

Borough Park Symposium  
October 8-10, 2007

Welcome and Introduction  
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Shalom and Welcome to the Borough Park Symposium, right here in Queens, New York . No, this is not Borough Park. That story will be told to you shortly. You'll find it interesting.

So, here we are, not far from Shea Stadium, the home of the New York Mets, one of the two professional baseball teams in this city. Sadly for Mets fans, they aren't in the post-season playoffs. That doesn't bother me, much, since I've been a fan of the other team, the New York Yankees, since I was born, having spent my formative month in the Bronx. As a Yankee fan, I must say that I'm glad that the Bronx Bombers made it into the post season again. It's just how it ought to be, don't you think?

With the theme of baseball in mind, I want to suggest something. At a baseball game, there are two competing teams on the field, around 100 players, coaches, umpires, batboys, etc., being watched by millions and millions of people. While the fans watch, the teams go at it. But, in a sense, the players are on the same side. Why do I say this?

As long as the games stay interesting—as long as baseball attracts fans and support, these ball players are fulfilling their childhood fantasies. Nearly every boy imagines playing pro baseball at one time in his life. So, as long as they get to play on some team, they're happy. Yes, the ball clubs compete, but it's even more important to make sure that the game itself remains popular. That's why ball players are usually very friendly with one another, even in the middle of an intense game. It looks like they're asking each other if they have plans after the game. You see, they know that, win or lose, they all win in the long run. They get to play baseball. Although they may be on different teams, they are really on the same one—baseball

In a way, our symposium is a little like that. We may be on different theological teams, we may have different ways of operating, but we're all in the same "game," the effort to promote the Kingdom of God among our people, We're really on the same team.

Some of us call ourselves Messianic Jews; others, Hebrew Christians. Some of us are missionaries; some rabbis. Some are dispensational; others lean toward covenant theology. Still others would classify themselves differently..

Each of these terms describes differences or at least, emphases. Yet, no matter what we call ourselves, no matter how many ways we find ourselves to be different from others in this group, the Jewish community and the Church, see us pretty much as members of the Jews that follow Jesus (or Yeshua if they've been clued in to the way many of us talk) team. To outsiders, we're all pretty much the same. To the spectators, our differences

don't matter much. In fact, one might say that to the outside world, we barely qualify to play in the major leagues.

According to the latest census, there are approximately 6.6 billion people in the world today. Of that number, only around 13 million are Jews, that's only two tenths of one percent of the world's population (.002). For the sake of discussion, if we assume that Jews in Messianic congregations and churches total 100,000, we're only .007 of the Jewish people, or .000015 of the world's population. We are minor leaguers, no matter how major we think we, our organizations, our missions are.

I'm not saying this to be discouraging. In fact, Messianic Jews haven't been so noticed by our people since the first centuries of the Common Era. The word is out—there are Jewish people who follow Yeshua, believing him to be the Messiah. In the Christian world, Messianic Jews are having major successes: God is bringing us into positions of influence—seminary professors, TV and radio show hosts, speakers to huge international conferences, etc. I don't have to tell you how amazing our success stories have been, but that's in our eyes. Even with our successes, to the non-Messianic Jews, as well as the vast majority of those who call themselves Christians, we're still only in the minor leagues. That's why this symposium is so important. As we learn how to listen and work together, we will accomplish much more than the sum total of what we're all doing separately. We all know how easy it is to break a small stick. Yet, when enough sticks are put together, the task becomes more and more difficult. There's strength in unity.

The primary purpose of the Borough Park symposium is

to provide a forum for members of the broader Messianic Jewish community to articulate their beliefs with an expectation that they will receive a respectful hearing, but without the expectation that agreement concerning these beliefs will be achieved. The Symposium is designed to provide an *internal* platform for leaders to better understand one another and the various positions held within the Messianic movement.

The Borough Park Steering Committee thought that if we can help us all listen to each other we might build more cooperation and understanding to help us accomplish our shared goal. Many brilliant minds have devoted countless numbers of hours to reading, to studying, to researching, to thinking and to writing their views on issues that concern us all. A lot goes into our desire to express what we believe to be true, but where we sometimes go wrong is to behave as though we “own” *the* Truth and others are just plain wrong. This causes division in our small community, something that we cannot afford and something that goes against the instructions of the team's manager. Yeshua haMashiach challenges us to be unified and loving toward one another to the glory of God. What a statement that would be to our people and the Church! It might even be a first!

Isn't it amazing how many disagreements we can have? These are ultimately important for us as individual leaders because they help us refine our thinking, as “iron sharpens

iron.” They matter since sometimes they serve as correctives if we’re somewhat, or a lot, off track. But, our differences shouldn’t separate us, which too often they do. We are a miniscule movement, and because we are small, we need to be unified.

We may be comfortably ensconced in our respective organizations, whether they are schools, missions, congregations, etc., but we are connected (whether we like it or not) to one another. We are connected even though we may seriously disagree with each other, but is that so unique among our people. If we didn’t disagree, one might ask if we really are Jews. It’s just who we are. Through respectful dialogue, even disagreement, we all think more clearly.

The Steering Committee of the BPS organized this event to help us get past our disunity and move more toward unity, not uniformity, if not in our theology, then in our relationships. No one expects that we’ll ever have total agreement, but in the larger scope of things, we have more in common with each other than any other people. We all agree that Yeshua is the Messiah; we all believe that our people are the chosen people; we all hold that the Land of Israel was uniquely given, and still belongs to, the Jewish people. We all accept the Torah to one degree or another. I suggest that if the entire 6.6 billion people in the world were surveyed about these issues, we would have more in common with each other than any other group in the entire world. This is something to consider.

A few years ago, I was talking with my good friend, Mitch Glaser, about the struggle between the mission and congregation worlds. This conflict didn’t seem necessary or useful. In fact, it was counterproductive. More can be done through cooperation than competition. Since CPM was involved in both missionary and congregation planting work, I thought this idea would resonate with him. Whether or not that discussion had any impact on the Borough Park Symposium, I’m very glad that Mitch and David Sedaca and their staff, invited a bunch of us to meet in Borough Park last fall to discuss the viability of such a symposium. And now, we’re all here. You might say it’s a minor miracle that we’re all sitting down and talking together. Wouldn’t you agree?

In baseball, the leadoff hitter’s job is to get on base so other batters can move him around the bases to score. I am honored to get our conference on base. Let me tell you who’s on deck. David Rudolph has prepared a well thought out paper that will help guide our discussions. We might call them our “rules of the game.” Let’s face it: There are no slouches among this group. Each one of us could hold his or her own in any theological ball game. But, that’s not what we’re trying to do. If any one of us tries to win at the expense of others, we all lose. We don’t need to prove how right our theological points of views are; we all *know* that each one of us is right or we wouldn’t be who we are. What we need to do is hear each other, understand each other, and respect each other. David’s paper will help us do just that.

Following David in the lineup will be Mitch Glaser, who has written a challenging paper that we will all identify with, in one way or another. Mitch’s paper offers some provocative points for us to consider, not the least of which is the amazing growth of the Messianic Jewish community. We may still be small, but Mitch will remind us of just

how small we once were so we can thank God for so how far we've come. We'll also be challenged to seek ways to enlarge the tent pegs of our movement through his words.

Each of the three sessions, tomorrow morning, tomorrow afternoon, and Wednesday morning, will have a moderator, or should I say, an umpire. Knowing that there might be some controversial presentations made, the moderator is to call balls and strikes, and determine if someone is safe and out. Remember there is no arguing with the umpire, no kicking dirt on his feet, no throwing of objects...or you may be ejected and have to watch the rest of the conference from the locker room.

Actually, we need to start praying for these moderators now since we know how we can be, sometimes. I believe that if we let them guide our conversation, we'll have some excellent, productive discussions.

To clarify, each presentation should be no more than twenty minutes long. Then there'll be a five-minute clarification period. After all the papers for any one session are given, there'll be a fifteen minute break and then an hour to an hour and a half discussion about the papers.

We are asking everyone to raise their hands and get called on so we can keep things running smoothly. We also don't want to have any interruptions of the speakers. We will make a list of those people who want to speak and will call on each of them in turn. Once we get through about five or so questions, we'll call for other questions and make a new list. We will favor those people who haven't spoken, in calling on people. All questions and discussions should be only 2-3 minutes long.

So, tomorrow morning's session will be The Gospel Message and we'll hear from Rachel Wolf, Stuart Dauermann, and Arnold Fruchtenbaum. The afternoon session will be about Salvation and the Jewish People and our speakers will be John Fischer, Michael Rydelnik, and Mark Kinzer. Then, on Wednesday morning, Presenting the Gospel to our Jewish people will be the theme, with papers presented by Tsvi Sadan, Sam Nadler, Susan Perlman, and Vladimir Pikman. After our lunch break, Jason Sobel and Joel Chernoff will offer some thoughts about the Future of our Movement. Then, David Sedaca will be the closer, wrapping everything up with some comments and an evaluation form for you to fill out.

I don't know about you, but I think we're going to have an awesome series, uh, symposium. Let's appreciate the intellectual stimulation that comes from these papers, enjoy the fellowship with fellow ballplayers, seek the spiritual growth that might come from our time together. Who knows, we might even change our minds a little about some of these issues, but, even if we don't, it's truly worth getting together to listen to each other with an open mind and heart. After all, we are a unique community of brothers and sisters.

May we be like those Jews of the Jerusalem Council who met so many centuries ago to deliberate about some controversial matters. They were all pretty intense about their

convictions, perhaps wondering if the others were really true followers of Yeshua. “After all,” they might have thought, “how can they be since they disagree with *me*.” But, the Ruach HaKodesh overruled their differences and they were able to continue in fellowship together and launch the Gospel throughout the world. May God help us do the same and be pleased with us as we talk about the Gospel. Now, let’s “Play ball.”