

Notes on Evangelizing After Holocaust in NYC.

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Ruth Wardell recalls that when she arrived at the American Board of Missions to the Jews in 1946 it was much different than when Leopold Kohn had established the mission around the turn of the century. Over three and a half million European Jews had come to the United States in the 1800s through the early 1900's.

In 1946, all of the Jewish missions were in a slump. There was not as much immigration and people were not coming to the missions like they once had. There was not much to attract these people to come to the mission. It was different 50 years earlier at the time when people first arrived in this country and did not know many people in America. They knew little or nothing about the American culture. Add to this the war years with Hitler and the Holocaust, which destroyed 6 million Jews. The newly arrived Jewish people were not about to come to a Christian mission after the Nazi persecution. As a result these were slow years.

The people who came out of the Holocaust were not really interested in believing in Jesus. It was a hard, hard thing for them to accept. Ruth says that there were some Jewish people coming into the Mission but it was not the same as it was in the late 1800s in the early 1900s.

The outreach to the unbelieving Jewish person manifested itself in visitations.

When Ruth started to do visitations she was instructed to go into apartment buildings and start at the top and work her way down to the main floor. This was just after World War II, and if you did not start at the top and work your way down, the tenants would be throwing stuff at you by the time you got to the top floor and then you had to run the gauntlet- top to bottom just to get out of the building.

The Holocaust was still fresh in these people's minds and Christians were not seen as friends. Missionaries were seen as a threat to Jewish existence just the Holocaust had been. Hitler had stated that his Final Solution of Jewish extermination was being done in the name of Christ.

Missionaries were also seen as much a threat to Jewish existence as the Nazi Holocaust had been.

Why should the Jewish people believe in the same Jesus that wanted them dead? To say the least the reception that missionaries received when they went into these apartment buildings was quite contentious. Many of these people had lost friends and relatives in Europe and some were even recent immigrants after years in the camps. It was a very difficult time.

Ruth found it hard to relate to the terrible stories that she had heard about what had happened. It was a very difficult time. All the Jews had tremendous burdens in the area where Ruth was working. To be sure, they were not excited to see a missionary telling them to believe in Jesus.

Ruth tells how she would enter a building and go up to the top floor. She would knock on a door, and when these people would answer the door she would hand them a tract and invite them to the meetings at the mission. Some reactions to her invitation were okay, and some people just shut the door. They then would call the people on the lower floors to warn them that “Christians” were in the building trying to convert Jews. Ruth was pretty quick about getting out of the building, so she never had anything thrown at her. Other missionaries were not as fortunate and objects with thrown at them routinely, if they did not get out of the building fast enough.

Some of the other Jewish people were not really unfriendly, but they would just close the door. Some would say, “We don't want anything to do with that. How can you possibly do this to us?”

In all her time doing these visitations Ruth did not find many who would speak with her. They would, however, take her literature. Unfortunately, Ruth never knew if any of those tracts had any influence on those people coming to faith. They would do these visitations one or two days a week over a period of a couple of years.

Some did attend what was called a “refugee” dinner. These dinners were held on a weekly basis. The people would come to the Mission where they would have a fine meal. Afterwards, the

Mission would try to find jobs for people who were out of work and offered medical assistance to those who were in need. The people were very appreciative of the help that this Messianic organization was providing. The survivors of the Holocaust, who were often in a bad way, were most appreciative. It was awful to see the results of man's inhumanity to man yet it was a blessing that the Mission workers were able to meet some of their needs and show them the Love of God.

Ruth's Neighbors- Holocaust Survivors

Just down the hall from the apartment that Ruth was renting in Borough Park, lived a Jewish couple who had survived the Holocaust. These lovely people would wait for her to come home at night from her work at the Mission so that they could sit and talk for a while. They enjoyed her company and the conversations they had together. The times that Ruth spent with them taught her much about the Jewish people and she heard firsthand of the sufferings that they had experienced. They had owned a factory in Germany which had been taken from them by the Nazi government. What was worse was that all of their family had perished in the camps. They told Ruth about their terrifying experiences. This couple had been scarred emotionally as well as physically by the brutal treatment they had witnessed and endured. Ruth heard their words but could only imagine the atrocities that they had suffered.

When Ruth shared how sad she was that they had lost their factory which they had worked so hard to build, they said, "We can always get another factory but we can never get any of our family members back again." Through that exchange God taught Ruth that it wasn't "things" that were important but it was always the "people" that were important.

This couple was very kind and loving and the times they spent together seemed to benefit them as much as it did Ruth. The wife was not a good sleeper and would often wake up quite early in the morning. Her first order of business in the morning was to take a bath. The bathroom was a hall bathroom that served the three one-room apartments on the second floor. The plumbing was situated in the walls in such a way that the pipes leading to the bathtub shared the same wall where the head of Ruth's bed was located. This dear woman did not want the noise of running water to awaken Ruth so she would take wash cloths and wrap them around the faucet so that the sound of the running water was muffled and Ruth could enjoy her sleep uninterrupted.

To this day Ruth is still amazed that this woman, who had been through such a terrible existence, would consider her need for sleep and take the necessary action to insure that she was not disturbed. Her caring and kindness made a great impression on Ruth. Here was a daughter of Abraham, a Jewish woman showing the Love of God to a young Christian woman.

The lesson that Ruth learned was that no matter what she was going through, she should not be bitter. Ruth learned that she needed to remain kind and loving. God used these people to teach her about the people that she needed to relate to- as well as teaching her about how she should live her life.

Ruth is thankful that God allowed her to share Messiah with them on many different occasions, in spite of the fact that they had a difficult time hearing the Gospel. This was understandable since they had been persecuted by so called "Christians" during the Holocaust.