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The Second Generation: Challenges and Growth Under Joseph Hoffman Cohn

Mitch Glaser

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Hoffman Cohn served as the second General Secretary of Chosen People Ministries¹ and I have the joy of serving as the seventh leader of this 125-year-old Mission to the Jewish people. Joseph was a prolific writer and communicator. His

¹ Chosen People Ministries is the current name for what was once called the American Board of Mission to the Jews or ABMJ. Previously the name of the organization was the Williamsburg Mission to the Jews. The name change from the American Board to Chosen People Ministries took place in 1982. The Williamsburg Mission to the Jews was kept as an extant nonprofit ministry organization until this day. Joseph Hoffman Cohn never served with Chosen People Ministries and therefore we will continue to use the name American Board of Missions to the Jews throughout the paper, unless we are referring to the organization after 1982. We will use the initials, ABMJ.



writings, sermons, and radio broadcasts span multiple decades. It is almost impossible to catalog and communicate his thinking about God, the Messiah, the Jewish people and work of the Mission with due justice, due to the sheer volume of his contributions. However, I will attempt to give a brief summary of his life and accomplishments and then turn our attention to the variety of shaping experiences that impacted his life and the strategies, methods and values, which he then communicated to an organization that continues until this very day. As it is with so many great leaders, their true legacy is not the organization, buildings, programs, funding or institutions they built, but rather it is the values and the ways in which they shaped the future of the organization they led. This is the legacy of Joseph Hoffman Cohn.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Chosen People Ministries newsletters, Board minutes, particular writings of J.H. Cohn, and his published books, are all held in *the Chosen People* Ministries archives, many of which are now repositied online, including his 400 radio programs.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joseph Hoffman Cohn was born on March 27, 1886 and died on October 5, 1953. He was the second oldest son of the founder of Chosen People Ministries – Rabbi Leopold Cohn. He led the American Board of Missions to the Jews (ABMJ) from the time of his father's passing in 1937 until his own death. Both father and son died on the job. The memorial service took place at 236 West 72nd street on Thursday night, October 8th, 1953. He



married Josephine Stone, who came from a wealthy and well-established Detroit family. Josephine was a Barnard graduate in June of 1917, and they had three children; Joseph H. Cohn, Jr., Huntley S. Cohn, who was named after the benefactress to the Mission, Frances J. Huntely, and Cordelia S. Cohn, as well four grandchildren. Josephine passed away at the age of 75 in Detroit, where she had grown up, in 1960. Her father was a school superintendent and businessman and her mother's name was Cordelia, the name sake for one of her children.²

Joseph attended Adelphi College in Brooklyn, studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and was granted of Doctor of Divinity (honorary doctorate) from Los Angeles Baptist College in 1937, the same year his father died, and Joseph officially became the General Secretary of the American Board of Missions to the Jews. He was also a member of the Long Island Baptist Ministers Association at the time of his death.³

At the time of his passing, Cohn was writing a book about the history of Chosen People Ministries entitled, *I Have Fought a Good Fight*, which he completed on October 1st, 1953. Four days later, Dr. Cohn suddenly died of a heart attack and was called home to be with the Lord. He was buried alongside his father and mother in the Cypress Hills cemetery in Queens, NY.

As one of the Board members of the Mission stated at the time of his passing,

On Thursday, October 1, 1953, Joseph Hoffman Cohn finished correcting the proofs of this book. In his bold hand, he joyfully wrote, "finis" on his copy. Indeed, he had "fought a good fight," but he had also finished his course.⁴

2 *Battle Creek Enquirer* (March 11, 1960), 12.

3 *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (October 7, 1953), 19.

4 Joseph Hoffman Cohn, *I Have Fought a Good Fight* (New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1953), 315.

Joseph was born in Hungary and emigrated to the United States with his mother and three other siblings by way of Edinburgh, where the family was reunited with Leopold, who was studying for the ministry at New College, Edinburgh. It was a dramatic escape as Rose, Leopold's wife, was held in virtual captivity by her family who opposed her marriage to Leopold upon hearing of his faith.

Joseph writes, almost as an aside, in *I Have Fought a Good Fight*,

There were four of us who sailed across the waters from Europe when my mother had managed to escape from the alert relatives who were watching her day and night. It was one black midnight that I can still remember, as a boy of seven, that a lumber box wagon drove up to our home in Berezna.. The wagon was drawn by one rather bulky horse, and the driver was my father's nephew from the town of Sziget, some twelve miles away. Into the lumber box body, all of us four children piled, and over us they spread a canvas such as is used for tents. My mother climbed up on the seat with the driver, and off we went. All that night we rumbled and rumbled along and early in the morning the poor bedraggled horse came to a stop in front of the little house in which lived my father's nephew and his family. From there came the flight by train to Berlin, and then to Hamburg, and then Edinburgh.⁵

There was one more son, David, who was the only American born child of the Cohn family.

There is always a lot to learn about the life of a man from his obituary. Of particular interest to our research is the special J.H. Cohen Memorial edition of the *The Chosen People* produced in November 1953, the year of his death, which included a variety of testimonies and memorials to this remarkable man and leader.

This volume of the ABMJ magazine, known as *The Chosen*

5 Cohn, *I Have Fought*, 108.



People, highlighted his character and achievements. The author speaks about Joseph Hoffman Cohn's spirituality and his evident love for Jesus the Messiah. He is also described as a man of conviction and it is these convictions that are of particular interest. Cohn's belief systems and views of doctrine and theology influenced the way in which he led and shaped Chosen People Ministries both prior to and after the death of his father. It appears that father and son were harmonious in their perspectives on the Bible.

The editor of the J.H. Cohn Memorial newsletter writes,

To him, the great teachings of the Bible, the atoning work of Christ, the place of his will and God's program, the pre-tribulation rapture of the church, and the pre-millennial return of our Lord Jesus for more than just theological terminology. They were the foundation upon which his life's work was built. Like his beloved father, Leopold, Joseph had the unshakable conviction that the Bible doctrine of to the Jew first was just as imperative today so was on the day that it was first uttered. He said, "upon this conviction this work stands or falls."⁶

The author describes Joseph as a man who was a "contender for the faith." This speaks directly to the context of his day, particularly in the church, which was harshly divided over the fundamentalist – liberal controversy. The author of the memorial writes,

The struggle between fundamentalism and liberalism found him always on the battle line warring for the faith delivered to the Saints. Time and eternity alone will count the worth of this ministry as a Bible teacher of the written and spoken word, as he proclaimed the great fundamentals of our faith. He kept the faith, and because he did many who might have wavered were established. Those who were fighting the

6 *The Chosen People*, Joseph Hoffman Cohn Memorial Edition (December 1953): 4.

battle were strengthened and encouraged by his presence at their side.⁷

Cohn was a prolific writer, as his articles in *The Chosen People* newsletter, books, tracts and his writing and editing *The Shepherd of Israel* magazine attest. He was also highly regarded as a Bible teacher and radio preacher through *The Chosen People* Hour radio broadcast. His monthly work appeared in the newsletter at first as a writer helping his Yiddish speaking father, and then as an editor of the monthly magazine, and eventually as the leader of the Mission.

Joseph was also known as a remarkably good businessman and built the financial base of the organization, purchased multiple properties and generally placed the organization on a good footing financially throughout his career.

In addition, Joseph had a great love for the missionaries serving with the Mission. In an interview with Ruth Wardell, a 50 plus year veteran of the mission, she regaled the current author with stories of Joseph Hoffman Cohn's ability to manage the staff and to take a deep personal interest in the lives of each worker. He would meet with every missionary staff member monthly and read through the daily journal of their ministry. Joseph would make comments, encouraging the staff and praying with them as well. Ruth Wardell served faithfully in New York City directly under the leadership of Joseph and died only a few years ago in her early 90s. She was one of many who deeply appreciated Joseph's personal attention. She spoke fondly of his gracious manner and ministry to her as she served the mission in New York City, Los Angeles and finally in Dallas, Texas, where she passed away.

Dr. Charles Feinberg, who knew Joseph for almost three

⁷ Ibid., 4.



decades, referred to him as a father in the Lord, a colleague and confidant, and eulogized Joseph in the Memorial edition of the magazine.

He speaks of Cohn's belief in the importance of telling Jewish people about Jesus as mandated by Scripture,

In the matter of Jewish missions, Dr. Cohn was a lifelong exponent of the truth of Romans 1:16, (I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God and salvation to everyone that believes it to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.) "To the Jew first" was not a shibboleth with him nor a fetish, nor a clever means for gaining support, as some may have fondly surmised, but it was life of his life and flesh of this flesh. He believed this with all his heart. He was willing to nail this truth to the mast of the ship and go down fighting for it. Yes, my dear friends, this man of God was characterized by deep convictions on these basic matters, and he was unswervingly faithful to them.⁸

Dr. Feinberg mentions that Joseph was also a man characterized by *mighty deeds*. He goes on to say,

Under God he was used to transform a small mission in Williamsburg into a worldwide testimony where truly "their line has gone out to all the world." This he did by the help of God, by dint of ceaseless work. As a young man he found himself knocking at the doors of ministers throughout the land... in order to get his message to the people. In addition to all of this, he looked personally after the financial welfare of the work, and the individual problems involving missionaries, he had a brilliant mind, and ceaselessly sought to promote the work of the mission to which God had called him. He was an untiring worker, easily did the work of three men or more.⁹

The autobiographical book, *I Have Fought a Good Fight*

8 Ibid., 5.

9 Ibid., 6.

explores the travels and connections Joseph made on behalf of his father and the ABMJ. By the time of his death, the ABMJ was certainly the best-known Mission to the Jewish people in the United States.

ACHIEVEMENTS

At the time of Joseph's death, the American Board of Missions to the Jews (ABMJ) maintained a seven-story headquarters building at 236 W. 72nd Street in Manhattan, eleven missionary centers in the United States and six overseas. There was a total of thirty-two ABMJ missionary staff in North America. Cohn had a deep, personal interest in France as demonstrated by the five staff members serving with the ABMJ at that time. The ABMJ published *The Chosen People* monthly, as well as the Shepherd of Israel, which was an evangelistic publication produced in both Yiddish and English, on a periodic basis. A Yiddish/French edition was regularly published as well. The French publication of *The Shepherd of Israel* continues to this day as *Le Berger d'Israel*.


The ABMJ also maintained a training school for Christian workers interested in Jewish evangelism in New York City, as well as a fellowship organization for Jewish believers in Jesus called The World Fellowship of Christian Jews. At one time, this fellowship had a European headquarters in Paris and an American headquarters in New York City.

The Mission published many different books at that time, including the Leopold Cohn memorial edition of the Yiddish New Testament, printed in 1941. This was a revision of the 1901 Bergman Yiddish New Testament published by the British Foreign Bible Society. At the time of Joseph Hoffman Cohn's



Resolution

A TRIBUTE TO DR. JOSEPH HOFFMAN COHN

E has gone. His chair is empty. A vacancy has taken place in the hearts of multitudes. Thousands upon thousands throughout the land and across the seas, bow in sorrow in the loss of a great friend, but rejoice in the achievement of a victorious life.

He slipped away so quietly, at the peak of his activities — his book of the history of the Mission just finished — the material for THE CHOSEN PEOPLE for November and December, just finished — the birthday gifts delivered to his grandchild, whose birthday was yet in the month to come — just as though the Lord had said to him (maybe He did, who knows?) "son get ready, you're coming home to the Father's house."

Those who were in close association with him during the past two or more decades, best realize what it meant to have fellowship with this great man of God. The days ahead are going to be hard for them. They will have to lean hard on Him whose everlasting arms were always round their leader.

Dr. Cohn was chosen of God for a great work, and God signally equipped him for his monumental task. As the Apostle Paul was signally prepared of God for the ministry to which God called him, so Dr. Cohn was prepared for his great assignment; and one cannot think of his genius apart from God's endowments.

We shall best revere his memory by giving ourselves unstintingly to the wonderful stewardship with which God has entrusted us.

D. H. Luntan *Shirley L. D. Owen* *Dr. Abner Morris*
Dr. M. J. Davis *James A. Barclay* *John E. Mellon*
Walter A. Jones *William Jones* *Tommy*

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

God gave him rare executive and administrative ability; gave him great gifts of writing, so that one could hardly finish one paragraph, in anticipation of what the next would reveal; gave him great gifts as an expositor, so that he was totally unable to meet the demands for his ministry, that came to him, from all over the country; gave him great gifts in appraising men and women, enabling him to penetrate through the exterior and determine what was in the heart, that the personnel of the Mission would be above reproach; gave him great reserves of faith and strength to withstand the Satan-inspired attacks that were leveled at him through the years; gave him great courage in his writings, in which he unsparingly attacked those whom he regarded as the enemies of his Lord; gave him great powers of discernment in the study of the Scriptures, enabling him to answer multitudes of those seeking light; gave him a phenomenal memory, a quick mind, ability to reach immediate decisions with exceptional inerrancy; and so we could go on and on before reaching the bottom of the well of God's reserves.

And now he has left a great work, firmly established, with a world wide recognition. In his meticulous care for details, he has seen that every phase of the work of the Mission, is in running order, with a consecrated personnel, so that the great ministry of the Mission may go forward, not only without abatement, but to scale greater heights in its witness for the Master.

passing, the ABMJ also maintained its facility on Throop Avenue in Williamsburg.

Additionally, Joseph's radio program was heard weekly on 44 stations throughout the United States and Canada. The Mission had nine Board members with a large advisory Board of eleven significant evangelical leaders at the time of his passing.

In the Memorial edition of the ABMJ newsletter a summary was written and signed by the Board members which articulates how fondly the Board felt about Joseph and his accomplishments.

FACTORS WHICH SHAPED JOSEPH'S CHARACTER AND MINISTRY HIS RELATIONSHIP TO HIS FATHER

Jewish Identity

Joseph, who grew up speaking Yiddish, as he did not come to the United States until the age of seven, had a Jewish identity that was unquestionable and was typical of Eastern European immigrants of his day who came from a more religious background.

He learned his Jewishness at his father's knee, as the Hebrew scriptures teach parents to teach their children the ways of the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). By the time Joseph was seven, he had read through the five books of Moses three times and could recite scripture from memory. Every morning, Joseph and his brothers had to read one chapter of the Torah or Psalms and repeat it back to their father in Yiddish, so that he knew they understood the text. Joseph's Eastern European Jewish identity, combined with his deep personal faith in Jesus, was expressed both personally and professionally as the Cohn's lives were fully integrated with their ministry of reaching Jewish people for Jesus. Their family "business" of reaching fellow Eastern European



Jewish immigrants for the Messiah made the issue of personal Jewish identity more complex for Joseph, whether he knew it or not. This identity was unfortunately not effectively passed down to his children and grandchildren. Though Cohn helped to establish a Jewish Christian community in many places, he always felt separated from the mainstream Jewish community, which opposed the work of his family.

In *I Have Fought a Good Fight*, Joseph ponders his relationship as a Jewish believer to traditional Jewish life. He reflects,

My father's method of "Gospelization," if I may use such a word, was what might be called "legalism."¹⁰ Pork he would never touch, and it was not allowed at any time in our home. And so with all the forbidden animals of the Bible and the creatures of the waters. The Mosaic law was adhered to. When it came time for Passover, we kept the feast at our home. My Father had been brought up among the Hasidic Jews of Europe, which made him ultra-fanatic in obeying the Mosaic law.

This training in the home has remained with me to the present hour, so that I too have never knowingly eaten pork, ham, or bacon, lobster, crab, clams, or oysters. For all of this, he was continually attacked, even by certain Jews who had already accepted Christ. The reason for my father's lifestyle was not that he felt himself under the law of Moses, but that by this method he was able to win Jews to Christ who could not have been won otherwise. I come face-to-face with the same problem as I go about the country. Many Jews come to me at the close of a meeting, pointing a finger of scorn at me, and telling me "Yes, you wanted to eat pork and so you became a Goy, a Gentile." I would turn on him and say, "Hold on a minute, my friend; you are a Jew; do you eat bacon with your eggs in the morning?" In most cases he would turn a bit red and confess that he did like a slice of bacon with his eggs in the morning.

I will then ask him again, "Do you like lobster?"

10 Though this term is used quite differently today.

Again, he would have to admit rather shamefacedly that he did eat lobster and that he did eat oysters and clams. I would ask him for the whether he keeps the Sabbath, or does he have a store open all day Saturday; whether he keeps the unleavened bread feast of Pesach? He would have to admit that he keeps his store open all day Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, and he does not always keep strictly the Passover Week with regard to unleavened bread.

So, then I would have him at my mercy, and I would say, "Now you see, my dear man, I've never eaten pork in my life; I've never eaten any other thing forbidden by God in the Pentateuch. I keep the Passover and for one week I do not eat unleavened bread. But I do eat unleavened bread. Now tell me, who is the better due? You are right?" And so, he would go away rather crestfallen, for his accusation had fallen flat and he was defeated in the presence of the people standing around.

My father used this method as a means to bring the Jews across the bridge from fanatic Judaism to genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Messiah. The result of this method was that my father in his own lifetime was able to report more actual conversions and baptisms than perhaps all the Jewish missions in America put together.

Joseph adds, never was there any quarrel as to dietetic practices of our converts.

If we were taking lunch with some Jewish Christian brother and he ordered baked ham, never did my father indulge in rebuke or even any comment. Romans 14:2-3 was always the standard, "whatever is not of faith is sin."¹¹

To this day, because of both Cohns' influence, Chosen People Ministries may be viewed as a Jewish, Jewish Mission. Chosen People Ministries starts and maintains Messianic congregations and encourages Jewish believers to be faithful to Jewish life. Not merely as a part of their testimony, but because it is a mark

11 Cohn, *I Have Fought*, 202-203.



of being part of the remnant established by God within Israel, according to Romans 11:5. From Leopold and Joseph's day until today, Chosen People Ministries has maintained Jewish persona and an "insiders" approach to the mission of Jewish evangelism. The Cohns struggled to fit into American society and even more, the American fundamentalist movement, though Joseph was naturally far more American in culture and language than his father. Joseph's concerns for the Jewish people and Jewish life often brought a degree of conflict with his Christian friends and supporters, as neither Leopold nor Joseph ever felt totally at home in the church. Throughout his life, as demonstrated by his response to growing antisemitism during the 1930's and both the Holocaust and post Holocaust period, Joseph was disappointed that the American Fundamentalist movement did not do more to help the Jewish people.

Leadership Style

We learn quite bit about the way Joseph viewed his leadership style and work ethic as distinct from his father. Joseph, reflecting upon the accusations of his father being a shrewd businessman who was taking advantage of "good Christians" comments,

I have to smile further when they accuse my father of having been a shrewd scheming exploiter. The truth is that he never had one executive hair in his head. He knew nothing about business management; he knew nothing about the scheming state accused him up. It was a very simple mind, and a simple soul, whose one driving force was that he must reach the Jewish people with the gospel.¹²

When it came to fundraising, Joseph comments further about

¹² Cohn, *I Have Fought*, 123.

his father,

Not only was he single-minded in his devotion to the actual work of preaching the gospel to the Jewish people, so that everything else was pushed aside as a secondary consequence, he adhered pretty strictly to the policy he had adopted for himself that he would never ask a human soul for a single dollar for the carrying on of the ever increasing burdens which the Lord had placed upon him.¹³

As a result, much of the growth and expansion of the ABMJ was generated by Joseph's entrepreneurial drive, leadership and skill in developing partnerships and patrons.

THEOLOGY

Premillennialism and Pre-Tribulationism

The best Christian friends of the American Board of Missions to the Jews at this time were those who were fundamentalists, dispensational premillennialists and others who believed in the pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Leopold developed a host of high-level friends who identified with these theological positions and even received an honorary doctoral degree from Wheaton College. At the time, Wheaton was led by Dr. J. Oliver Buswell, who served as president of the from 1926-1940. His tenure bridged the lives of both Cohns, father and son. Joseph developed a friendship with Buswell when he was the local pastor of a smaller church in the Midwest.

Buswell was also a committed Calvinist who held to the Westminster Standards and Covenant Theology. Yet, he was

¹³ Ibid., 124.



considered a fundamentalist in the most evangelical sense of the word, specifically opposed to the “modernism” of his day. He was also a premillennialist and believed in a mid-tribulation rapture, although he was not a dispensationalist.¹⁴

Buswell also served on the board of reference of the ABMJ, along with a number of other key fundamentalist leaders. In fact, the list of those who received Doctor of Divinity degrees from Wheaton college under Buswell’s presidency included not only Leopold Cohn, but also some members of the ABMJ Board.¹⁵

To the Jew First (Romans 1:16)

One of the fundamental beliefs Leopold and Joseph Cohn shared was the necessity for all Christians to bring the message of the Gospel to the Jewish people. By contrast, the liberal Christians were mostly concerned with social services and not interested in bringing the gospel to the Jewish people. The fundamentalists, especially those who befriended the Cohns, believed that the gospel should go to the Jewish people “first”, although there were different interpretations as to what the Apostle Paul intended. Many of the fundamentalists at that time identified themselves as dispensational premillennialists and Christian Zionists who believed in the literal land promises, the survival of Jewish people, and the end time repentance of Israel as the precursor to precipitate the second coming of Jesus. These were all fundamental doctrines of the Mission. The difference between

14 “J. Oliver Buswell,” Theopedia, accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.theopedia.com/j-oliver-buswell>.

15 Advisory Council Rev. Cortland Myers, D. D., Los Angeles, Cal.; Rev. Otho F. Bartholow, D. D., Mount Vernon, N. Y.; Rev. John Bunyan Smith, D. D., San Diego, Cal.; Rev. Keith L. Brooks, Los Angeles, Cal.; Rev. R. Paul Miller, Berne, Ind.; Rev. C. Gordon Brownville, D. D., Boston, Mass.; Rev. David Otis Fuller, D. D., Grand Rapids, Mich. (*The Chosen People*, November 1939).

then and now was that these Christian Zionists always believed in the necessity of evangelizing the Jewish people. This is not necessarily the case today.

The Cohns' best friends among the fundamentalists were those who accepted the pre-tribulation rapture view that Jesus would gather both Jews and Gentiles who were part of the church to Himself, where they would remain for seven years and then return with him at the literal second coming. It is this second coming, described in the book of Zachariah 12: 9–10, as well as in Romans 11:25–29, that according to Joseph and other fundamentalist dispensationalists, was the hoped for the pre-millennial return of Jesus to establish his literal kingdom on earth with Jerusalem as the capitol. The turning of the Jewish people to Jesus precipitated the second coming of Christ and was the underlying reason why bringing the Gospel to the Jewish people was so important.

This argument was not unique to the American fundamental dispensationalists, as it was also a core belief of the Scottish and Irish revivalists in the early 1840's. Remember, Leopold Cohen studied at New College, Edinburgh, and would have been influence by the Scottish Presbyterians in theology and methodology. The Scots were definitively influenced by this linkage between the second coming of Christ and the end time repentance of the Jewish people. It is quite probable that either Leopold embraced this point of theology during his year in seminary or somehow picked this up upon his return to the United States. It is hard to tell, but regardless, the "To the Jew First" understanding of Romans 1:16 was basic to the approach of the ABMJ during the tenure of both Leopold and Joseph. In fact, he devoted his lead article every January in *The Chosen People* to this theme, a tradition that continues in the Mission's publications cycle to this day.



Eventually, Joseph would edit an entire book compiling his father's and his own January lead articles from *The Chosen People* which emphasized the "to the Jew first" theme. He writes in the introduction to this book, entitled *Beginning at Jerusalem*, which was published in 1948,

This book, *Beginning at Jerusalem*, is the answer to the urgent appeals of thousands of lovers of Israel, that we gather together in one volume the principal editorial messages which have been printed in *The Chosen People* on the exalted theme which has inspired this work of this mission throughout its history, namely, to the Jew First. My father, ex- Rabbi Leopold Cohn, founder of the American Board of Missions to the Jews and editor-in-chief of *The Chosen People*, made it his duty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the set apart the January number of the magazine each year to a prayerful exposition of the truth of Romans 1:16.

In collaboration with him, I began to take over the task of preparing these yearly messages. The early chapters in the book, 1918, 1919, and 1920, are his work. Beginning with 1921 and continuing through the rest of the 30 years until 1948, the responsibility for the authorship of the messages is to be charged to me. But in a sense, this book is a memorial to her father of whom it can truly be said "he being dead yet speaks," for it was at his feet, so to speak, that I imbibed the God inspired teaching that the Bible doctrine to the Jew first, is as basic and its application to the missionary program of the church as faith in Christ is basic to the program of salvation."¹⁶

ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism was progressing vigorously and viciously in Europe during the "interwar" period between the First and Second

¹⁶ Joseph Hoffman Cohn, *Beginning at Jerusalem* (New York: The American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1948), Introduction.

World Wars, when in 1937 Leopold died and Joseph took up the reigns of the ABMJ. The actual beginning of the Second World War was only two years away, as Poland would be invaded in September of 1939 by Germany. Antisemitism was also growing as a movement in the United States during this time, led by the likes of Catholic leader Father Coughlin who branded a virulent Catholic antisemitism during this period. The Great Depression in the United States left millions unemployed and fearful of competition due the scarcity, therefore existing immigration quotas of the 1920s were left in place. The widespread hardships of the 1930s contributed to a feeling of xenophobia and antisemitism, as “Jewish conspiracies” provided a scapegoat for economic problems and changing social landscapes.

The fundamentalist movement, the major friends and supporters of the Chosen People Ministries, held political positions that sometimes led to anti-Jewish sentiments and rhetoric. Communist plots and global conspiracy theories with Jewish involvement were at times embraced by the fundamentalist as well during this time period. Joseph felt he needed to speak to these issues in support of the Jewish people without overtly offending his more extreme isolationist, anti-Bolshevik and “Jewish cautious” fundamentalist friends. He addressed these issues in *The Chosen People* newsletters and was quite brave and outspoken on behalf of the Jewish people, understanding that he and the Mission were in a unique place to stand between the church and the Jewish people. Joseph’s loyalty to his own Jewish people was especially tested during the dark days just prior to the Holocaust.

He writes,

We have been challenged why we do not spend our time and energies in denouncing Communism from the housetops; and the challenge has come to us in even more specific language, why do we not denounce “Jewish Communists”? The answer



is that we occupy a most perplexing and difficult position, and we are in constant need of the faithful prayers that our precious friends are continually pouring out in our behalf. We are a Jewish Mission first, last and always. This one thing the Lord has put upon us to do, and everything else must be bent to the one purpose of pouring out the Gospel message.

Joseph already saw the hard times ahead amidst the rise of National Socialism, and unfortunately there was a brief period when Hitler was viewed as a positive force in his anti-Bolshevik rhetoric. He wrote,

Israel in what may well be her darkest hour before the dawn. We stand astride the chasm between the Church of Christ and the Israel of the dispersion. To each God has given us a message, and the two messages cannot be confused without damage.¹⁷

And further,

Therefore, this is the point to press home with the Jew; nothing is gained by calling the Jews Communists, or by creating insinuations of evil character against them; the only task that the Church has with regard to the Jew is to press home to him his need of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. And a Church that will do this, in all Christian love, and totally apart from false accusations and bitter denunciations, will be honored of God and will find that He will give many tokens of His approval and blessing. Such a church can have the joy of seeing many Jews come to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ through its ministry.¹⁸

This was a brave statement that could have cost the ABMJ some significant influence and support at the time.

His book *Jacob Have I Loved* addressed these same issues as oftentimes the story of Jacob was used to depict Jewish people in

17 *The Chosen People* XLV (November 1939): 3.

18 *Ibid.*, 4.

a negative manner. He wrote the book to shatter the stereotype and show that Jacob, who would be named Israel and thereby become a synecdoche for the Jewish nation, should be viewed as a good and faithful man rather than a conniver and immoral person who thought nothing of deceiving his brother Esau for his Abrahamic birthright, who gladly gave it up for a bowl of porridge.

Of course, Joseph had some nascent idea of what was happening to the Jewish people in Europe as he was very close to the work of the Mission on the Continent and had travelled there a few years earlier. But he could not have imagined the horror of what would come next through the modern Haman, Adolph Hitler.

Joseph, in this same lead article of his November 1939 newsletter writes,

And so if we who are Christian Jews, knowing that it is a Satanic libel, hatched in Berlin, that all the Jews are Communists and everything else that is evil, if we swallow such falsehoods in unsophisticated gullibility, and jump to the rostrum to join the vociferous self-seekers who make capital out of exploiting such false accusations against a helpless people, then what will the Jews think of us? Will our testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ have any value? To us the Jews could very properly then say, "You are traitors, for you claim to be Christian Jews, and you claim to stand for the truth, and here you are taking sides against us with those who are known to be Jew-haters, and you are repeating the same falsehoods with which they have tried to destroy us from the face of the earth!"

The same sequences would naturally follow if we should just keep silence regarding charges which we know to be false. The old saying is, "Silence gives consent." So if we are witness to a whole race being libeled, and we keep silent, then we are to that extent partakers of the libel.¹⁹

19 Ibid., 5.



THE HOLOCAUST

Charles L. Feinberg goes on to say in his memorial,

No one can realize the activities Joseph underwent as he learned again and again throughout Europe of the Nazi persecutions of the Jews, as bereaved, after bereaved poured his or her tale of woe into his ears and heart.²⁰

Cohn's life and ministry were shaped to a great degree by the Holocaust. His European background and ability to speak Yiddish enabled him to speak directly to Jewish people who were caught in the Nazi vise grip and ultimately suffered the horrors of the Holocaust. Joseph was especially close to the missionaries serving in Europe among the Jewish people to the Jewish people just prior to and after these events. Cohn travelled to Europe immediately before the Holocaust and desperately tried to help Jewish believers and a number of missionaries to the Jewish people escape what lay ahead.

The ABMJ missionary in Vienna, Emmanuel Lichtenstein, would eventually flee Europe after working with the Swedish Israelite mission just prior to the Anschluss (the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany on March 12, 1938) enabling thousands of Jewish believers in Jesus and other Jewish people to escape through Sweden. Eventually, many of these Messianic Jews immigrated to Argentina and settled there. In due time, Lichtenstein himself and his Swedish wife also settled in Buenos Aires, beginning the work of Chosen People Ministries in this South American country that had multiple hundreds of thousands of Jewish people.

Cohn paid careful attention to the dark clouds of the Holocaust settling over France. He worked with Henri Vincent

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

and the French staff of the ABMJ to get ready for what was coming. Indeed, for some time Vincent, André Frankl and other ABMJ staff were thought dead, but thankfully these workers survived. However, many of those who were part of the work of the Mission died in the death camps.

The following letter from Jermaine Melon-Frankel printed in the December 1944 issue of *The Chosen People* gave more of the details:

My dear director and friend, It is such a blessing to be able to write again after these terrible years. I do hope you are well. Give me your news. Here in Paris we are safe, Vincent as well as my husband, our little girl, myself and all the staff. But I had last February the deep sadness to lose my beloved mother who died with cardiac illness.

Our work among Jews was never stopped. But we saw our people secretly and André did not live at home but went to hide himself in three different places in friends' homes. During this time the police came twice at home to arrest him, but he was not here, and all was well. And now is a splendid liberation! André is at home again and all the work begins again. We have now to see so many new people who are waiting for the gospel. We shall send a full report as soon as the correspondence with the U.S. will be possible again. With all our affection and gratitude.²¹

After the war, Cohn helped establish partnerships with various Missions in Europe, including the Belgian Evangelical Mission in Brussels to house and feed Jewish survivors. Otto Samuel, a staff member of the ABMJ, helped lead the post war efforts in Europe. Along with other missions to the Jews, the properties of the ABMJ, especially the Center in Warsaw, were destroyed in Allied bombings and the land lost to the formation of the USSR.

21 *The Chosen People* III (December 1944): 13.



ISAAC FEINSTEIN IN GALATZ

In 1938, Joseph Hoffman Cohn travelled to Europe to encourage a few Messianic leaders to leave Europe because he knew what was coming. His trip to Europe brought him into contact with some of these leaders and his conversations were printed in various issues of *The Chosen People*. Joseph especially had great admiration for Isaac Feinstein, who led the Norwegian Israelite Mission work in Romania before the War, and was an early martyr at the hands of the Nazi inspired Iron Guard.

Cohn tells the story of his martyrdom and of the ABMJ's continue care for his widow.

Many a time the tears come unbidden to our eyes as we ponder over the tragedies that lie hidden under the clouds of Nazi cruelties. In Galatz they took a beloved brother, Isaac Feinstein, and from what reports we got, they must have tortured him in a way that cannot even be described until his poor wilted body gave up the spirit within and the angels from heaven escorted him into the presence of his Lord whom he served to the point of death.²²

Cohn continued the story as he had actually visited with Feinstein before the war and tried to persuade him and his family to leave Europe:

It was the summer of 1938. We were walking together on the Buda side of the Danube at Budapest. My companion was Isaac Feinstein, a beloved young Jewish brother who was then stationed at Galatz in Romania, about 200 miles farther east than Budapest, and was carrying on a faithful and brilliant testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ under the support of some Christian brethren in Norway. I coveted this young man and his talents for our work here in the States.

²² Joseph Hoffman Cohn, "Salutation," *The Chosen People* 48, no. 7 (1944a): 6.

Every time I looked into his face I could not help thinking of Nathaniel of old, the Israelite in whom our Lord found no guile. His eyes burned with the explosiveness of impassioned zeal. He had the perfect background for a marvelous ministry to the Jews of New York City. He was young, he was steeped in all the Hebrew lore as on his way he was a master in Israel and could speak to his Jewish compatriots with authority. So, I turned to him suddenly and asked him if he would leave Romania, take his wife and six children and come to America and join our staff.

I pointed out to him the imminent dangers developing in Europe and brutal thoughts of Nazism and asked him to ponder and to pray seriously over the question as to whether the Lord would not have him leave these lands of horror and come to America for a greatly enlarged field of service and testimony.

He was overwhelmed for a moment, but soon recovered his poise and told me frankly with affection and emotion how grateful he was for this compliment. But that he felt it would be an act of cowardice to leave his post in the face of threatened dangers. He felt that Nazis or no Nazis, it was his duty to stay at his post. There were so many of his Jewish brethren in Galatz who were depending on him for spiritual comfort and leadership that he would feel all his life the terrible shame of having deserted them in the hour of their need. So, we parted, and my last words to him then were that if ever the time came that he found himself compelled to leave Romania, he should take the first boat to New York and report to our office.

Cohn continued:

Came the war, one by one the Nazi beasts took captive country after country. And soon Romania fell victim and the Nazis stormed over the land like the lice in Egypt. And to Galatz they came, spreading cruelties and death on every side. They seized this young brother, who had done them no harm but was a faithful servant to the Lord Jesus Christ. They tied him to a stake and then for days they tortured him. His tongue hung out of his mouth in desperate body-torturing thirst, but never was he shown one shred of mercy or decency. Finally,



he died from sheer torture and exhaustion.

Cohn printed another letter from Esther Feinstein in *The Chosen People* in which she thanked him and the ABMJ for their support. She also gave some insight into her continued ministry among the refugees and of the plight of the survivors in general:

This week I had the great joy to receive a letter from you, though with the date January 14, 1944, so it is just a year ago. It is the first message I had from you, but I hope others will follow. I was so glad to hear that you had some of my letters so at least you heard that I received your help for which I am so extremely thankful. Though the bank cannot give every month the sum you pay in for me, I get part of it when I need it badly and the remaining is kept for my use later on; I suppose when the war is over. It means very much to me, for I hope to be able with the aid of these savings to start a new house with the children. It is my dearest dream.

I cannot tell you how thankful I am for your help which I had never expected, and which came in such a wonderful way to us. I really see that the Lord sent it and I take it from his hand praising him. Of course, I had heard of you through my dear husband, but I shouldn't have thought to ask your help. It was Richard (Wurmbrand) who wanted me to do it. How glad I should be to have news from our friends there, but what a terrible time they must have gone through. I am looking forward very much to seeing you when you will come to Europe. I shall have lots to tell you. Somehow, I feel that you are a sort of a father for my little orphans and I am so happy that you take an interest in them. For the present I am working among Jewish refugee children and am trying to be a mother to those poor dear ones who lost so much. My own children are well, living with friends, except my six-year-old, little Gabrielle, was not healthy like the others and must be looked after in a special home. I use part of the money to pay her board. I ask the Lord to bless for all you do and have done for us.²³

23 Esther Feinstein, "Jewish Notes," *The Chosen People* 51, no. 2 (1945b): 14.

Cohn wrote of the ABMJ's continued concern for the wife and children of the martyred Feinstein. He also gave us some insight to his expectations for post-war ministry among the survivors.

His widow with her six children escaped to Switzerland, and like the woman in the wilderness of Revelation, it is our privilege to nurture her as we send each month, through your generosity, \$100 that she may have food for herself and her children. This is only a sample of what will await us once the war is finished and we are told to go across and minister to these, His disciples. I am hoping that we will have not less than \$100,000 in cash to take with us on that crisis trip of mercy and comfort.²⁴

After the war, Cohn visited the Displaced Camps throughout Europe and the ABMJ helped many Jewish people by providing food staples, helping them reunite with families, emigrate to Israel and more. He reports that the condition of the homeless survivors moved him to great compassion and motivated him to continue the benevolence that was part of the ABMJ ministries from the beginning. Only this time, instead of helping new immigrants learn English, receive medical care etc. as his father had done, he helped Jewish survivors of the Holocaust continue to survive. It was a different day and different need. Joseph would bring resources from Christians in the US to help the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust but who were still living in displaced persons camps and in terrible squalor.

A trip into the mountains to a camp for Jewish children only, must not be omitted from this report. There were several hundred children, most of them had neither a mother nor a father living, and here they were being brought up under Jewish United Relief funds, amid surroundings that looked as though they had provided every means for building up of health and strength. I was received most cordially and was

24 Cohn, *The Chosen People* (1944a): 6.



invited to take dinner with the children, which I gladly did. The bells rang, and the children immediately gathered in the courtyard for a military drill. They too were being trained and made ready to be shipped across to Palestine, there to partake of the struggle for freedom under the Israeli flag. The ages ranged anywhere from six to fourteen; the ache which filled my heart was that these children did not know how to smile or to laugh. Their smile was gone, and I thought that for many probably it meant forever. Many of them had lost their mothers and fathers back in the days of Polish warfare and Nazi gas chambers, and perhaps others from starvation and disease. But never again would the children have a father or a mother. I sat with them and partook of a simple, almost “austerity” meal, but it was nourishing, and wonderfully well cooked, and tasty. The children ate all that was given them and then they were offered second helpings. I took some motion pictures, and as I talked with the children, I found them somewhat frightened, although they were friendly when they felt they could trust me. But back of that friendliness there was something in the eyes that brought terror to my soul; I just wondered how the Gospel could ever make an approach to these young ones who were already old long before their time, old with the experience of what Jew-hate really means, old with a distrust for all that bears the name Christian. When they grow up, how will they respond to the Christian message?²⁵

Cohn had a difficult time accepting the silence of the Christian church. He writes,

I think of that poor impotent cripple who cried out from the agony of a heart wrung with the ache of many years of hopeful waiting, “Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me” (John 5:7). And so these thousands of helpless, defeated Jewish souls are calling out to a church strangely dumb, “I have no man to put me in the pool!” It is an astonishing perversity of human nature that we have an organized Christianity ready to make

25 Cohn, *The Chosen People* 53, no. 1 (October 1948): 5.

pronouncements upon every conceivable “problem” in the world, but it will do nothing to bring to these miserable creatures the only deliverance that there is in all the world, the message of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. When the Hitler outrages were running riot through Germany, when the Nazi savages were burning eighty-two synagogues in one day in Berlin, the Church of Christ was mute! It may shock our readers to know that at the present moment as we write these lines, Niemoller, the much-touted “hero” of the Nazi war, is still a Jew-hater! It may shock you to know that not a single church in Germany has yet had the decency and the courage to announce to the German people that Jew hate is a sin! And this is the Christianity that the Jew has to face. Is it any wonder that the Jews are alienated from the Church, from the Cross, from the Christ?²⁶

This was a part of the identity dilemma at the core of Joseph’s soul as he was part of two worlds and sometimes it was overwhelmingly difficult. Ultimately, Joseph would become somewhat embittered towards the Christian church, which he felt lost significant credibility for a lack of action during the Holocaust.

THE FOUNDING OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

Joseph was a Zionist, both theologically and in the most practical of terms. The ABMJ was a Zionist lightning rod for the fundamentalist movements within the United States. The hope of a Jewish return to the land of Israel was the subject of his writings, preaching radio broadcasts and books. It is a marvelous thing that he lived until 1953 and was able to see the return of the Jewish people and declaration of the modern state of Israel

²⁶ Ibid., 6.



in 1948, unlike his father. Joseph would believe that the modern state of Israel was the fulfillment of prophecy. He also viewed the establishment of the fledgling Jewish state as the precursor to far more and darker prophetic events which would entail great suffering during the Great Tribulation period until all was resolved with second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Millennial kingdom.

The writings of Dr. Charles Feinberg, the first Dean of Talbot Seminary (part of Biola University and named after Biola President Louis Talbot) were a regular feature in *The Chosen People* magazine under Joseph's leadership. Feinberg's commentaries on the Minor Prophets began as a series in the magazine. Feinberg's book *Premillennialism and Amillennialism* was an academic defense of the dispensationalism embraced by so many fundamentalists, including Joseph, the founders of Dallas Theological Seminary and other luminaries of the day including Harry Ironside, the pastor of Moody Church, and so many other fundamentalist leaders.

The ABMJ and those who supported the mission were confirmed "biblical Zionists" and usually dispensational in their theological vantage point.

The founding of the state of Israel was well covered by *The Chosen People!* However, during the early years of the state Joseph was still focused on the humanitarian needs of the refugees flowing into the land as Chosen People Ministries continued to work among the displaced person in Europe into the early 1950's.

Ultimately, the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel was viewed as a powerful polemic for the veracity of Scripture and of Old Testament prophecy in particular. The fulfillment of prophecy and the end times would continue as a major theme in the life of the ABMJ until this day. In fact, Cohn

would eventually turn his fund raising for Holocaust refugees into a fund to provide aid to Jewish people during the Great Tribulation period that was a key point in his and dispensational eschatology, as the church would be *raptured* and non-believers, both Jews and Gentiles, would left to go through this time of trial and testing.

CONFLICT AND CONTROVERSY

As had his father's, Joseph's life seemed also to be shaped by a variety of conflicts with other missionaries to the Jews stretching along the spectrum from fundamentalist to liberal Christianity. Much like his father, Joseph continued to conduct a steadfast ministry in the midst of these controversies.

There were many prominent Christian leaders who supported J.H. Cohn early on. One of them was Dr. Louis Klopsch, a Jewish believer. Founder of The Christian Herald magazine, in 1885 Dr. Klopsch purchased the building which the Bowery Mission was leasing at that time. He became the president of the Mission in 1897 when it was formally incorporated. After meeting Dr. Klopsch, Joseph was able to receive some financial help and good advertising, which enhanced the image of the Mission in the Christian community of New York City.²⁷

Joseph was also adept at developing patrons for the Mission and keeping and nurturing these relationships. Ms. Francis J. Huntley, the president of a manufacturing company in Rochester, New York, was a woman who gave generously to the Cohns. She gave a \$10,000 gift (almost \$200,000 today) to the expressed need detailed in the *The Chosen People* to help with the \$50,000, (about one million dollars today) building campaign to be used

²⁷ Cohn, *I Have Fought*, 114.



in erecting the headquarters building in Williamsburg. This created quite a controversy with the Home Mission Board of the Northern Baptists (now the American Baptists) which led to Leopold splitting with the group. For a time, Ms. Huntley's \$10,000 hung in limbo between the Baptist leadership and the Cohns, but ultimately Ms. Huntley made it clear that the money was not to be used for Home Mission Board expenses, but rather for the Williamsburg building. According Joseph's account, Ms. Huntley promised to support the Mission as long as both Leopold and Joseph gave their lives to the work of the Mission.

Joseph adds a poignant note on God's provision for the Williamsburg building, as Ms. Huntley promised a gift of \$25,000 at her death to pay off any loans that might be left owing by the Williamsburg facility.

On July 1 of 1909, the new building, Beth Sar Shalom, at 27 Throop Ave., Brooklyn, was dedicated. Gas was connected and turned on at 5 o'clock so that we would have light for the evening service. At 6 o'clock, a letter came from Rochester, and in it was a draft for \$25,000! Ms. Huntley wrote that she could not bear the thought of the building being dedicated with a \$24,000 mortgage on the property; so, she decided to pay her bequest ahead of time. And here we had \$25,000 with which to pay the \$24,000 mortgage and an additional \$1,000 to help pay for a little equipment in the building. That night as we went to bed we could say with the Nehemiah, "So we built the wall!"²⁸

This brief vignette speaks to two of Joseph's life principles. First of all, aside from cultivating patronage, he understood that ultimately God would provide, and this assurance gave him the confidence to build a strong financial base for Chosen People Ministries. Additionally, Joseph embraced the entrepreneurial and independent spirit of his day and the need, especially for

²⁸ Ibid., 120.

Jewish immigrants of the first American generation, to work hard and give their all to remain independent and to be successful in whatever endeavor they chose. This attitude continues within the Mission 125 years later.

Joseph's battles, along with those of his father, extended to many different areas of the ministry. From the very start, Leopold would have an embattled relationship with the North American Baptist denomination. At the turn of the twentieth century, the North American Baptist was a very conservative denomination, but over the next few decades would be heavily influenced by "modernism" and become a mixed denomination of both conservatives, fundamentalists and liberals. As one would expect, the liberals did not believe in Jewish evangelism.

In his book, *I Have Fought a Good Fight*, Cohn recounts some of the difficulties he had in getting ordained. Ultimately, he was, in his own understanding, forced to seek ordination outside of the New York Baptist Association in Michigan through Dr.

Van Osdel, the pastor of Wealthy Avenue Baptist Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and patron of the ABMJ.

Joseph also felt the pressure to incorporate as the incorporation of nonprofit ministries was growing in importance as a means of obtaining the ongoing trust of Christians. In 1923, Joseph led the charge and the Mission was incorporated as the Williamsburg Mission to the Jews, as that is where the Mission headquarters was located at that time.

Joseph describes the series of attacks on Hermann Warszawiak who led his father to the Lord, and had a great rise in ministry popularity among Christians, and an even greater fall. He was defended by both Cohns. It was interesting to see how Joseph expressed the ways in which Hermann was mistreated as he claimed that he and his father were mistreated the same way. Joseph writes in *I Have Fought a Good Fight* the sense he



had throughout his life of being embattled and engaged in one conflict after another.

Joseph continues the story of Warszawiak

The Christian Herald had taken Herman Warszawiak with open arms, and had set aside for his use the whole suite of rooms in the old Bible house opposite the Wanamaker store in downtown New York. Warszawiak was gullible; he trusted everybody, suspected nobody. His subscription list and contributors' list, his office files, all, all, were wide open so that anybody who was evil minded could steal what names they wanted and use them to their own advantage. We have had the same experience ourselves more than once, when the subscription lists of *THE CHOSEN PEOPLE* were stolen from our files, our office rooms burglarized and ransacked; many important letters taken from our files. All of this to be followed later by the rascals guilty of these robberies sending out letters to the names they had stolen, vilifying your American Board of Missions to the Jews, vilifying the name of Leopold Cohn, and vilifying the name of Joseph Cohn. But slowly we got used to this thievery and we began to safeguard our mailing lists, until today they are under lock and key. But Warszawiak did not know of these measures of protection; he trusted everybody. It was this unsuspecting nature that brought about his ultimate destruction.²⁹

Joseph's further reflections on the life of Warszawiak and the way he was misunderstood and mistreated by both the Jewish and Christian communities reflected his own views about how a Jewish mission should be run. These values were well developed in *I Have Fought a Good Fight*.

The following reflects some of his thoughts about the state of Jewish missions, the acceptance of Jewish missions by the Christian community and the ways in which Jewish missionary activity were viewed in the Jewish community.

He writes to his Christian audience,

²⁹ Ibid., 165.

The truth is that your Jewish missionary work is the most difficult of our mission field and needs the most skillful management of any ministry undertaking. Just giving money to Jewish missions does not meet the requirement at all. Indeed, sometime soon we're better off if you give nothing for often you will accomplish more harm than good because you only encourage some who were not worthy of encouragement. Your ABMJ has been used of God to establish the most generously supported Jewish mission of the earth today. The support is come about honestly. You've learned through years of experience and satisfaction, that you should have every confidence in your work and in your workers. This is part of why others are so envious. So, we have more than a few bitter enemies. And the more covetous they are of God's blessings upon our labors, the more bitter is the greed. But you, our precious family and friends are already accustomed to these sad facts.³⁰

In the above statements one can see that Joseph constantly felt embattled with peers on the Christian side and by the nonbelieving Jewish community on the other side. This sense of embattlement, a desire to achieve and be successful as a second-generation American – especially who was naturalized and born outside of the United States, drove him to build the mission in a particular way. Cohn was unwilling to accept the default poverty of everyday missionaries to the Jews and marginalization by both the Christian and Jewish communities. Aligned with these other shaping experiences and values was a deep desire to professionalize the field of Jewish missions.

HIS PERSONAL LIFE

Joseph came to faith when he was thirteen years old and was baptized with his mother by Dr. W.C.P. Rhoads, pastor for more

³⁰ Ibid., 182.



than 40 years at the Marcy Avenue Baptist church in downtown Brooklyn. He was a dear friend and defender of the Cohns, and the church became home to many of the Jewish people whom Leopold and then Joseph helped come to the Lord.³¹

Joseph had a challenging domestic life. Though married for many years, he and his wife lived separately, although they never divorced. He carried out his final years of life and ministry on his own at the Beacon Hotel on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

Josephine, who had been active as a young person in church and missionary work as a Presbyterian, moved to Connecticut, where the Cohns owned acreage in the town of Easton on the 90 acres given to them for a camp purchased with funds donated by Francis Huntley. The Cohn children spent much of their childhood on this property, which did indeed operate as a camp for urban Jewish youth for many years. Eventually the land, given prior to corporate nonprofit laws, was added to the personal estate of the Cohn family and ended up in the possession of Joseph's side of the family and was passed through to his grandson, Huntley Joseph Stone III.

According to her obituary, Josephine had obtained "separate maintenance" through court action and had resumed her maiden name, Stone, which the children used as well. Nonetheless, Joseph was known for being a devoted father and Feinberg notes this in his eulogy when he wrote,

He tenderly loves his family. There was not one of them but what he was not proud of every accomplishment, with her daughter, daughter-in-law, sons or grandchildren. The memories of the early home life of his children spoke enough so tenderly.³²

Joseph's son Huntley, was a graduate of Princeton and an

³¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

³² 1953 Memorial Edition of the *The Chosen People*

attorney in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and then Denver, Colorado. He served on the Board of the ABMJ until 1965 and passed away a year ago. We do not know a lot about Joseph's other son, Joseph Jr., nor about his daughter, Cordelia, except that she lived in the Denver area. One of Joseph's granddaughters is an attorney living in LePorte, Colorado.

There is quite a bit more that can be discovered regarding Joseph's family and family life.

CONCLUSION:

THE LEGACY OF A WELL MANAGED ROUGH AND TUMBLE MISSION TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Joseph Hoffman Cohn was clearly the person that built the ABMJ, now Chosen People Ministries, on the foundation laid by his immigrant father. When telling the story of an organization, whether a for-profit company or nonprofit organization like the Red Cross, World Vision, a synagogue, local church or mission agency like Chosen People Ministries, there are a number of critical factors to be studied. There are external issues such as the macro-cultural context in which the organization or company developed. Also to be considered are the micro-cultural, more internal issues reflecting the particular industry wherein the organization develops, as well as the capabilities and personal circumstances of the leader or leaders initiating the organization. These factors continue throughout the life of an organization while adding complexity as other factors that are again more internal; such as values, organizational culture, adaptability, leadership selection, principles of financial management and others become even more important the longer an organization exists. However, the battle between micro and macro context which factor in determining in the growth and development of



an organization, a nonprofit or a ministry like Chosen People Ministries, will have ongoing impact into the future.

In studying the life of Joseph Hoffman Cohn, we are looking at a 125-year-old organization that was born in the midst of the largest wave of immigration of Eastern European Jewish people to the United States. Many researchers suggest this number to be between two and two and a half million Jewish immigrants of which a million and a half lived in the greater New York City area.³³ As briefly noted in the Library of Congress exhibition “From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America,”

Between 1881 and 1924, the migration shifted from Central Europe eastward, with over two-and- one-half million East European Jews propelled from their native lands by persecution and the lack of economic opportunity. Most of those who arrived as part of this huge influx settled in cities where they clustered in districts close to downtowns, joined the working class, spoke Yiddish, and built strong networks of cultural, spiritual, voluntary and social organizations. This period of immigration came to an end with the passage of restrictive laws in 1921 and 1924. Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe to the United States never again reached the levels that it did before 1920.³⁴

Leopold Cohn’s immigration to the New York City area where millions of Jewish people lived made the birth of an organization like the ABMJ possible. Rabbi Cohn himself was transformed by the message of the gospel, but was also uniquely suited to begin this ministry which led to the start of the ABMJ. He was perfect for the job – as if he was made for it. He was a man among the people, as he was called later on by Joseph. He

33 Samson D. Oppenheim, J.D., “The Jewish Population of the United States,” Census.gov, accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/jewishpop-ajc.pdf>.

34 “From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America,” Library of Congress, accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/haven-century.html>.

understood the language, culture, religion, needs and shared the same experience, both in Europe and in the United States, of those he served. This unique blend of qualities was integral to the founding of the organization as both the macro and micro contacts perfectly matched.

A more distant illustration of this is found in the start of Apple Inc. by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. Whereas Wozniak was technically equipped to work in the field of computers, Steve Jobs was not. However, he had other gifts and talents, including an innate ability to understand the times and what people needed, as well as being an intuitive marketer. However, none of their leadership skills would have mattered if the technology were not available to create a home computer. Once again, this is an illustration of a perfect match between the micro context – primarily the leaders of the organization – and the macro context of the technical and cultural times in which they lived. The same would be true of Bill Gates of Microsoft and Larry Ellison, who founded Oracle. The illustrations are unending!

However, sustaining that organization and continuing the innovation upon which it was founded would be far more challenging. One only needs to study the growth of Apple Inc. to see how a growing organization, especially one that lost its founder so early, continued to adapt and remain successful. It is hard to believe that there was a time when it was thought that Apple would not survive without Steve Jobs and he had to return to the organization. Since his death, Apple has flourished, as did Chosen People Ministries under Joseph.

It would be easy to simply focus on the leader of an organization, whether that be the founder or the very important second person to follow that founder, and ignore the macro context in which the organization began and thrived. This would be a mistake and create a superficial, one-dimensional view of



the leader studied. We are all products of our times.

The micro and macro context of the founding of the ABMJ and its progress through a second generation of leadership must take into consideration the times during which both Leopold and Joseph Hoffman Cohn lived. One cannot separate the ways in which a leader responds or adapts to his or her macro-cultural context and simply study their past experiences and the extraordinary gifts with which they were born.

Joseph Hoffman Cohen was a gifted, driven, entrepreneurial, second generation Jewish immigrant who was the son and the apparent heir of the family business. This is not meant to be derogatory in any way, but simply to state or describe what seems to have transpired in the passing of the baton from Leopold to Joseph. There's no doubt that this passing of the baton happened many years earlier than the official date in 1937 when Leopold passed into the presence of the Lord. Joseph had already been the editor of the magazine, the chief representative and fundraiser for the organization and was probably the person doing the daily management of the ABMJ for more than a decade by the time he took over for his father. In fact, it could even have been a number of years earlier than that.

The environment for the second generation of the ABMJ led by Joseph was quite different than the first led by Leopold. By the time Joseph became General Secretary of the ABMJ, he was already well Americanized and though he probably spoke with a slight Yiddish accent, he was fairly typical of the more successful second-generation immigrant. His father founded a movement in a religious community, motivated by his love for Jesus and his own people and only cared about organizational life in as much as he was able to make a small living and meet the needs of his constituency. Joseph, like so many other eastern European Jewish immigrants, was a builder. His English was better than

his father's and he was better able to leverage his father's fundamentalist Christian friends to build a wider network of respectability for a work that was in reality for many years, a small localized ministry work in Brooklyn. Joseph was an excellent writer and had mastered the written English language. He fully understood how to communicate what was happening in Brooklyn and in many other places around the globe among the Jewish people and in Jewish missions in a way that captured the imagination of the Christian public.

He moved the organization into Manhattan, which was also sign of greater status in his quest for respectability. He married a gentile woman who was a graduate of Barnard College, another clear status elevator when looking through the eyes of the greater culture at that time. Again, this should not minimize the good work Joseph did, but rather help us understand him as a man of his times, a second-generation Eastern European Jewish immigrant building an organization which needed the respectability and acceptance of those outside the community he was serving.

Joseph was shaped by many of macro global events and experiences already noted in this brief paper including antisemitism, World War I, the Great Depression, and particularly World War II, the Holocaust, the formation of the state of Israel and the ongoing battle between liberals and conservatives among the Christians that supported the ABMJ. Joseph had superb adaptability skills and was able to meet many of these challenges in ways that propelled the ABMJ forward. Among comparable organizations around the globe, the ABMJ was certainly one of the most successful.

Jim Collins, in his book *Great by Choice*, written with Morton Hansen in 2011, speaks about the challenges of ongoing leadership, especially in the earlier stages of an organization's life.



Collins writes, “Why do some companies thrive in uncertainty, even chaos and others do not? When buffeted by tumultuous events, when hit by big, fast-moving forces they can neither predict or control --what distinguishes those who perform exceptionally well from those who underperform or worse?”³⁵

Collins continues to describe the study that became the basis for the book, which was unlike any of his previous research, as he writes, “cases were selected not just on performance or stature but also in the extremity of the environment.” He continues, “First, we believe the future will remain unpredictable in the world and stable for the rest of our lives, and we want to understand the factors that distinguish great organizations, those that prevail against extreme odds, in such environments. Second, by looking at the best companies and their leaders in extreme environments, we gain insights that might otherwise remain hidden when studying leaders in more tranquil settings.”³⁶

In order to understand Joseph Hoffman Cohn, one needs to understand the environment in which the organization grew. It was the years between the two great wars, which in many ways created a stable environment for a short season—but not within the field of Jewish missions itself, as Joseph was constantly embattled on every front. Even though we do not read about conflict with his father or with his board or even staff, certainly, he was in conflict with some other missions to the Jews and with the Christian church where he was seeking partnership and support. Clearly, there was tension between the growing work of the American Board of Missions to the Jews and the Jewish community.

Overcoming hardship and adaptability was one of Joseph’s gifts and at times it appeared that he thrived on difficulty.

35 James Collins and Morten T. Hansen, *Great By Choice* (New York: Harper Business, 2011), 2.

36 *Ibid.*, 4.

Mitch Glaser, 'The Second Generation: Challenges and Growth Under Joseph Hoffman Cohn' 153

Perhaps because he was very good at using the energy of battle in fueling the growth of the organization. The most heart wrenching and deeply personal challenges he faced was brought about by a growing, virulent antisemitism which paved the way for the Holocaust.

However, the ABMJ survived and thrived and outlasted Joseph for another 66 years so far. The challenges brought about by the varying macro and micro contextual factors remain and, in some ways, morph from one generation to the next. Yet, the underlying values, principles and theological truths formulated by Leopold and especially by Joseph during this critical second generation of the ABMJ's organizational life continues to shape the present and will hopefully lead the ministry of the Cohns to a better and brighter future.

