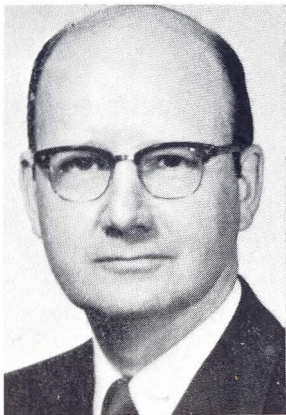


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I Saw New Life in New York City

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DR. PAUL S. JAMES, *Pastor*

THE MANHATTAN BAPTIST CHURCH
OF NEW YORK CITY
IN THE NEW YORK CENTER
227 WEST 46th STREET

I SAW NEW LIFE IN NEW YORK CITY

by

PAUL S. JAMES

A few days ago I had lunch on Governor's Island as a guest of our Southern Baptist Chaplain, Lonnie Knight of Mississippi, who is in the headquarters of the First Army. The history of Fort Jay which is located here goes back 300 years. Looking north across the harbor one sees Lower Manhattan and what has been called "the most famous skyline in the world." Several small buildings down close to the water's edge were there at the turn of the century, but everything else has been built since 1900.

New Urban Development

By "everything else" I mean the concentration of tall buildings which make up what is known as "The Financial District." This is the nerve center of the financial life of the world; for in New York, which Peter Minuet bought from the Indians for \$24,000.00 worth of trinkets, today you will find the headquarters of 27 billion-dollar corporations and 1,205 million-dollar corporations — all of this development since 1900! Which is to say that New York is a modern city, undergoing constant changes. It is "the city that never sleeps" in more than one sense; and, someone says, "It will be a great city if they ever get done building it."

Flying over the city it is hard to imagine what exists half a mile below. For one thing, there are more language people than the total language groups served by the Home Mission Board six years ago. More than 600,000 Negroes and Puerto Ricans have moved to New York since 1950. There are more Negroes in New York City than in Tennessee and Arkansas combined. Seventy-five different languages are spoken here.

Recently I met a young Egyptian as he disembarked at a port in Brooklyn, coming to make his home with an uncle in Phoenix, Arizona. One of our pastors in Phoenix put me in touch with this young Moslem. A New York friend who has been a missionary among Moslems in their own lands told me he has reached more Moslems for Christ in one year in New York than in five years abroad; and these are Moslems with leadership potential to return to their own countries with the message of Jesus and his love.

In New York gleaming new office buildings reach toward the sky; but there are more than 16,000 dilapidated dwelling units with neither sanitary facilities nor hot water, and thousands of these units have no heat. A multi-million-dollar redevelopment program is in progress, but the housing projects that replace the old tenements often displace more people than the new buildings can accommodate. There is much over-

crowding and discomfort. Not far from where we are living on the East River, 4,000 people are living in a single block. Such situations explain much of the teen-age trouble. New York has 6,000 miles of streets and 12,000 taxis on these streets. Your heart goes out to the kids playing on the streets and dodging the cabs. Your heart goes out to the little folks too. It's a common thing to see pre-school-age children on door-steps gambling.

One night a visitor in our car as we drove to a meeting on Long Island (the Island is 120 miles long) exclaimed: "Just look at that, apartment buildings as far as you can see!" Percentage-wise Long Island is the fastest-growing area in America.

New Southern Baptist Development

Six months ago I knew perhaps three Southern Baptist families on Long Island. One month ago we held a Vacation Bible school at Mitchell Field, L. I., which was staffed by Southern Baptists, 270 were enrolled in this school, and 23 boys and girls accepted Christ as their Saviour and Lord with an equal number rededicating their lives to him. In our Vacation schools this summer 320 have been enrolled — the first Southern Baptist Vacation Bible schools ever held in the area where vacation schools were started but where few are held now.

The Manhattan Baptist Church of New York City, affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, was organized at Hotel New Yorker on January 10, 1958, with 99 charter members. It was formerly a mission of the College Avenue Baptist Church of Annapolis, Maryland, whose pastor is Charles Jolley. In less than six months after being organized, our membership doubled and we started two missions. For the past ten months the Lord has given additions every Sunday with only three exceptions, one of these being the Sunday of the record-breaking snow-storm. More than once we have had as many as 15 people coming into the membership on a single Sunday from as many as ten different states.

We have a full schedule of Sunday services in the attractive New York Center on West 46th Street, just off Broadway at Times Square, where we are surrounded by 70 theaters in an area of six blocks.

Recently a tall Oklahoman was in our services for the first time. He was in Sunday school, morning worship, Training Union, and the evening service—just like back home, but at Times Square. He met a man who has been a Sunday school superintendent and Training Union director in Florida. He talked with a man who has been a deacon in North Carolina. He heard a duet sung by a student from Georgia and a Texas girl who is now an assistant to one of the nation's foremost dress designers. He was welcomed by a man from Louisiana and a recent new

member from Israel who was won to the Lord by a Southern Baptist missionary. A telephone company engineer, living in Jersey, had charge of the Sunday school. A Columbia University speech instructor from Kentucky directed Training Union. He saw the warm smile on the face of a Southern Baptist missionary, about to return to Nigeria, as she was assured by raised hands of the prayers of her own Southern Baptist people.

We have Training Union and preaching service every Sunday night near Madison, New Jersey, in an area of half a dozen communities without a single Baptist church of any kind. We will start Sunday evening services at Hempstead, Long Island, in September, and hope soon to be able to report flourishing chapels under capable mission pastors at these locations. We have three prayer meetings each week, two of them 60 miles apart. We have three WMU's with auxiliaries. We give 15% of our receipts to the Co-operative Program, and every family receives *Home Missions* and *The Commission*. Many of our families drive at least 35 miles one way to be in our services, paying heavy tolls each way. Twice in mid-Manhattan we have had dinner on the grounds, with everything but redbugs. August 10 marked our record attendance—in the middle of the summer. "It's the most dedicated group I've ever been associated with," one of our men says. The Manhattan church is a mecca for Southern Baptist missionaries and chaplains, students and visitors, and people who for years have longed for a Southern Baptist Program in the New York area. We are asked, "Why wasn't this started sooner?" The blessing we have had since it was started is "the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

New Baptist Development

Of course New York has hundreds of churches, everything from massive cathedrals to kingdom halls. Several other Baptist groups are at work here, and we are seeking to establish cordial relations with them. But the fact remains that 56% of Manhattan's people are not connected with any religious institution, and only a little more than 10% are Protestant. When our Conventtion was organized in 1845 its purpose as stated in the constitution was "to provide a general organization for Baptists in the United States and its territories for the promotion of Christian missions at home and abroad." On this basis we have entered New York City "to reach all we can for Christ, to teach all we reach, to win all we teach, to train all we win, and to enlist all we train." Billy Graham's crusade here last year is a constant inspiration to us. One of our last baptisms was a young woman saved in that crusade. I expect soon to baptize a preacher who was saved under Billy's ministry — "after wandering for 40 years in the wilderness of liberalism."

In his presidential address before the Houston Convention, Brooks Hays, who has been in our services, referred to "the exciting new outpost in New York City." Truly it is exciting to serve Christ and Southern Baptists under the auspices of the Home Mission Board at "the crossroads of the world." We worship and work at the throbbing heart of the world's largest city. From the top of the 102-story Empire State Building on a clear day one can see 20 miles in every direction. Within this radius nearly 15 million people are living, about one-tenth of the population of the entire United States. The Manhattan church is surrounded by more lost people than any other church in the Southern Baptist Convention. We like to think we are where the Apostle Paul would be if he were alive today.

It is inconceivable that Southern Baptists should claim to be reaching America for Christ and not do our best to reach America's most strategic city for Christ, hub of the nation's business and industry, art and culture, education and communications. Think, for instance, of the needs of 35,000 students at Columbia University and 45,000 students at New York University. Everything Southern Baptists are doing needs to be done in New York City, and needs to be done bigger and better because it's New York. Here the buildings are taller, the crowds are larger, the pace is faster, the Christians are scarcer, the opportunities are greater, the demands are heavier, the standards are higher, the workers are fewer, the call is louder, and the reward is grander. O that some of our best pastors may sense it and come!

Thanks to you for praying for us. Thank you for letting us know when your people come to New York. Thank you for keeping your people informed of the work. We covet your increasing support. We need large financial resources almost immediately, and we need the most capable workers we can get. We ask you to stand with us as we constitute New Testament churches on what has been called "the world's greatest mission field." Some are saying this is the most significant thing Southern Baptists are doing in this hour of tremendous opportunity when we seek to influence world life for Jesus Christ.

There's a new light on the Great White Way, and each of you can help to make that light shine brighter.