

First “Organized” Bible-work in 19th Century Jerusalem (1816–1831)

Part VII: Five Bible-men in Jerusalem (1823–1824)

by Kai Kjær-Hansen



In the spring of 1823, a trio consisting of Joseph Wolff and two American missionaries – Pliny Fisk and Jonas King – had worked as Bible-men in Jerusalem. Fisk and King had soon sold their rather limited supply of mainly non-Hebrew Scriptures. Throughout the period Wolff was in a position to supply Hebrew Scriptures, but he was only able to distribute a few to Jews in Jerusalem.

Four months after leaving Jerusalem, Fisk is back in the town, and a reorganization of the work is carried out. A Jerusalem Bible Society was not established, but at the turn of the year 1823–1824 a “Bible Society Room” is set up in Jerusalem.

A good many Scriptures are distributed over these five months. The present challenge is to uncover the relationship between the distribution of non-Hebrew Scriptures to Christians – be they residents of Jerusalem or pilgrims – and Hebrew Scriptures to Jews.

Pliny Fisk is the only one of these five Bible-men who remains in Jerusalem all through this period of five months, from November 21, 1823, to April 22, 1824.¹ The others are listed chronologically. William Jowett, a resident of Malta, is sent out by the Church Missionary Society (CMS); he arrives together with Fisk and stays in Jerusalem for approximately three weeks. Next is William Bucknor Lewis, sent out by the London Jews Society (LJS); he stays for six weeks. This article will focus on these three persons and their Bible work.

The other two individuals are the Americans Jonas King and William Bird. King’s main task is to accompany the newly-arrived American missionary William Bird to Jerusalem, where they arrive on January 21, 1824.² After just two weeks, on February 6, 1824, King leaves Jerusalem for Jaffa in order to study languages. During his journey to – and particularly from – Jerusalem, he distributes Scriptures.³

1 On Fisk’s and Jonas King’s first visit in 1823 together with Joseph Wolff, see *Mishkan* 54 (2008): 64–79.

2 With Isaac and Ann Goodell, William and Abigail Bird were anchored off Beirut on November 16, 1823; cf. *Missionary Herald* (1824): 214.

3 *Missionary Herald* (1824): 215, 245; (1825): 105–06.

The American mission base in Beirut sent Bird to Jerusalem so that Fisk should not be alone there. So by telling Fisk's story, Bird's as well as King's stays in Jerusalem in 1824 are basically covered.⁴

Bird and Fisk both leave Jerusalem on April 22, 1824.

Jowett in Jerusalem, Autumn 1823

William Jowett, CMS's missionary and mission researcher residing in Malta, makes his first journey to Syria and Palestine in 1823–1824.⁵

In the description of his visit to Jerusalem, Jowett gives much valuable information about Jerusalem's demography, about the Christian churches and their convents, about individuals mentioned by name, about church libraries, etc. He buys old Bible manuscripts and hires the learned local Arab Greek Orthodox priest Papas Ysa (Isa) Petros to translate some material, leaving Fisk one hundred dollars to pay Ysa.⁶

So Jowett does not really come to Jerusalem as a Bible-man. The main purpose for his visit is *not* to distribute Scriptures – he comes as a researcher. And yet he has a place, as we shall now see, in the story of “organized” Bible work in Jerusalem.

Jowett and the Bible Cause

On his arrival in Jerusalem, Jowett notes that people immediately come to Fisk “inquiring what Bibles and Testaments we had brought.”⁷ This signals that at least some people in the Holy City are receptive to the gospel. But who, and in what numbers?

Accompanied by Fisk, Jowett meets a few Jews, among them, on December 5, Rabbi Mendel Ben Baruch (Menahem Mendel),⁸ the chief rabbi of the Polish Jews residing in Jerusalem, and his disciple Rabbi Isaac. The visit with Rabbi Mendel seems to have been a courtesy call. At any rate, Jowett has nothing to report in the way of existential conversations of a religious nature with Rabbi Mendel. It was, furthermore, a handicap for Jowett that he was unable to communicate with them in German. But he tells about the oppression Jewish people are subjected to by the Muslim authorities and mentions, as an example, that one week earlier Rabbi Mendel was fined and, with a few other Jews, placed under arrest

4 In Isaac Bird, *Bible Work in Bible Lands* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1872), there are few details about his visit to Jerusalem that cannot be found in Fisk's journals.

5 On earlier failed plans, see *Mishkan* 41 (2004): 23.

6 *Missionary Herald* (1825): 10–11. Altogether, Papas Ysa (or Isa/Issa) and his interactions with the Protestant missionaries and the Bible cause in Jerusalem might deserve a paper of their own.

7 William Jowett, *Christian Researches in Syria and the Holy Land* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1825), 211.

8 See *Mishkan* 49 (2006): 48–49, 55–57; and 54 (2008): 64–79.

for twenty-four hours because his street door had been left open in the night (see below under Lewis).⁹

Young Rabbi Isaac accompanies the missionaries to the Western Wall one Friday afternoon.¹⁰ Later, Rabbi Isaac and another Jew come to see them. Jowett writes about this:

We gave Rabbi Isaac a Hebrew and an Arabic New-Testament. On my wishing to point out to him Stephen's Sermon in Acts vii. and particularly the application of it at verse 51, he was so fearful of my taking the books from him, that he would not let me have them to shew him the place. I therefore looked for another copy, and referred him to the page.¹¹

This experience clearly made an impression on Jowett. But if this incident gave some of Jowett's readers in 1825 the impression that Jewish people in Jerusalem in general were receptive to the gospel, they were mistaken!

Jowett also reports about the Christians in Jerusalem and their conditions, including the oppression they experience at the hands of the Muslim authorities. He visits the various convents and is received with kindness. The Greeks get the best marks when it comes to the Bible cause. "On this topic, it is peculiarly grateful to find the Greek Church favourable."¹²

This is written immediately after an interview, on December 8, with Daniel, the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Nazareth (who resided in Jerusalem). And yet Jowett says, "I retired from this interview with spirits unusually depressed." And he continues, "While Humanity pleads for them, Christian Faithfulness cannot acquit them as innocent." But not only that: "On reaching home, I unburdened my heart; and could not help explaining, 'I have not spent one happy day in Jerusalem.' My Missionary Brother [Fisk] readily sympathized with me."¹³ And yet, when Jowett later finishes his book about his visit to Syria and Palestine, there is nevertheless something joyful to tell about his visit to Jerusalem.

Jowett's Charter for a Bible Society in Jerusalem

Jowett's "Instructions" from 1815 contain a passage about looking into the possibilities for a Bible Society to be formed in Jerusalem.¹⁴

When he instructed Christoph Burckhart in Malta in 1818, before the latter's visit to Jerusalem as the first Protestant Bible-man there, everything seemed easy. Then it was said, in almost euphoric terms, that all they had to do was find a few persons who would say, "We are the Bible

9 Jowett, 231–33.

10 *Ibid.*, 234–35.

11 *Ibid.*, 247–48.

12 *Ibid.*, 242.

13 *Ibid.*

14 See *Mishkan* 41 (2004): 23.



Society” – and then a Bible Society would be formed in Jerusalem. It was not going to be as easy as that.¹⁵

Jowett was to become wiser after that, and says that he did not, on his journey to Palestine in 1823, entertain “sanguine hopes of such an establishment”; nor was the objective much upon his mind. But a remark from Fisk, when they were traveling in Galilee, strongly reminded him about it. Experience had made him less optimistic and more realistic. The conversations with Fisk about this matter during their journey to, and stay in, Jerusalem “led them to suspend their expectations; believing that equal or much greater benefit would, under the present circumstances, be derived from measures less complex and less ostensible, than the term ‘Society’ implies.”

Jowett continues, referring to himself in the third person:

Christian co-operation is, in fact, little understood in Turkey;¹⁶ and, from the publicity of such a kind of union, the natives would shrink with trembling. Not to lose sight of the principles, however, in which it would be desirable that Christians, under more auspicious circumstances, should concur, the Author drew up, in short compass, a few leading topics; with the intention, had it been advisable, that they should be submitted to the Ecclesiastics of the different Communions at Jerusalem; and, if they should agree, be signed by them, and by Mr. Fisk, and others of the Missionaries from Europe and America. There appeared, however, sufficient reason for not circulating them; and they are now first presented to the eye of the English reader.¹⁷

The four “Articles” which Jowett commits to writing in Jerusalem “dwell,” as Jowett mentions, “more on fundamental principles than on the technical details of business.”

The first “Article” is about the duty of every man to communicate to his fellow-creatures the revelation of the will of God by making known the Scriptures by their general distribution.

The second “declares what Canonical Books are considered to be the Word of God” – leaving out the Apocrypha.

The third relates to the necessity of having Scriptures in vernacular languages.

The fourth, and last, “Article” says:

We will correspond with such countries, as shall furnish us with copies of the Holy Scriptures for distribution; and we will use our exertions to distribute them, in every place, to which our influence may extend. The Reverend Mr. Fisk, who is recommended to us by Letters and by his Christian Labours, will have under his charge, and will ren-

15 See *Mishkan* 42 (2005): 58.

16 I.e. in the Ottoman Empire, which includes Jerusalem.

17 Jowett, 411–12.

der an account of the manner of distributing, the Scriptures, which we shall thus receive.¹⁸

Jowett attaches the following words to this: "The FOURTH lays the foundation of actual labours, in such manner as the existing circumstances of Palestine would permit: this was virtually acted upon, when Mr. Fisk, on the receipt of several boxes of the Scriptures, established a Depôt in the Convent of Mar Michael."¹⁹

Jowett is just in time to meet with Lewis on December 13 and 14, before he himself leaves Jerusalem on December 15, 1823. The mood – or the spirit – is better now than on December 8 (see above). On Sunday, December 14, the missionaries hold a "Divine Service, in Italian." Jowett says about this:

If, however, the work now beginning here, be (as we would humbly trust it is) right in principle, and the workmen right in heart, we must not despise the day of small things. Two ministers of the Church of England, one to the Jews and another to the Gentiles [Lewis and Jowett] and a Minister from the distant shores of the New World [Fisk], uniting in prayer with a Native Minister of the Gospel in Jerusalem [Papás Ysa Petros], form but a small assembly; but it is such a congregation as I once never thought to see. May our prayers for an increase of Labourers be accepted and answered, by the Lord of the Sabbath, *exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think!*²⁰

If people in 1825 understood Jowett's words to say the Greek Orthodox Church, through the local Greek Orthodox priest Ysa, was formally ready to have joint services with the Bible-men, they were mistaken. Both parties, the Greeks and the Bible-men, are in agreement about the value of Bible distribution, but they do not ignore their differences of theology and tradition. Papas Ysa (and other local priests at Mar Michael) form an *unofficial* link between the Greeks and the Bible-men.

As the second Bible-man to visit Jerusalem, James Connor had, in 1820, made an agreement with Procopius, the *Locum Tenens* in Jerusalem (i.e. the superintendent of the Greek Orthodox Archbishop, residing in Constantinople).²¹ Compared to this agreement from 1820, the *local* element in the Bible cause in Jerusalem has now been weakened. Procopius had been the link between the Greeks and the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), with direct reference to Jowett in Malta. But the situation was quite different in 1823–1824. Procopius had died in the summer of 1822.²² The fact that he had undertaken the task and entered into an agree-

18 *Ibid.*, 412–13.

19 *Ibid.*, 413–14.

20 *Ibid.*, 266–67.

21 See *Mishkan* 44 (2006): 70–71, where the agreement between Connor and Procopius is printed.

22 See *Mishkan* 48 (2006): 73–74.



ment with Protestants was exceptional. His successor does not seem to have had the same vision and courage. In 1820, the parties involved agreed that it was not possible to form a Bible Society proper, due to the dissensions which existed among the different bodies of Christians in Jerusalem. This situation does not seem to have improved in the autumn of 1823.

It is against this background that Jowett and Fisk's reorganization of the Bible work – with Fisk as its leader – should be seen. Officially, a Jerusalem Bible Society has not been formed, but Fisk is now responsible for the Bible Society Room at the Greek convent Mar Michael. This Bible Society Room was to have a history of its own up until 1831, which will be covered in the last article in this series.

Before we take a closer look at Fisk's work in 1823–1824, we will focus on the LJS missionary Lewis and his work in Jerusalem.

Lewis and Way's Large-scale Bible Expedition in 1823

William Bucknor Lewis had arrived at Sidon, in Lebanon, together with Lewis Way on May 21, 1823.²³ Besides the task of accompanying Way, Lewis had been sent out "with a view of remaining in those parts as a missionary to the Jews."²⁴ In Malta they had helped to establish the Malta Jews' Society.²⁵

Way hoped to visit Jerusalem, indeed to establish "a Protestant chapel at Jerusalem"; the latter objective was, however, without any form of realism whatsoever, considering the political situation in the region.²⁶ Due to illness Way had to give up his plans to visit Jerusalem, and he left Lebanon on August 8, 1823.²⁷ Before then he had rented a building in Antoura, in the mountains of Lebanon, which had been "used as a school since it was abandoned by the Jesuits."²⁸ The building was to be a "College" for the Protestant missionaries. The tenancy met with rather strong opposition in Maronite quarters, and was cancelled after Way left Lebanon. This tenancy was one of the factors that sparked off several bans against the Protestant Bible-men.²⁹

Did Lewis Way Bring "10,000 Bibles"?

It cannot be denied that Way's expedition was planned on a grand scale. It had to be like this with a wealthy man like him. According to what he himself said, he brought "10,000 Bibles" on the ship the *Hebe*. After the

23 *Jewish Expositor* (1824): 24. For Way's description of the journey, see *Jewish Expositor* (1824): 41–53.

24 *Jewish Expositor* (1823): 101.

25 *Ibid.*, 307.

26 *Jewish Expositor* (1824): 48.

27 *Ibid.*, 243.

28 *Ibid.*, 46.

29 See, e.g., Lewis's account in *Jewish Expositor* (1824): 27–35, and (1825): 98–108, where various bans against the Protestant missions are printed in translation. More about this in the next article in this series.

expedition, he sends a report from Leghorn in Italy, dated October 22, 1823, in which he says:

I am therefore not surprised that on the landing of 10,000 Bibles on the shore of the Holy Land, there should be persons ready, as if prepared to prevent their distribution, or counteract their efficacy; and *such was the case*. I throw out this hint, because I conceive you will hear more on the subject hereafter, but for obvious reasons, I must be silent as to particulars and persons ...³⁰

Other things being equal, "10,000 Bibles" is such an unusually large number that it is justified to ask some critical questions, or at least to ask, "What is meant by '10,000 Bibles'?"³¹

It would have helped if Way had written "10,000 Bibles" and then added an "&c." Such an "&c" must be presupposed, as it appears in the information about what Way received in the way of Scriptures in Malta. In Lewis's words: "The Bible Society here [at Malta] is providing us with a large quantity of Arabic Bibles &c. at half the cost price, and which we intend to dispose of as well as we can."³² LJS also sent supplies to Malta, which appears from the following letter of thanks, written by Cleardo Naudi on behalf of the Malta Bible Society: "The boxes you mentioned of Testaments, Tracts &c. forwarded to Malta for the use of Messrs. Way and Lewis, were duly received, and seven of which they took with them."³³ The latter supply was presumably Hebrew Scriptures and tracts.

This information alone shows that when Way writes "Bibles," he must mean *Scriptures* – not in the sense of "full Bibles" but also portions of the Bible, including New Testaments. If we take the figure 10,000 at face value, it would be tempting to include some thousand "Tracts" in this number.³⁴

It is, however, an unquestionable fact that Way and Lewis are well supplied with *Scriptures* &c. when they arrive at Sidon, although it can be difficult to determine what precisely is meant by "a large quantity." The editor of the *Missionary Herald* recounts the following from the beginning of July 1823, when Fisk and King were on their way back from their visit to Jerusalem in the spring of 1823, where they had run out of Scriptures: "By Mr. Lewis they received letters, and Bibles, and tracts for distribution, from the missionaries at Malta."³⁵ And immediately before Way's departure from Lebanon in the beginning of August, it is said that Fisk, in Sidon, "received a large quantity of Bibles from the Malta Bible Society, which were with the baggage of Mr. Way at that place [Sidon]."³⁶

30 *Jewish Expositor* (1824): 51.

31 Kelvin Crombie, *For the Love of Zion* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 18–19, accepts this information without asking critical questions about it.

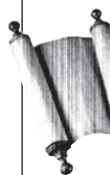
32 *Jewish Expositor* (1823): 309.

33 *Ibid.*, 311.

34 The question is hereby passed on to others for further research.

35 *Missionary Herald* (1824): 109.

36 *Ibid.*, 243. In this quotation "Bibles" are also identical with Scriptures, i.e. including Bible parts.



In any case, Lewis has no shortage of Scriptures when, prior to his stay in Jerusalem, he visits other places that are inhabited by Jews. But what is the situation in Jerusalem? Has he, for example, enough “full Bibles” in Hebrew?

Lewis in Jerusalem, the Turn of the Year 1823–1824

Lewis arrives in Jerusalem on December 13, 1823, and leaves again on January 20, 1824, which means that his *first* visit to Jerusalem lasts approximately six *weeks* – not six *months*, as maintained by Sherman Lieber.³⁷

Lewis now involves himself in the social conditions of the Jews in Jerusalem; he even ventures to approach the governor of Jerusalem in order to call attention to the unfair treatment Rabbi Mendel and other Jews have been exposed to in connection with the charge brought against Rabbi Mendel, who had left his front door open one night.³⁸ Lewis receives a letter of thanks for his efforts from Rabbi Mendel and Rabbi Solomon Mendel Sapira, in which they ask him to use his influence abroad in order to improve the situation of the Jews in Jerusalem.³⁹ As he has seen the hardships the Jews are exposed to, and because he wants to secure them and the missionaries against unjust treatment at the hands of the Muslim authorities, Lewis becomes the first Bible-man who voices the necessity of having a British consul in Jerusalem.⁴⁰

Lewis and the Distribution of Bibles in Jerusalem

In the published report there is no detailed information about *how* Lewis distributed Scriptures in Jerusalem. But there are rather precise indica-

37 Sherman Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries: The Jews in Palestine 1799–1840* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992), 171–77. Lieber assumes that Lewis paid only one visit to Jerusalem, which is not correct. Lieber states correctly that Lewis arrives on December 13, 1823, two days before Jowett left Jerusalem (p. 171). But after this he does not distinguish between this visit and Lewis’s second visit in the spring of 1825 (see next article in this series). Having mentioned that Fisk and Bird left Jerusalem (on April 22, 1824), Lieber writes, “Lewis was now the only Protestant missionary in Jerusalem” (p. 173). But Lewis had left Jerusalem *before* King and Bird did, on January 20, 1824; i.e. *before* King and Bird had arrived there. In conclusion, Lieber writes about Lewis: “Forbidden to distribute Bibles by order of Ottoman and papal bans issued in 1824, he became completely disheartened ... and in the summer of 1824 he left Jerusalem after residing there for about six months” (p. 177). (More about these bans in the next article in this series. Suffice it here to say that the Ottoman ban from 1824 had probably *not* been issued while Lewis was in Jerusalem.)

38 *Jewish Expositor* (1824): 381–82.

39 In the rabbis’ letter, printed in the *Jewish Expositor* (1825): 108–09, *Jesus* is mentioned by name – and used as a positive example; the rabbis speak about the “deceivers who would lead the people to violence [against the Jews], contrary to the charge given by *Jesus* to his apostles.”

40 Voiced in a letter to LJS dated February 23, 1824 (cf. *Jewish Expositor* [1824]: 380). On June 21, 1825, he writes to LJS: “I hope the Committee and the friends to the general welfare and peace of Jerusalem, have determined before this to effect something, with the view of obtaining a resident consul or protector, in behalf of visitors and European settlers at Jerusalem, Jews as well as Gentiles” (*Jewish Expositor* [1825]: 427).

tions about the numbers. He has also acquired information about which editions of Hebrew Scriptures *not* to offer to Jews. It is clear that he has heard how copies of the Bible that had earlier been distributed were burned or otherwise destroyed by Jews because they contained "notes or marks with regard to the various readings"; even though "the little sign of the cross" is but a common reference symbol, it was considered by the Jews "to be intended as a sign (in the way of a charm it must be) to make Christians of them."⁴¹ Moreover, there are the three Hebrew letters (Yod, Shin, and Waw) which could be read as *Yeshu* in the notes to Psalm 3 – even in an edition "published by your Society" [LJS], as he says; these three letters have "given many of them great offence." And further, the mere fact that the Scriptures have been printed by Christians demonstrates "their very unreasonable prejudices against us," as "not a few among them" are "rejecting the Bible published in the simple Hebrew, without any of the Latin characters, or figures, &c."

Although there are many odds against the distribution of Scriptures among Jews, Lewis is not disheartened. He writes:

Although it is to be acknowledged, that the novelty of the things, as in Jerusalem was the case at first, must have attracted at that time a good number of the Jews to ask for books; and notwithstanding the report in the convent that the same were afterwards committed to the flames, still hopes must be entertained that some good was then effected, and that a few, at least of the Testaments, &c. were kept and read, and that God's Word will not return unto him void; and we must also hope, that the Hebrew Scriptures which I sold in Jerusalem for distribution among Sephardim Jews, as well as the Askenazim, will find their way, as waters descend, in spite of all impediments, from the lofty mountains into the gardens of the vallies [*sic*], and that they will be glorified.⁴²

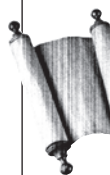
As to the number of distributed Scriptures in Jerusalem, Lewis gives the following figures:

I disposed of 40 Bibles, (five of them bound with the New Testament,) 12 Prophets and Testaments, 90 Prophets, and 1065 Psalters. I have received for the same, in favour of the Society, 63 Spanish dollars; a sum much less indeed than the same books would have brought, if sold in one of your bookseller's shops in Paternoster-row, or St. Paul's Church-yard.⁴³ But we are poor, very poor, in Jerusalem; and I have

41 This is probably a reference to what happened during Joseph Wolff's visit in 1822; see *Mishkan* 49 (2006): 55–57.

42 *Jewish Expositor* (1825): 15.

43 For comparison, see King's specification of what he sold in Arimathea (Ramla), February 6, 1824: "In all, I sold here nine Bibles, twenty-three New Testaments, sixteen copies of Genesis, and four Psalters, all in Arabic, for about twenty Spanish dollars" (*Missionary Herald* [1825]: 106).



no doubt the Society will feel for us. If I had more Bibles I might dispose of them. Mr. Fisk has sold a good number belonging to his stock, in favour of the Malta Bible Society.⁴⁴

In this context, “Bibles” – which Lewis has run out of – means just that: Bibles, i.e. “full Bibles,” *Hebrew Bibles*, and probably also Hebrew Bibles *not* bound with the New Testament.⁴⁵

If we consider the total number of Hebrew Scriptures distributed by Lewis among *Jews* in Jerusalem during the six weeks he stayed there, he surpassed all the other Bible-men before him – Joseph Wolff included. More than 1,200 Scriptures! He says explicitly that these were sold or distributed to *Jews*.

Provided this is correct – and regardless of how many Scriptures were “disposed of” and how many “sold” – the sale of the more than 1,200 copies of Hebrew Scriptures comprises fewer than 20 copies of the Hebrew New Testament.

It would not be in keeping with the contemporary Bible-men’s understanding of their work to say that Lewis had sold “wrong” parts of the Scriptures to Jews. Lewis himself, however, makes it clear that he would have preferred to sell “other” parts than those he did. He writes: “The Prophets do not sell so well as the full Bibles amongst any of the Jews, so I have still a good number on hand, as well as of Testaments and Tracts. I rather, indeed, endeavour at first to put the prophets as much as possible into the hands of the people ... the more the true prophets are read and understood, the sooner will they be prepared to know, and to receive Him who is the great Prophet, Priest, and King.”⁴⁶

Although Lewis had disposed of a considerable number of Hebrew Scriptures in Jerusalem at the turn of the year 1823–1824, he was not quite satisfied with *which* parts of the Scriptures Jews had received from him.

This does not mean, as asserted by Sherman Lieber, that Lewis left Jerusalem “completely disheartened.” After his first visit to Jerusalem, Lewis is still prepared “according to the wish of the committee, to make Jerusalem my principal station,” as he says at the end of May 1824.⁴⁷

44 *Jewish Expositor* (1825): 15–16.

45 This is one more indication that the “10,000 Bibles” which Lewis Way claims to have brought to Lebanon are not “full Bibles” (see above).

46 *Jewish Expositor* (1825): 16.

47 *Ibid.*, 14. Sherman Lieber (cf. the critical remarks above in note 37) believes that Lewis came to Jerusalem in December 1823 with the *purpose* “to establish a permanent mission station” (p. 172). Lieber concludes that “Lewis was unsuccessful in his campaign to open a permanent mission station in Jerusalem ...” (p. 177). The truth is rather that LJS *in London*, on December 15, 1823 – at the beginning of Lewis’s stay in Jerusalem – decides that Lewis should make Jerusalem his “principal station” (cf. *LJS Committee Minutes*, Bodleian Library, Dep. CMJ, c. 11 # 262, December 15, 1823). Lewis does not receive this information till May 14, 1824 (cf. *Jewish Expositor* [1825]: 13), so he does not come to Jerusalem in December 1823 “to establish a permanent mission station,” as asserted by Lieber. He can therefore not be considered “unsuccessful” in that respect.

And now back to Fisk, who was in Jerusalem throughout the period with which we are dealing.

Fisk in Jerusalem, November 1823 to April 1824

As we shall soon see, Fisk and Bird are arrested on February 10, 1824. But before that, and before Bird's arrival, Fisk has distributed Scriptures in Jerusalem. His base is the Greek Orthodox convent Mar Michael, where four rooms have been rented. "Being furnished by the Malta Bible Society with a large supply of the Scriptures in various languages, I set apart one of our rooms as a 'Bible Society Room,'" writes Fisk. With the establishment of this "Bible Society Room," physical conditions have been created for the reorganization of the Bible work that had been agreed upon with Jowett.

How Fisk worked the first two months and who were the main recipients of Scriptures appear from the following words:

For about two months I sold only to such persons as came to my lodgings to purchase. During this period I think I sold about 200 copies. I then sent our Dragoman to offer the Scriptures for sale at the convents and in the market.⁴⁸ The Armenian pilgrims had now become numerous, and among them our books found a rapid sale.⁴⁹

It appears that the missionaries' dragoman, Joseph, is not given the task of selling Scriptures in the streets of Jerusalem until Bird has come to Jerusalem, on January 21, 1824. Before Fisk and Bird's arrest, a total of 300 or more copies of the Scriptures seem to have been sold. This *public* sale of Scriptures causes problems with the Muslim authorities.

Arrest of Fisk and Bird in February 1824

On February 10, 1824, Fisk and Bird are arrested by the Muslim authorities. These cannot deny that the missionaries have a valid *firman*, but they allege that this "is merely for travelling, and gives you no permission to sell books." According to the missionaries, it is really the Catholics who are behind this charge, since they have made the strange allegation that the missionaries sell neither Muslim nor Jewish nor Christian books, but *false* books.⁵⁰ Fisk and Bird are brought before the judge and the governor. A crier is sent "into the market, and to the doors of the convents, prohibiting all persons purchasing books from us, and ordering all who had any of our books to deliver them up to the Judge."⁵¹

48 Bird writes about this: "One day our young man Yoosef [Dragoman Joseph] went out with his books and in two or three hours' time returned, bringing us five or six dollars for the books he had sold. Still more books had been asked for, and he went out the next day with about the same success." Cf. Bird, 107.

49 *Missionary Herald* (1825): 33.

50 *Ibid.*, 34.

51 *Ibid.*



The authorities decide that the missionaries are to spend the night in the Roman Catholic convent. Bird later writes, not without sarcasm: "Our enemies at the Latin convent, it was thought, would take excellent care that we should not escape."⁵² But the Catholic convent refuses to accommodate the missionaries. After this they are escorted back to their own rooms at Mar Michael, where their belongings are searched thoroughly. In the end the missionaries spend the first part of the evening in the governor's house, in "a lower room, which serves as barracks for soldiers. There we spent the evening with twenty or thirty soldiers about us, who were smoking and playing at chess, and expected to sleep on the ground among them," Fisk writes. It did not go quite as badly as that.

At about ten the same evening they are called to the governor's room, where they are treated with courtesy and given coffee. When asked why they also distribute Scriptures in Arabic to Muslims, they answer, "If Mussulmans [Muslims] wish to read our books, and learn what we believe, we are always ready to give them an opportunity"⁵³ – an answer which seems to satisfy the governor but which is hardly the whole truth!

Afterwards they are taken to the governor's nephew's room in the same building. After sherbet, pipes, coffee, and a supper, they spend the night there. The physical "afflictions" in connection with the arrest were thus endurable. Worse was the uncertainty as to the ultimate consequence for their work. Fisk gives expression to this: "What we most seriously feared, was, that we should be either ordered to leave Jerusalem, or prohibited from distributing the Holy Scriptures."

Neither of these things happened. The next day, February 11, the missionaries asked if they "could distribute the Scriptures as formerly," to which the answer was, "Certainly." And they are told that the crier on the previous day had only prohibited "Mussulmans" from receiving their books – an explanation which the missionaries do not accept but regard as a downright untruth.⁵⁴

They are taken back to their rooms at Mar Michael. In Fisk's words: "Mr. Bird's room and mine were given up to us. The Bible Society's Room they have not discovered the day before. They now examined this, and sealed it up; and said that this, and Mr. King's room, in which they found me the day before, must remain for the present sealed up."⁵⁵

On their "release" they immediately send word to the British consul in Jaffa, Antonio Damiani, and to Consul Peter Abbott in Beirut. Both intervene, Consul Damiani by sending his son, Joseph, to Jerusalem.⁵⁶ At another meeting between the missionaries, accompanied by Joseph Damiani, and the judge, the latter rules "that infidels, meaning Christians and Jews, might buy and sell their infidel books as they like, only Mussulmans must

52 Bird, 112.

53 *Missionary Herald* (1825): 34.

54 *Ibid.*, 35.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.*, 36.

not purchase, nor receive them."⁵⁷ After this interview the Bible Society Room is unsealed on February 18, and the Bible-men can continue their work. The end of it was that "the Turks made no objection to the distribution of Christian books among Christians."⁵⁸

Before then the Muslim authorities had paid a visit to the Jews.

Fisk and the Jews

Lewis had distributed Scriptures to Jews (see above). So had the Americans. It is not possible to determine the quantity on the basis of the sources available, but it is hardly a large number.

Two days after the missionaries' "release" – i.e. February 13, but with the Bible Society Room still sealed and without the ability to distribute Scriptures – the "College of the European Jews, under the pretence that they have some of our books there," is sealed up, writes Fisk. The next day an order comes from the Pasha of Damascus, "commanding that the European Jews should not be molested, nor any money extracted from them." This command, which relates to an *earlier* complaint from the Jews, contributes to the solution of the affair in question and the College was reopened. Fisk comments:

When the Jews told me that the College had been sealed up on account of our books, I felt as if there were no prospect of selling any more books to Jews; but to my surprise, the same Jew, before going away, asked if we had any more Hebrew Bibles, and said a friend of his wished to purchase a quantity. The next day an Armenian called to tell us what grief our confinement occasioned in their convent, and to inquire if we had Armenian Bibles, saying that he wished to purchase seven or eight. The few Bibles which we brought with us, however, were all sold, and we had nothing remaining but Testaments.⁵⁹

So Fisk did sell a few Hebrew Scriptures. About other contacts with Jews, he writes, "With a few Jews I have had several religious discussions, and have frequently read with them portions of the Old and New Testament."⁶⁰

Distribution of Bibles after the Arrest

Two days after the Bible Society Room had been unsealed, i.e. February 20, Joseph, the Dragoman, is again sent out into the streets of Jerusalem

57 Ibid., 36–37.

58 Ibid., 38.

59 Ibid., 36.

60 Ibid., 12.



to sell Scriptures, and “in the course of four days we sold about two hundred copies,” Fisk writes.

Accompanied by Joseph Damiani, Fisk and Bird set out, on February 24, on a visit to Hebron and Bethlehem – even bringing a letter of introduction from Rabbi Mendel to the Jews of Hebron.⁶¹

The sources are silent about the sale of Bibles in Hebron, but in Bethlehem they sold “16 copies of the Scriptures, and gave away 18, and 60 tracts” – doubtless to Christians.

On February 27, they are back in Jerusalem. On one day in the beginning of March, 50 copies of the Scriptures are sold, “and the day following 54 copies.”⁶²

Fisk accounts for the total sale of Scriptures in “the course of five months at Jerusalem” in these words: “I sold 703 copies of the Bible, New Testament, Psalter, or Genesis, for \$ 210, and gave away 86, and 400 tracts.”⁶³ The distribution also includes some “copies of the New Testament and of the Psalms of David” to the few Syrians of Jerusalem.⁶⁴

So the arrest did not influence the sale of Scriptures. By and large, there is no difference between the number of (parts of) Scriptures sold before and after the arrest, the majority to pilgrims, a few to Jews, and a few to Muslims.

Fisk and Bird’s Last Six Weeks in Jerusalem

About March 10, 1824, Fisk falls ill. “About six weeks before I left Jerusalem, I was attacked by a fever, which interrupted my studies and labors for the rest of the time.”⁶⁵ After Easter, in mid-April, the pilgrims – according to Bird – “immediately prepare for their homes; and Jerusalem, without pilgrims, offered at that time few advantages for evangelical labor.” The bill for the rented rooms at Mar Michael is paid, a total of 200 piastres, and Papas Joel, who receives the money, is admonished not to do as he did the year before: pretend to his superiors that the Bible-men only paid 100 piastres!⁶⁶ Even though the missionaries leave Jerusalem, the lease of the four rooms at Mar Michael is still valid.

Fisk and Bird leave Jerusalem on April 22. Fisk writes in connection with this: “I left a large quantity [of Scriptures] in the Bible Society Room at Jerusalem and a considerable quantity at Joppa.”⁶⁷

When Fisk left Jerusalem in the spring of 1823, he – and King – had used up their supply. It was different in the spring of 1824, when he, and Bird, still had a large supply. But the Hebrew Bibles had all been sold.

61 *Ibid.*, 65.

62 *Ibid.*, 37.

63 *Ibid.*, 67.

64 *Ibid.*, 12.

65 *Ibid.*, 67.

66 Bird, 130.

67 *Missionary Herald* (1825): 67.

Concluding Remarks

The turn of the year 1823–1824 meant a reorganization of the Bible work in Jerusalem. There is still no Bible Society, but a Bible Society Room was set up, and the American missionary Pliny Fisk was appointed leader of the work. The architect behind this was William Jowett.

There are plans in Boston as well as in London to make Jerusalem a "station" for American and English Bible-men respectively, but the political situation in Palestine does not make this possible. The Bible Society Room and three other rented rooms at the Greek convent Mar Michael comprise the base for the Bible work. This is the place where Scriptures are sent and kept until the Bible-men return to Jerusalem, not least at the Christian festivals.

While the American missionaries in 1823–1824 distributed Scriptures predominantly, but not exclusively, to the Christians in Jerusalem and to pilgrims, William Bucknor Lewis succeeded in distributing a large number of Scriptures to Jews. As has been demonstrated, the number of distributed Hebrew New Testaments is relatively small. The Jews in Jerusalem are not very receptive to them.

In the first six months of 1824, several bans are issued against the Protestant missionaries and against the distribution of Bibles. We will look into that in the next article in this series, which will deal with the period from the summer of 1824 to the spring of 1827.

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