

# Honoring the Fallen: The 70th Anniversary of the Destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto

## By Dr. Mitch Glaser, President, Chosen People Ministries

**Editor's Note:** This article on the 70th anniversary of the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943 also includes portions from Dr. Glaser's 2012 article, "Heroes of the Holocaust: Poland, the Warsaw Ghetto and Yeshua." An excerpt of that was published in the May 2012 *Bulletin* (Issue 108, p. 15). The full earlier article can be downloaded at the LCJE.net website under "Papers" (2012).



*The Great Synagogue - Warsaw*

### Overview

The achievements and witness of Jewish believers during the Holocaust and especially in the Warsaw Ghetto are essentially unknown to most present-day Jewish believers. We stand on the shoulders of these heroes of the Holocaust - the Jewish believers of the Warsaw Ghetto - and their story, as much or as little as we know, must be told. First, we shall look at a brief history of the destruction of the Ghetto itself.

### Destruction of the Great Synagogue in Warsaw

On May 16th, 1943, the Nazis forces, led by General Jürgen Stroop, blew up the Great Synagogue on Tlomackie street in Warsaw and destroyed what remained of the Jewish presence in the Ghetto after 27 days of intense fighting. The Great Synagogue was destroyed to symbolize the triumph of Stroop's troops over the Jewish Ghetto fighters.

According to Moshe Arens, writing in the *Jerusalem Post* article in 2003, Stroop was a committed Nazi who went

beyond usual duty in destroying the Ghetto:

*Stroop was the archetypal Nazi - a sadistic anti-Semite who took joy in hunting Jews, whom he considered sub-humans. He remained unrepentant right up to his execution in Warsaw, after being convicted of war crimes. In the Warsaw Mokotow prison awaiting his trial, he regaled his cellmates with stories of how he had succeeded in liquidating the Warsaw Ghetto.*

One of those cellmates was a Pole named Kazimierz Moczarski. Moczarski was accused at the time of conducting activity against the Polish Communist regime. In his book titled, *Conversations with the Hangman*, Moczarski recounted Stroop's description of how he had dynamited the great synagogue on Tlomackie Street. Moczarski wrote that Stroop's eyes "sparkled with enthusiasm. 'What a wonderful sight!' I called out 'Heil Hitler!' and pressed the button. A terrific explosion brought flames right up to the clouds. The colors

*were unbelievable. An unforgettable allegory of the triumph over Jewry. The Warsaw Ghetto has ceased to exist. Because that is what Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler wanted.'*<sup>(1)</sup>

This is a Tish B'av anniversary - another day when we remember that the enemies of Israel tried to destroy the Jewish people. They failed because the God who chose the Jewish people preserved them. And so we say, She-hechyanu, "Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion." Yet, at the same time we grieve over what we lost.

According to reports, 56,065 Jewish people were captured, 5-6,000 killed in the fighting, 7,000 were shot and thousands of others were sent to Treblinka, where the Jewish people of the Ghetto had been sent over the last year to their deaths in the gas chambers.

**Mordechai Anielewicz**  
The hero of the Jewish

resistance was Mordechai Anielewicz, who was a young Jewish political activist. (2)

The organization led by Anielewicz was called the *Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa*, known as the ZOB - the Jewish Combat Organization. Its counterpart organization was called the *Zydowski Zwiazek Wojskowy*; ZZW – the Jewish Military Union. The ZZW grew out of the Jewish Revisionist Party (Betar), a more right-wing Zionist group.

Combined, these two groups had approximately 750 fighters, poorly armed and with minimal support from the Polish resistance. (3)

### Mass deportations

The Ghetto was sealed off on November 16, 1940. Mass deportations continued from July 22 through September 12, 1942, when more than 300,000 inhabitants of the Ghetto were killed in the Treblinka concentration camp.

Only 60,000 Jewish people then remained in the Ghetto, and the Germans reinitiated deportations on January 18, 1943, when the Jewish fighters under young Anielewicz's leadership (4) began their active resistance. They were successful in disorienting the Germans and at first they believed that they had stopped the deportations, but unfortunately, they had not.

The Nazis regrouped and planned to destroy the Ghetto within three days. They were going to begin their renewed efforts on April 13th, the beginning of Passover. However, those plans changed: the Jewish resistance fought valiantly and held out for a full month.



Mordechai Anielewicz  
*Flickr.com photo*

### Last letter to a friend

In his last letter to his friend and co-leader of the ZOB, Yitzhak Cukierman, penned on April 23, 1943, Anielewicz wrote,

*It is impossible to put into words what we have been through. One thing is clear, what happened exceeded our boldest dreams. The Germans ran twice from the ghetto. One of our companies held out for 40 minutes and another for more than 6 hours. The mine set in the 'brushmakers' area exploded. (5) Several of our companies attacked the dispersing Germans. Our losses in manpower are minimal...I feel that great things are happening and what we dared do is of great, enormous importance.... Beginning from today we shall shift over to the partisan tactic."*

He next emphasized their operational needs: "*...What we need urgently: grenades, rifles, machine-guns and explosives.*

*It is impossible to describe the conditions under which the Jews of the ghetto are now living. Only a few will be able to hold out. The remainder will die sooner or later. Their fate is decided. In almost all the hiding places in which thou-*

*sands are concealing themselves it is not possible to light a candle for lack of air. With the aid of our radio we heard the marvelous report on our fighting by the "Shavit" radio station. The fact that we are remembered beyond the ghetto walls encourages us in our struggle. Peace go with you, my friend! Perhaps we may still meet again!*

He concluded with what has become a rallying cry for generations of future defenders of the Jewish people:

*"The dream of my life has risen to become fact. Self-defense in the ghetto will have been a reality. Jewish armed resistance and revenge are facts. I have been a witness to the magnificent, heroic fighting of Jewish men in battle. (6)*

### Last Stand: Mila 18

They made their last stand at Mila 18, an apartment that served as their headquarters (which was the inspiration for the book, *Mila 18*, by Jewish author, Leon Uris), and it was there that Anielewicz and dozens if not hundreds of his fellow fighters committed suicide rather than fall into the hands of the Nazis – a modern Masada! He died on May 8, 1943. This signaled the end of armed resistance by those Jews left in the Ghetto.

A stone lies at the site of the bunker adjacent to Mila Street and commemorates the fallen. The text on the stone is a moving and fitting testimony to those brave Jewish fighters who fought to their deaths: "*Grave of the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising built from the rubble of Mila Street, one of the liveliest streets of prewar Jewish Warsaw. These*

ruins of the bunker at 18 Mila Street are the place of rest of the commanders and fighters of the Jewish combat organization as well as some civilians. Among them lives Mordecai Anielewicz, the commander-in-chief.

"On May 8, 1943, surrounded by the Nazis, after three weeks of struggle, many perished or took their own lives, refusing to perish at the hands of their enemies. There were several hundred bunkers built in the ghetto found and destroyed by the Nazis. They became graves. They could not save those who sought refuge inside them, yet they remain everlasting symbols of the Warsaw Jews' will to live. The bunker at Mila Street was the largest in the Ghetto; it is the place of rest of over 100 fighters, only some of whom are known by name. Here they rest, buried where they fell, to remind us that the whole earth is their grave.

Marek Edelman, who wrote extensively about the Ghetto and the Resistance in the pamphlet, "The Ghetto Fights," (7), co-founded the ZOB with Anielewicz and survived the destruction of the Ghetto. He remained in Poland and later became one of the leaders of the Solidarity movement. The woman who initially published the document wrote the following about Edelman's brief history: "I am not acquainted with the young author of this booklet, one of the leaders of the Jewish Uprising. He brought me a typewritten copy, and I read it all at once, unable to interrupt my reading for a single moment."

The text read as follows: "I am not a writer. This has no literary value. However, this non-literary narrative



The Mila 18 Stone grave marker\*

achieves that which not all masterpieces can achieve. For it gives in serious, purposeful, reticent words a record, simple and unostentatious, of a common martyrdom, of its entire involved course. It is also an authentic document about perseverance and moral strength kept intact during the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind. (8)

#### **A personal pilgrimage**

This past March I travelled to Warsaw with my wife Zhava and Vladimir and Inna Pikman, who lead Beit Sar Shalom (part of Chosen People Global Ministries) in Berlin, Germany. The Pikmans have family in Poland, and Zhava is working on her doctoral dissertation on the Holocaust and related themes. I completed my Ph.D. dissertation more than a dozen years ago and wrote on Jewish Missions during the first 50 years of the 20th century, focusing on Continental Europe. Quite a bit of my research focused on the role of Jewish missions and Messianic Jews in the Holocaust.

#### **The Messianic movement in Poland**

It was at that time that I first came to learn about the Messianic movement in Poland and throughout Europe. I was especially moved by their testimony in Poland and gradually developed a heart connection

to the missionaries and the Jewish believers in Poland and Warsaw especially who endured such terrible suffering and death.

Martin Parsons, a non-Jewish ordained missionary to the Jewish people with CMJ, the historic British mission to the Jewish people, provides a thumbnail sketch of Jewish missions in Poland two years prior to the Nazi invasion in a paper presented to the meeting of the International Missionary Council Christian Approach to the Jews:

"The American Board of Missions (Chosen People Ministries today) has a center in Warsaw on the east of the river. They have room for some inquirers, in addition to general evangelistic work. The Mildmay Mission (Messianic Testimony today) has a hall in the Jewish quarter in Warsaw and their work mainly touches poorer Jews. The American Euro-pean Fellowship is in Warsaw and works particularly among children. They have a villa at Radoso, which is used in the Summer for children's work. The Bethel Mission in Lodz has an evangelistic center and a colony.

In addition, in Poland there is one Pentecostal evangelist, one member of the Open Brethren, one member of the Closed Brethren and a few private evangelists living by faith. The four missions in Warsaw work together in close cooperation. The shape of this is in the form of monthly-united prayer meetings and monthly evangelistic meetings.

In Lvov there is active cooperation between the Church Mission to the Jews (CMJ) and the Danish Mission (DIM) with their joint monthly evangelistic meeting. (9)

There is so much more than can be said about these ministries, but for our purposes it is simply important to know that a vibrant Messianic movement and missionary effort amongst the Jewish people existed before the war.

Naturally, I was drawn to ask whether or not there was some type of active presence of Jewish believers in the Warsaw Ghetto. It seemed to make sense that there would have been a strong presence of Jewish believers in Ghetto as there were probably more than a dozen Messianic congregations and missions operating in Warsaw alone during the years between the two World Wars. I wondered about what happened to these Jewish believers? My assumption was that most were forced into the Ghetto and died there or were sent to Treblinka and certain death along with their fellow Jews.

But what may have happened in the Ghetto? Did their testimony end with the formation of the Ghetto walls or did it continue throughout these few terrible years. There is considerable evidence that their witness continued. I have always wanted these heroes of the faith to have the opportunity to tell their story and to hear what happened during the sad days of the Ghetto. I also want to find some way for the testimonies of these Jewish believers to be shared with future generations of Messianic Jews and other believers.

### **Rachmiel Frydland and the Warsaw Ghetto**

At one time, all we really knew about this time were the stories told by the very godly



*The author at the Warsaw Ghetto, March 2013*

and humble Rachmiel Frydland who went to be with the Lord a number of years ago. His book, *Joy Cometh in the Morning*, and other articles and personal stories I had the privilege of hearing were about all I knew about life in the Warsaw Ghetto for Messianic Jews.

Frydland recounted his incredible visit in and out of the Ghetto: *"By God's enabling, I secretly slipped into the ghetto and was able to speak comfort to a few of the Jewish believers still alive. Other Jewish brethren heard the message and believed in Messiah Jesus. My friends in the ghetto insisted I leave. They said that if God had preserved me thus far, I would be a witness to the woes they now experienced. At the end of the war, I could tell the story of their suffering. I was probably one of the last to leave the ghetto. It was only shortly afterward that the Germans obliterated the entire Jewish area."* (10)

**Peter Dembowski's History**  
Later, I also came across the

book, *Jewish Christians in the Warsaw Ghetto* (2005), by a devoted Catholic historian, Peter Dembowski, who taught at the University of Chicago until he passed away a few years ago. (11) In 2012, I wrote a paper that drew in part from Dembowski's book. That paper, written for the LCJE North America conference that year - which had the Holocaust as its theme - was titled, "Heroes of the Holocaust: Poland, the Warsaw Ghetto and Yeshua." This can be read in its entirety in the online LCJE archives. (12) But at the time I wrote that paper, I had not yet personally visited Warsaw.

As stated in my earlier paper, Dembowski's work is both monumental and informative. It is perhaps the best source of information in English regarding Jewish believers in the Warsaw Ghetto, gathering together what limited material is available. Clearly this was a labor of love and devotion in the case of Dembowski, who lived through these terrible events himself. (13)





*The Walls Still Speak: This apartment building façade in one of the few remaining structures of the Warsaw Ghetto memorializes some of the residents who never returned*

Another key source for information about Jewish believers in Jesus in the Ghetto, and in particular, Catholic Jews, may be found in the book titled, *The Story of One Life*, written by Dr. Ludwik Hirszfeld and published in English in 2010. (14) Hirzfeld penned this work in 1943-44, having escaped the Ghetto immediately before the Nazi *Aktion*. According to Dembowski, the most important chapters in this book are those that describe the life of the author as a Christian Jew in the Ghetto. It is unique as it is a rare biographical work by a Jewish Christian. (15)

Another work of interest

cited by Dembowski is by Jewish historian Havi Dreyfus Ben-Sasson and her article titled, "Christians in the Ghetto," published in *Yad Vashem Studies*. Ben-Sasson is a staff member of the International School for Teaching the Holocaust at Yad Vashem (16)

### **Visiting what remains of the Ghetto**

Finally, my dream of visiting Warsaw came true this past year. Thanks to the efforts of Kazimierz Barczuk (who also works with Chosen People Global Ministries) and whose testimony can be read on the LCJE web site (17), we had a great guide and toured what

was left of the Ghetto. This included some of the remaining walls, the churches where the Protestant and Catholic Jewish believers worshipped and much more! We visited the Jewish Heritage Institute where the full works of Emmanuel Ringelblum, the archivist of the Warsaw Ghetto, are preserved. Ringelblum wrote the *Journal from the Warsaw Ghetto (Togbukh fun varsherver geto)*. This journal and a trove of source documents were hidden from the Nazis in milk cans and discovered after the war. (18)

We also visited the site where a tall glass building now stands, at the place where the Great Synagogue on Tlomackie street



One of the Ringelblum milk cans

used to tower magnificently over Jewish Warsaw.

We visited Mila 18 and the site of the traditional memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto. While there, we also visited the new Museum of Polish Jewry which opened on April 19, 2013, to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. It is well worth visiting. (19) A recent article in the *Jewish Week* newspaper provides an excellent overview of the museum and the pertinent information needed if you find yourself able to visit what is now one of the most important Jewish sites in Europe. (20)

One site in the Ghetto area is an apartment house where the faces of the residents are emblazoned on the brick of the façade and the apartment house is left standing as a memorial to those who never returned home.

### **The Walls Still Speak**

One of the most moving experiences we had on our brief tour of the Warsaw Ghetto was standing at the few remaining walls of the Ghetto. I can barely describe the emotions I felt, knowing that just 70 years ago, my people were herded like animals inside this red brick cage and the only relief from their horrid imprisonment was to be

sent to their deaths in Treblinka. Standing there demanded a holy silence, and you could almost hear the walls telling the story of Jewish suffering and heroism.

It is difficult to discover the silver lining in this dark cloud. But, remembering the heroes of the Holocaust, those who fought for their people and those who stood for Yeshua inside the Ghetto gives me some degree of comfort. We might never know a lot about the Jewish believers in the Warsaw Ghetto, but I do believe there

is still much to be discovered about their lives and witness in there. It is comforting to know that one day the full story of Messianic heroism will be known, and I look forward to that day.

Until then, it is good to honor and remember the heroes of the Ghetto and to be inspired by their bravery and courage.

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\*Photos by the author unless noted otherwise in the text or endnotes





## ENDNOTES

1. Moshe Arens, "The Changing Face of Memory: Who Defended the Warsaw Ghetto?" *Jerusalem Post*, May 2003 (this essay was written to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising). See [http://www.freeman.org/m\\_online/may03/arens.htm](http://www.freeman.org/m_online/may03/arens.htm)
2. "Anielewicz, Mordechai". *YadVashem.org*. [http://www.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205739.pdf](http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205739.pdf)
3. Formed in the summer of 1942 in response to renewed deportation of Jewish people to Treblinka. See <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005188>
4. Anielewicz was appointed commander of the ZOB in November 1942.
5. This was describing one of the areas where Jewish slave labor had to work on behalf of German industry.
6. M. Anielewicz, Ghetto, April 23, 1943 [M. Kann], 'Na oczach swiata' ("In the Eyes of the World"), Zamosc, 1932 [i.e., Warsaw, 1943], pp. 33-34.
7. See <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/Holocaust/warsaw-uprising.html>. Also see the YouTube video interview at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkAPtRRk7Ts>
8. Zofia Nalkowska, LODZ, November 1945, <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/Holocaust/warsaw-uprising.html>
9. IMCCAJ Vienna Conference (1937).
10. MessianicAssociation.org, <http://www.messianicassociation.org/bio-frydland.htm>
11. Peter F. Dembowski, *Jewish Christians in the Warsaw Ghetto, An Epitaph for the Unremembered*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.
12. Mitch Glaser, "Heroes of the Holocaust: Poland, the Warsaw Ghetto and Yeshua." Paper presented at the 2012 Lau- sanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism, North America conference held in San Diego, March 5-7, 2012. [http://www.lcje.net/Heroes%20of%20the%20Holocaust\\_Poland\\_The%20Warsaw%20Ghetto%20and%20Yeshua.pdf](http://www.lcje.net/Heroes%20of%20the%20Holocaust_Poland_The%20Warsaw%20Ghetto%20and%20Yeshua.pdf)
13. As noted in my previous "Heroes of the Holocaust" paper, Dembowski served as Distinguished Service Professor (Emeritus) in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Chicago. Born and raised in Warsaw, Dembowski was involved in the underground activities of the Polish Home Army and participated in the Polish uprising. He was twice a prisoner of the Germans - first at the infamous prison known as Pawiak, where comrades bribed corrupt Gestapo officials to win his freedom, and later at Stalag XB Sandbostel, where he remained until the prison was liberated by the British. Upon liberation, Dembowski joined the Polish Army in the West. He was twice decorated with the Polish Cross for Valor and the Silver Cross with Swords.
14. Ludwik Hirsztfeld, *The Story of One Life*, edited and translated by Marta A. Balinska, ed. William Schneider (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010).
15. See <http://www.amazon.com/Ludwik-Hirsztfeld-Rochester-Studies-Medical/dp/158046338X>.
16. Havi Dreyfus Ben-Sasson. 2003. "Christians in the Ghetto: All Saints Church, Birth of the Holy Virgin Church, and the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto." *Yad Vashem Studies* 31: 153-173. See [http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/about/institute/studies/issues/Ben-Sasson's biography is at: http://en.auschwitz.org/m/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=537&Itemid=33](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/about/institute/studies/issues/Ben-Sasson's%20biography%20is%20at%20http://en.auschwitz.org/m/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=537&Itemid=33). Dembowski also suggests the following additional sources: Marian Malowist, *Assimilationists and Neophytes at the Time of War - Operations in the Closed Jewish Quarter* - written in Polish and composed shortly before the summer of 1942 by a Jewish believer who later became a professor of history at the University of Warsaw. He translated his essay, and it is included in a collection of documents taken from the Ringleblum Archives. Other sources (primarily in Polish) include: Iwona Stefanczyk, *Christian Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto* (1997); Ruta Sakowska, *The Christians in the Ghetto* (1993), pp. 138-140; Marian Fuks, "Christians in the Warsaw Ghetto," found in *From the History of the Great Catastrophe of the Jewish People* (1996), pp. 63-67. Dembowski states that Fuks is a descendant of "baptized Jews."
17. Kazimierz Barczuk, "My Testimony." [www.lcje.net/KR2010Testimony%20-%20Kazimierz%20Barczuk.pdf](http://www.lcje.net/KR2010Testimony%20-%20Kazimierz%20Barczuk.pdf)
18. See Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*, edited and translated by Jacob Sloan (New York: IPicturebooks, 2010). See also: The Emanuel Ringleblum Jewish Historical Institute, <http://www.jhi.pl/en>. The photo shown of one of the milk cans used to store the Ringelblum Archive is found on Wikipedia at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Milk\\_can\\_used\\_to\\_store\\_documents.JPG](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Milk_can_used_to_store_documents.JPG)
19. "Polish Jewish Museum Opens as Warsaw Ghetto Uprising 70th Anniversary Nears," *The Jewish Daily Forward*, April 13, 2013. <http://forward.com/articles/174913/polish-jewish-museum-opens-as-warsaw-ghetto-uprising/>
20. Steve Lipman, "Turning a New Page in Poland's Jewish History," April 17, 2013, *The Jewish Week*, <http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/international-news/turning-new-page-polands-jewish-history>

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## Note on Academic Programs of Interest to LCJE Members

**Editor's Note:** This is a placeholder for a future page covering some of the key academic programs relevant to Jewish evangelism and the global Messianic movement. This will be a 'work-in-progress.' LCJE members and readers of the *Bulletin* are invited to send information on academic programs or related activities that they think might be considered for possible inclusion in this list. It is hoped that both the *Bulletin* and the LCJE website can serve as forums for dissemination of information about relevant academic programs. Send information to: [lcje.int@gmail.com](mailto:lcje.int@gmail.com) or to LCJE, P.O. Box 5501, Falmouth, VA 22403 USA.