

THE LIGHT OF THE MESSIAH

PAULINE ROSE

Forming the Community

If we wish to trace the development and progress of the Jewish Christian Community, we must follow the Sabbath light which is kindled in honour of the Messiah, the Lord of the Sabbath. When the appointed time in God's plan had come for the forming of the Jewish Christian Community, His Spirit worked in the hearts and minds of those He had chosen, while they were as yet unknown to one another. Each one was being prepared for his task. The stones were being matched and chiselled to fit together for the foundation of the Messianic synagogue in Israel. The light of the Messiah was to burn in the hearts of those who, waiting for His return, were ready to receive Him as their King and Saviour.

Many great trials and tests in the personal lives of the individuals chosen led them along different paths, converging, however, towards the central point - the vision of the crucified and risen Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, and of His promised return. With that revelation came the acceptance of His Leadership and the deep desire to serve Him.

First Steps

The call first came to Abram Poljak in 1935 when he had the vision of the Messianic synagogue and of the mission to prepare the way for the return of Jesus and the setting up of the Kingdom of God on earth. For years he walked alone along that path, often misunderstood, facing all manner of opposition and criticism—the path of a pioneer.

Meanwhile others, also traveling the lonely road, answered a call which was to bring them together to form a community—to kindle the Sabbath light of the Messiah, the preparation for the Messianic Congregation in Israel.

In 1937 the first four members met in London, each one from a different country, each as diverse in temperament as were the backgrounds and experiences through which they had passed in preparation for this mission.

Separation and Reunion

With this beginning of a movement destined to carry the torch of the Messiah in Israel, began the battle in which the dark powers of the world sought firstly to prevent its light being kindled, or failing that, to make continued attempts to extinguish it, for the recognition and acceptance of the Messiah in Israel marks the nearness of His return and the end of this age of wars and evil. The trials within the Community were accompanied by the battles outside. When war was declared in 1939, it had serious effects upon the young Community.

Three of its members were interned as enemy aliens in Britain. Thus the Community was broken up, its members separated, deprived of mutual support and fellowship; but a work started by God cannot be thwarted.

In 1944 the period of separation came to an end. The four members were reunited in London and went forward again together towards the next step in the development of the work. They became entirely dependent upon their Leader, their Messiah. The centre of the group's faith, the significance of its purpose, the vision of its future, was to be symbolized in its form of worship. The light of the Messiah, which had been rejected by the synagogue and failed in the churches, was to be kindled anew in a synagogue built by the Messiah Himself, where *He* was the High Priest, and where *His* congregation would worship.

The Synagogue of the Messiah

At this point another chosen servant of God was led into the Community. Nathan Whyser, a rabbi, trained in the orthodox Jewish tradition, had received the revelation of the Messiah, and was guided to compose the liturgy. At the first Sabbath service of the Jewish Christian Community he officiated, and continued to do so during the following nine months until his early death. He had accomplished his mission, being faithful unto death.

On June 16th, 1944, the eve of the Sabbath, a small Jewish community and some of their Gentile friends gathered together in a humble room on the top floor of a tenement house in the East End of London, to hold the traditional Jewish service of the inauguration of the Sabbath; but for the first time the Sabbath light was "kindled in honour of Jesus the Messiah, the Lord of the Sabbath"—a light never to be extinguished. This first Sabbath service in the Community marked an important step in the development of its work.

The Spiritual Home

It was to one of these Friday evening services that I was guided, and the sincere spirit of truth and love which I found in that small gathering showed me that my search for a spiritual home was ended. I had found brethren with whom I was to work from then on in a common spiritual calling.

Many different friends gathered around this light, Gentiles. Some came only once, others remained united with us for some time and then left us. Many were called but only a few were chosen to keep the light burning, and to guard it.

Jerusalem

In 1946 the time had come for the Sabbath light of the Messiah to be kindled in the Holy Land. The two years in London had been a preparation for this

important step.

I was chosen for this particular mission. Being the one with the least experience on the spiritual battlefield, I went innocently into the unknown dangers of Jerusalem. But God chooses His instruments with wisdom. Had I known something of the dangers and the opposition I was to encounter, my courage might have failed me.

For four months I searched in all Christian and Jewish Christian circles of Palestine for those who shared our vision, the vision of Jesus in the synagogue. I was always received warmly and enthusiastically at first, but when I spoke of our Sabbath service and my hope of kindling the Sabbath light of the Messiah in the Holy Land, I met with the strongest opposition on all sides.

Some groups seemed to think that any connection with the Jewish people, the law or the synagogue, would lead me to destruction. It was as though it had been forgotten that Jesus was a Jew, that He had shown that the law must be fulfilled, that He had preached in the synagogue, and that He would return to His Jewish people.

The powers of darkness are very strong in Jerusalem, and had the hand of Jesus not held me firmly, I would certainly have broken down or lost my mental balance in the fight around the kindling of the light of the Messiah.

At that time, perhaps, more than at any other, I realised my utter helplessness and weakness in the face of the enemy; but I was also conscious of the wonders and the power of Christ. I was carried through all the attacks and finally led to the Mount of Olives, from whence Jesus ascended to heaven, and where, we believe, He will return.

There, on June 22nd, 1946, in a small room in an Arab house, I kindled the Sabbath light of the Messiah for the first time in Jerusalem. This date marks the foundation of the synagogue of the Messiah in the Holy City. The second

important step on the way of our mission had been taken, just two years after the first Sabbath service had been held in London.

Ten people witnessed the first kindling of the light on the Mount of Olives. A small community was formed. Satan attempted by all means to extinguish that light. However, although the Community was badly shaken and nearly broken up, the light continued to burn; no wind could extinguish it.

War

In 1947, at the commencement of the siege of Jerusalem, it seemed as though the storms might prove too strong for us. Not only did we have to face the enemy around us, but his power worked also within our ranks. There were fears and doubts, bullets, shells and all the influences of war. However, the light was kindled every Sabbath eve, and the peace of the Sabbath and the power of the light of the Messiah brought comfort and strengthening to the Community and all its friends. The light of the Messiah shone brightly in Israel—in Jerusalem, even during its darkest days.

Then it has burned undisturbed until the present, and continues to attract, to test, to sift the weak in faith and to strengthen those who are chosen for this mission.

If we follow that Sabbath light, we see the development of the Community. Looking back to its beginning in 1937, we can see how many were called into it and how few chosen to remain.

To-day those who have remained faithful from the beginning carry on the work of the Jewish Christian Community. As it is with our Jewish members, so it is also with our Gentile brethren. Many joined us with enthusiasm and left us with doubts and fears. The Sabbath services showed who truly belonged to this work. Those who support us and have remained faithful suffer criticism and often separation; for anyone who shares our calling also shares the

difficulties and attacks which beset us on our path.

The Task

The task of keeping the light burning in Jerusalem in the midst of Israel is a great and difficult one, demanding unwavering faith and complete dependence on God. Those to whom that task has been allotted are the ones with whom the Community was first formed in London. Each one has been tested and tried since the beginning of this work. They followed the call and were guided step by step out of different countries, to the meeting place in London, and from London one by one to Jerusalem, the centre of Israel. As the powers of darkness make their last frantic effort for dominion on this earth, still greater attempts will be made to extinguish the light of the Messiah and to destroy the bearers of that light.

What has God been doing with us ? He has been testing us, strengthening us, welding us together more firmly. Quietly our Leader has trained us, moulding us into instruments to prepare for the coming of His Kingdom. We do not know what the next call will be, nor what task will be given us. But we can see the importance of the kindling of the Sabbath light, which has guided us from a tenement house in the East End of London to the Mount of Olives. Only once, the first time, was the light kindled on that sacred hill; now we are not able to go there, as it is within Arab-held territory; but one day we, or our successors, will be there again, not to kindle His light but to welcome the Messiah Himself, the Light of the World, Whose Presence will illumine the whole earth and penetrate every heart.

On the Way

Until now we have only travelled part of the way, and there will be still greater trials awaiting us. We know that God's work will go on. We have learned also that whoever is not prepared to surrender his

whole life to God in this calling will be put aside. We must ever be watchful and ready.

In Israel a few Jews have gathered together to carry the torch of the Messiah. In other countries some Gentiles have been chosen to uphold the light in the midst of the nations. Let us march together in unity, supporting and strengthening one another in love and prayer.

Victory

Although our Community is small at present, let us not be discouraged; the time has not yet come for great numbers to be added to our ranks. The first community formed by Jesus was also a small one; but it was filled with His power, and through that small group of faithful disciples the Gospel was given to the world.

We are now at the turn of the age; all signs point to the nearness of the return of the Messiah. Once again He has gathered together a small community in preparation for the day of His coming. Until that day we cannot expect great numbers of believers in Israel. Only when He returns the whole nation will see "Him whom they pierced and will mourn for Him." In that day too, many nations will turn to God. That will be our day of victory; then our Community will no longer be a small one; it will be great in numbers and in power.

Let us keep this vision clear and bright, following the light that has been given to us, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but remaining steadfast to the end—until the goal is reached.