in Christian Work?
- The Present Outlook for Jewish Missions Considered Prophetically
- The Present Outlook for Jewish Missions Considered from the Practical Conditions of the Work (1908:940)

The Atlantic City Conference itself was an attempt to gather workers involved with the International Missionary Council Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews. There were many participants in the Atlantic City Conference who were not formally a part of the group, but had a desire for unity and involvement with one another's ministries. The sense of need for active cooperation among workers is as old as missions to the Jews itself.

A Ministry in Conflict Without

The Jewish community at large leveled attacks against the missionaries in many different ways. They mobbed street preachers, tore up tracts, and hurled charges against the missions in the Jewish press. Cohn provides an illustration of the opposition he received regarding his medical dispensary:

As already reported once before, a movement was started a while ago among some Jewish meddlers to stop our dispensary. They stirred up influential Jews who are among the most prominent men in the Jewish community of Brooklyn to oppose us. But they did not succeed. Until about a year ago we used to have Jewish doctors in our dispensary because of the language and because of their thorough knowledge and intimate acquaintance with the peculiarities of the Jews. These physicians at first agreed not to interfere in any way with our mission work. On the contrary, one of them promised to study up the claims of Christ and to speak to the patients favorably of the mission in case any questions should be asked by them. But about a year ago these doctors began to show symptoms of having been infected with the bitterness of the opponents of the mission. They objected chiefly to our large signs with the announcement both in English and Yiddish that this work is carried on in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that Christians who believe and love the Lord had sent of their means to carry on the work in order that the Jews too might find the light in their own Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. At last we had to dismiss the Jewish doctors and place three Christian physicians in their stead. One of those Jewish doctors became very indignant and threatened revenge, boasting he would destroy this dispensary. Consequently he opened a place just down the street from our building and put out a sign announcing his medical treatment, etc. The opposing band of young Jews who, as you know, put forth strenuous efforts to stop people coming to our meetings, rejoiced at this opportunity. When our dispensary opened they waylaid every patient and told them to go to the new place, praising up the doctors and telling them that the Jewish doctors left the mission because they did not want the Jews to be apostatized and now they are treating patients at as low a fee as that in the mission dispensary. A good many were persuaded to go there but many preferred to continue with us. They say invariably that they have more confidence in the doctors who are working in the mission than any others. Thus all the plans that blind prejudice could invent in order to defeat the purpose of God in this mission have fallen through. But it is a most remarkable fact that the crowds of men and women flocking to our meetings and to our dispensary have the moral courage and strength to stand all the threats and taunts and opprobrious names that are hurled at them by those opposing Jews. There was a time when Jewish zealots were absolutely indifferent toward the mission. They said, "Let them alone, they cannot do us any harm. Jews will never accept the Christian religion." But in the last few years they have begun to rub their eyes and see Jewish converts to Christianity by the hundreds and thousands and they now are awakening from their indifference. They see that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is a wonderful power and has taken hold of many Jews in Brooklyn and that it is impossible to stem its mighty tide. (1915:5:8-9)

The opposition was most active in the Jewish periodicals writing articles against the missionaries. The list of articles is endless and the acrimonious charges against the missionaries have not changed in more than a hundred years.

Dedicated to Maintaining a Jewish Identity

In the earlier part of the century, the Hebrew Christian Alliance had not yet made its way across the ocean. According to the *Missionary Review of the World*, in 1905, a group which called itself The Hebrew Christian Association of New York was formed. Of its fifty-seven members, twenty-two were active Christian workers and six others were volunteers. The group held a joint weekly Gospel meeting and a sewing school for Jewish working girls as well. According to one report, they also formed the First Hebrew Church of the Messiah in New York. A covenant, a confession of faith, and rules for church discipline were approved and the congregation began meeting on a weekly basis. They were open to both Jews and Gentiles (1905:467).

In the 1920s and 30s, large group meetings of Jewish believers were usually held on Sunday afternoon or evening; only some met on Friday or Saturday (Fahs:144). Week nights were usually reserved for prayer meetings and Bible studies. The majority of the missions had one or more of these types of meetings each week. Most of the missions celebrated the Jewish holidays with special services and outreach events. The relationship of the Jewish High Holidays to the person of Jesus was the subject of a considerable amount of literature produced during the era.

Though the missions did not call themselves congregations, they had programs which resembled church life: they involved the believers in worship, witness, education and social activities. The Jewish believer may or may not have been part of a conventional church, but his or her everyday spiritual life was focused on the mission. For many, the mission was the hub of their lives. It was their community, where they could be with other Jews and believers in Jesus and speak Yiddish, a language with which they were comfortable.

It would be a mistake to suggest that missions to the Jews in the first thirty years of our century did not care about Jewish believers maintaining their Jewish identities. This was as important to them as it is today to us. Perhaps they were so certain in their identity as immigrants that they did not choose to emphasize the matter. The expression of their Jewish identity was more natural to them than to us who are living in a more assimilated and non-immigrant Jewish society.

V. Lessons for the Present and Future

Missions to the Jews must remain mobile to meet the challenge of shifting Jewish geography.

Missions to the Jews need to follow the population shifts and demographic trends of the Jewish community.

The History of Missions to the Jews in New York City, 1900-1930, p. 18

Missions to the Jews should pay special attention to Jewish immigrant communities as they are usually more open to the Gospel.

People are usually more open to the Gospel when they first emigrate. This is significant because the Jewish community is often constantly in motion. The missions under consideration in this study were either created by or arose to meet the needs of recent immigrants.

Missions to the Jews must stay abreast of the ideological changes within the Jewish community and plan strategies that are in sync with the community.

The importance of mobility and flexibility on the part of missions and missionaries to the Jews is linked to the ever-changing nature of our Jewish people. We must stay current and relate our strategy and materials to the contemporary Jewish scene.

Missions to the Jews should consider purchasing properties in central locations rather than in Jewish neighborhoods, which tend to be unstable.

Missions to the Jews should prepare literature for the various Jewish language groups, now that Yiddish is no longer a common Jewish tongue.

Missions to the Jews should be prepared to meet the needs of the whole Jewish person.

The early missionaries met the social needs of the immigrant community and found that meetings these needs was a gateway for the Gospel. Today we do not see the Jews as a socially needy people, but history has taught us that this can quickly change.

VI. Conclusion

Missions to the Jews in New York City are a microcosm of missions to the Jews worldwide. If a person understands and appreciates missions to the Jews in New York City, he or she will be prepared to minister to Jews globally. New York continues to have Jews from numerous nations within the borders of its five boroughs. New York City is still the best place on the globe to train missionaries to the Jews. The need in New York remains as well for intensified efforts to reach the Jewish people who remain in this city. It is still true that if we win the Jews of New York City, we will be in a far better position to reach the Jews of the world. The words of Leopold Cohn nearly a century ago still ring true today:

The real solution of the Jewish problem in America is to centralize and focus on New York City; this is the storm center of Judaism not only for America, but for the whole world. What we do here, the Jew knows at one all over the world; ... The Jewish people of New York are drifting westward all the time, and if we can reach the individual Jew before he leaves New York, he will come to your city in a receptive mood for the Gospel, and you will find your task more easy than it is today. (Evearitt:198)

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APPENDIX

List of Jewish Missions Working in New York City from 1900-1930

American Board of Missions to the Jews (formerly Brownsville and Williamsburg Mission to the Jews)

Year Founded 1894
Founder Rev. Leopold Cohn
Director Rev. Leopold Cohn
Facilities 201 Van Buren Street, Brooklyn, NY
331 Rockaway, Brooklyn, NY
13 Manhattan, Brooklyn, NY
27 Throop Avenue, Brooklyn, NY
235 S. Fourth Street, Brooklyn, NY
141 Hewes Street, Brooklyn NY (Home for Jewish Believers)
Publications Chosen People Magazine
Shepherd of Israel (Yiddish and English)
Denomination Interdenominational

American Mission to the Jews

Year Founded 1895
Publications Salvation

Baptist Society for Evangelizing the Jews

Year Founded 1845

Beth Dor'she Emeth

Year Founded 1922
Director Rev. Joseph Lewek
Facilities 1216 Washington Avenue, New York, NY
Denomination Christian and Missionary Alliance

Brooklyn Christian Mission to the Jews

Year Founded 1892
Founder Benjamin Schapiro
Director Phillip Spievacque
Facilities 176 Penn Street Brooklyn, NY
Publications The Jewish Evangelist
Denomination Interdenominational

Christian Witness to Israel

Year Founded 1921

Director Charles Weisenberg

Facilities 2258 Westchester Avenue, New York, NY

Church Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews

Year Founded 1878

East New York Neighborhood House- National Board of Missions

Year Founded 1915

Director Mrs. Ida Bingener

Facilities 2030 Pitkin Avenue, Brooklyn, NY

Denomination Presbyterian

Gospel Mission to the Jews

Year Founded 1892

Founder Arno Gabelein

Director Arno Gabelein

Facilities 80 Second Street, New York, NY

Publications Our Hope

Tiqueth Israel (Yiddish)

Denomination Methodist

Greater New York Prayer Union for Israel*

Year Founded 1908

Director Rev. Thomas Chalmers, Secretary

Facilities 63 Central Place, Brooklyn, NY

* This was a fellowship group established as an adjunct to the mission.

Hebrew-Christian Publication Society

Director Benjamin M. Schapiro, Managing Director

Facilities 176 Penn Street Brooklyn, NY

Publications The People, the Land and the Book

Denomination Interdenominational

Hermon House - New York Jewish Mission

Year Founded 1929

Founder Rev. Thomas Chalmers

Director Rev. Thomas Chalmers

Facilities 56 Second Avenue, New York, NY

Denomination Interdenominational - Sponsored by the New York Jewish Evangelization Society 2654 Marion Avenue, New York, NY

Holy Comforter House

Year Founded 1923

Director Rev. Harry Greenberg

Facilities 44 Debevoise Street, Brooklyn, NY

Denomination Protestant Episcopal Church

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Jewish Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Year Founded 1885

Denomination Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States

Year Founded 1883

Director Rev. Nathan Friedmann - Superintendent

Facilities 342 East 78th Street, New York, NY

Publications Zuege und Anzeiger

Denomination Evangelical Lutheran

Mariners' Temple Jewish Work

Year Founded 1891

Director Miss Belle Chisakofsky

Facilities Mariners' Temple, 1 Henry Street, New York, NY

Denomination Baptist

New York Church Extension and Missionary Society

Year Founded 1886

Director Dr. Harry Zeckhausen

Facilities 92nd Street, New York, NY

Publications The City

Denomination Methodist Episcopal

New York City Mission

Year Founded 1889

New York City Missions and Tract Society

Year Founded 1885

Director Rev. A .F. Schauffler D. D..

Missionaries Bernard Angel (1904)

Facilities 287 Fourth Ave., New York, NY

152 East 7th Street - Reading Room (independently supported)

Publications City Missions Monthly

Denomination Presbyterian

New York Hebrew Christian Association*

Year Founded 1913

Director Dr. H. Zeckhausen, Secretary

Facilities 9 Second Street, New York, NY

Denomination Interdenominational

* This was a fellowship group established as an adjunct to the mission.

New York House to House Mission

Year Founded 1892

New York Jewish Evangelization Society

Year Founded 1908

Director Rev. Thomas Chalmers

The History of Missions to the Jews in New York City, 1900-1930, p. 23

Facilities 63 Central Place, Brooklyn, NY
Publications Prayer and Work for Israel
Denomination Interdenominational

New York Jewish Evangelization Society - Columbia University

Director Rev. Frederick Aston

NY Gospel Mission to the Jews

Year Founded 1911
Director Miss Ruth Angel
Facilities 137 Avenue B, New York, NY

Presbyterian Church of Bensonhurst - Department of Jewish Evangelization

Director Dr. B. K. Apelian
Facilities 1753 West 11th Street, Brooklyn, NY
Denomination Presbyterian Church in U. S. A.

Rainbow Industrial Mission to Israel

Director Rev. S. Neddleman
Facilities 395 First Avenue, New York, NY

The Zion Society for Israel

Director Rev. Harry Zeckhausen, M. D.
Facilities 81a Keap Street, Brooklyn, NY
Denomination Lutheran - 2031 17th Avenue So., Minneapolis, MN

Women's Branch, Brooklyn City Missions and Tract Society

Year Founded 1904
Director Miss Caroline Raphael
Facilities 483 Monroe Street, Brooklyn, NY
Denomination Interdenominational