

# Pollak/Lucky– a law-observing Jesus-believing Jew from Galicia

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## Jewish believers from the past

Tonight we are going to talk about Lucky, a law-observing Jesus-believing Jew from Galicia (a historical region in East Central Europe, currently divided between Poland and Ukraine), a man with many names and many facets.

A friend of Lucky's, the Lutheran clergyman Max Weidauer writes in 1923 that if you wanted to know something about Lucky's life and development, you had to "pump him for information". About Lucky's life I shall have to confine myself to a minimum. He loved Jesus. He loved his people. One of his concerns was that the (many) Jews who had forgotten that they were a people and just regarded themselves as, for example, Germans of Jewish persuasion might also see themselves as God's people. He wanted to take Jesus into the synagogue. He was a Jesus-believing Jew and lived to the end of his life as a law-observing Jew. And he was a bitter opponent of Jewish mission.

Lucky was born in 1854 near Stanislau in Galicia. He came to faith while he was studying in Berlin in the mid-1870s. He and another student had been given the assignment to compare Hillel and Jesus. So he had to study the New Testament, which he did in Delitzsch's Hebrew translation. And he came to faith. He is in the USA for some years during the 1880s; in this period he is co-editor of the English periodical *The Peculiar People* and the Hebrew *Eduth le Israel* (Testimony to Israel). When he returns to Europe in 1889, he is offered a post at the Institutum Judaicum in Leipzig, which he declines.

Lucky then settles in Stanislau in Galicia. In 1916 he sets off for the USA in order to renew his citizenship there. I do not know why this is so important for him. Due to the First World War he finds himself stranded in neutral Holland. Politically he sides with Germany, as he hoped that a German victory would make a massive Jewish immigration to Palestine possible. In Holland he falls ill and is taken to the hospital Eben-Ezer near Berlin. The law-observing Jesus-believing Jew dies there on November 25, 1916, at the end of the Sabbath – after having been nursed by Methodists.

### A death notice

I do not know any other Jesus-believer in the past with so many names. In the death notice for Lucky there are six: "Chajim Jedidjah (Christian Theophilus) Pollak called Lucky." An examination of these names, where and when and in what contexts he used them, could be an interesting approach to a study of his character and life. Did he, for example, in the company of *Jews* use the name "Christian", one who belongs to Christ? Or the Latin name "Theophilus", God's friend? He also used other names such as Elik, Elk, Lucki (one source says it is pronounced Luzki).

In the death notice he is described as "a member of the original apostolic Messianic church in Jerusalem, one who was zealous for the law of his fathers and a witness of Yeshua for Israel. It says further: "There remains, then, a rest for the people of God." The notice says that burial will take place in the Jewish graveyard in Plau, and is signed by B. Fliegelman on behalf of the law-observing congregation of Christ-believing Jews in Lemberg and by August Wiegand on behalf of friends of Christians of the nations. It is also announced that Lucky will be buried on November 27. Where? In the *Jewish* graveyard in Plau in Mecklenburg, the town where the Lutheran August Wiegand was a clergyman. For more than 25 years Wiegand has fought for Lucky's cause and been his mouthpiece.

I have not clear picture of how it was possible that the Jesus-believing Lucky could be buried in a Jewish

graveyard. Wiegand maintains that it did not imply a denial of Lucky's faith in Jesus. I would, nevertheless, like to have known what was said when Wiegand and the rabbi discussed Lucky's burial. I am not convinced that Wiegand tells the whole story. I do not know if a headstone was put on his grave. And if so, did it then say approximately the same as in the death notice, for example, that Lucky was "a witness of Yeshua to Israel"? The way Yeshua's name was written on Yechiel Lichtenstein's headstone in a *Christian* churchyard in Leipzig. And I do not know if it was mentioned that Lucky had been baptized. The way I read the sources, he had indeed been baptized – even three times. Be that as it may, Lucky did not advertise his baptism. For him baptism was a private matter. In this way he avoided being considered a *meschummad* – an apostate. I will leave it to you to decide whether he deserves praise or criticism for that.

### **Architect of a new mission strategy**

Lucky loved Jesus and his people, I said. But few, if any, have like Lucky fought against Jewish mission. He became the principal architect behind a new mission strategy that was later to be known as the Leipzig program. He befriended people who had been at the Institutum Judaicum in Leipzig and spent much time with them.

This program deserves a paper of its own, but here is a brief sketch.

The Leipzig program is a mission strategy that confronted the traditional organized Jewish mission that was quick to offer interested Jews baptism, education in a proselyte home and sometimes money so they could travel to Western Europe. In its most radical formulation the Leipzig program said that no persons of Jewish descent should be paid missionaries to the Jews. The use of paid Jewish missionaries was – it was said – counterproductive when witnessing to Jews. The traditional mission was criticized for de-nationalizing Jews who came to faith in Jesus. In Western Europe there was no need for special missionaries to the Jews or for Jewish mission or a special training for people to reach Jewish people with the gospel. This was for the churches to do. Talmud Jews were the primary target, and the majority of those were in Eastern Europe. So the missionary candidates should first of all have a training that could help them to meet the East European Orthodox Jews. But not even in Eastern Europe should they engage in direct mission. The first task of a missionary to the Jews was to work for the formation of living, evangelical Christian congregations – in contrast to the Roman Catholic and Greek/Russian Orthodox churches; this would generate interest among Jews. The vision was to fight anti-Semitism and to call forth love for Israel in these "Gentile Christian" congregations. In other words: a missionary to the Jews should work out from such a "diaspora mission", associate with, for example, congregations in the German colonies and make them ardent and zealous for the cause of Israel. One motivating factor was the salvation of all Israel at some time in the future. The few Jews who accepted the gospel were seen as a prerequisite for this future.

To sum up: Struggle against all mission humbug. No direct Jewish mission and no paid Jewish missionaries, and for the Jesus-believing Jew, no national breach with his Jewishness.

Lucky won quite a few Germans and some Danes, Norwegians and others who had been at the Institutum Judaicum over to his side. It should, however, be mentioned that not all advocates of the Leipzig program were as pronounced in their views and mission practice as Lucky was.

### **Lucky and the money of the mission**

Lucky wanted, as already said, have nothing to do with organized Jewish mission. He does not want to be paid by the mission either. But it is not easy to be consistent, not even for a Lucky. In the light of history he is not quite "kosher," which emerges from the following story.

Back from the USA Lucky plans to publish the periodical *Eduth le-Israel* in Galicia. He approaches the Jewish-born

G.M. Löwen, employed as a missionary in the Berlin Society, and asks Löwen to be in charge of the publication. Lucky assures him that he will be doing most of the work. But, says Löwen, without money such a project is not feasible. "Does that mean that your Society will not help?" Lucky retorts. And Löwen continues: "What? Should a mission society support a work which is hostile to organized mission work?" Eventually the new *Eduth le Israel* did get published. But then Löwen withdrew. Lucky had required of him that he should live in the same way as himself, namely be a law-observing Jew that lives by rabbinical law, something Löwen was neither able nor willing to.

How Lucky fended for himself without getting money for his work is quite a riddle. Max Weidauer says that Lucky never begged. He often stayed at friends' houses and had his meals there. Christian housewives often dreaded his visits. Weidauer's comment on Lucky seems to be spot-on: "He believed that he was the most undemanding person, but in demanding something special for himself he was indeed demanding. He also

believed that he was the most independent person, but really he was very dependent on other people.”

And then it should be added that this Lucky who did not consider himself an “exelyt”, who had not withdrawn from the synagogue and who lived by rabbinical law, did not in the least mind celebrating Christmas with Christmas presents and Christmas tree when he visited Christian friends. At Christmas 1911 he paid a visit to Mrs Petra Volf not long after she had lost her husband, the Danish missionary Stefan Volf. Mrs Volf writes this about those Christmas days:

“I still have many memories about Lucky from those same days, for example how he sang with us all our Danish Christmas hymns; I think it was because he wanted to be a Dane to us Danish, and it was amazing how well he understood them; he had an unusual gift for languages.”

### **What did Lucky really want?**

The Lutheran clergyman August Wiegand had defended Lucky and pleaded his cause from approximately 1890 – for example at the mission conference in Leipzig in 1895 and in Stockholm in 1911. The problem was especially Jesus-believers’ attitude to the law. Wiegand had come to Stockholm with a declaration and was given five minutes to present it, but there was to be no subsequent discussion! There is, not least in the German sources, a rich material that we could benefit from when we today deal with this important question. Well, I have to leave that alone here. When Wiegand presents the question, he stresses the *freedom* to keep the law that the gospel gives. But the question is if this *freedom* did not for Lucky imply an obligation. When he worked closely together with Jewish-born Jesus-believers, he seems to have demanded that they should live like him.

What did Lucky really want? Wiegand helps us to answer that question. In 1917, the year after Lucky’s death, Wiegand says as follows:

“It should not be concealed, however, that what was presented in Lucky’s name in Leipzig [1895] and Stockholm [1911] did not really express his *innermost thoughts*. What he wished and wanted was, at bottom, not a group of Jewish Christians who were faithful to the law inside the gentile church but a *congregation of Jews who were faithful to Jesus inside the synagogue*. That is what he worked for in the end and he almost regretted that he spent so much time and energy on the German candidates instead of dedicating himself completely to the internal Jewish work. His proper Jewish followers should therefore remain in the synagogue and also commit themselves to the rabbinical interpretation of the law to the extent that it was recognized in the synagogue. Consequently they should only differ from the other Jews in regard to faith in Jesus.”

The question is if such a vision was not an illusion. It is one thing what you yourself would like. It is a different matter what the other side, the synagogue, wants. Of course the synagogue will not be defined by a Jesus-believing Jew; it defines itself and defines itself in relation to Jesus.

Löwen is aware of that point. He writes:

“Lucky’s exaggerated love of his Jewish people destroyed, unfortunately, what he had laboriously achieved. He led the souls to Christ and then drove them back into the synagogue, the same synagogue where they daily recite Moses Maimonides’ confession which consciously defame Christ as an idol.”

Then it is up to the individual to reflect on and apply this assessment – if there are any Luckys in the messianic movement in our time.

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*Texts on the internet*

See Jorge Quiñónez' Messianic Archive Page at <http://www.afii.org/jorge.htm>