

Borough Park Symposium Opener by Mitch Glaser

How many of you remember the days when you felt like you were the only Jewish believer in Yeshua in the world? It feels like yesterday! Isn't it wonderful to know that our children will not feel the same way? We have come along way *Bubby!* The Messianic movement has a bright and promising future.

And yet, I believe this Symposium comes at a critical juncture in time and that some of what happens here will help chart the future course of our Messianic movement.

I pray that our discussions will help clarify our various positions, build better personal relationships between us and take some of the tension out of the air. I do not want to minimize or simplify our differences and the deep concerns we have with one another both theologically and orthopractically.

But, when you think about it, if we called for a conference of this nature years ago, we would have had very few people show up. Instead, our planning committee has gone through a very difficult process of deciding whom we would invite to this event! We have so many gifted, mature and thoughtful Messianic leaders among us today. It is just too bad that you all do not perfectly agree with me!

Brothers and sisters, we live in a very different time than we did a few decades ago. There are now many of us who are Jewish and believe in Yeshua. We are in the midst of raising a new generation of sons and daughters who affirm their Jewish-ness and also follow Yeshua as Messiah. Some of us even have grandchildren who know they are Jewish and believe in Yeshua!

Because of the contributions of many in this room tonight, we know we are not alone and that God is still committed to His covenant promises. So from my perspective – no matter what happens at this Borough Park Symposium – I stand overwhelmed by God's grace and mercy simply because we all are here tonight.

The Messianic Jewish movement is alive! We event have Messianic versions of the Bible and commentaries thanks to David Stern, Arnold Fruchtenbaum and others. We have Siddurs, Machzors and wonderful Messianic music thanks to John Fischer, Stuart Dauerman, Barry Budoff and others who I do not have time to mention. We have ongoing alliances, multi-national fellowships, conferences, camps, publishing houses and so much more because of the Chernoff family, David Sedaca, Barry Rubin and many others who have contributed so much to our growth.

When I became a Jewish believer at age 19 there were less than a half dozen Messianic congregations in the world – and now there are hundreds. I remember when we were accused of various forms of heresy because we believed you could be Jewish and believe in Yeshua and lived in a way where we identified as Jews. I am asked by many Christians if I still embrace Jewish traditions and celebrate the Jewish holidays and even if we as a ministry start Messianic

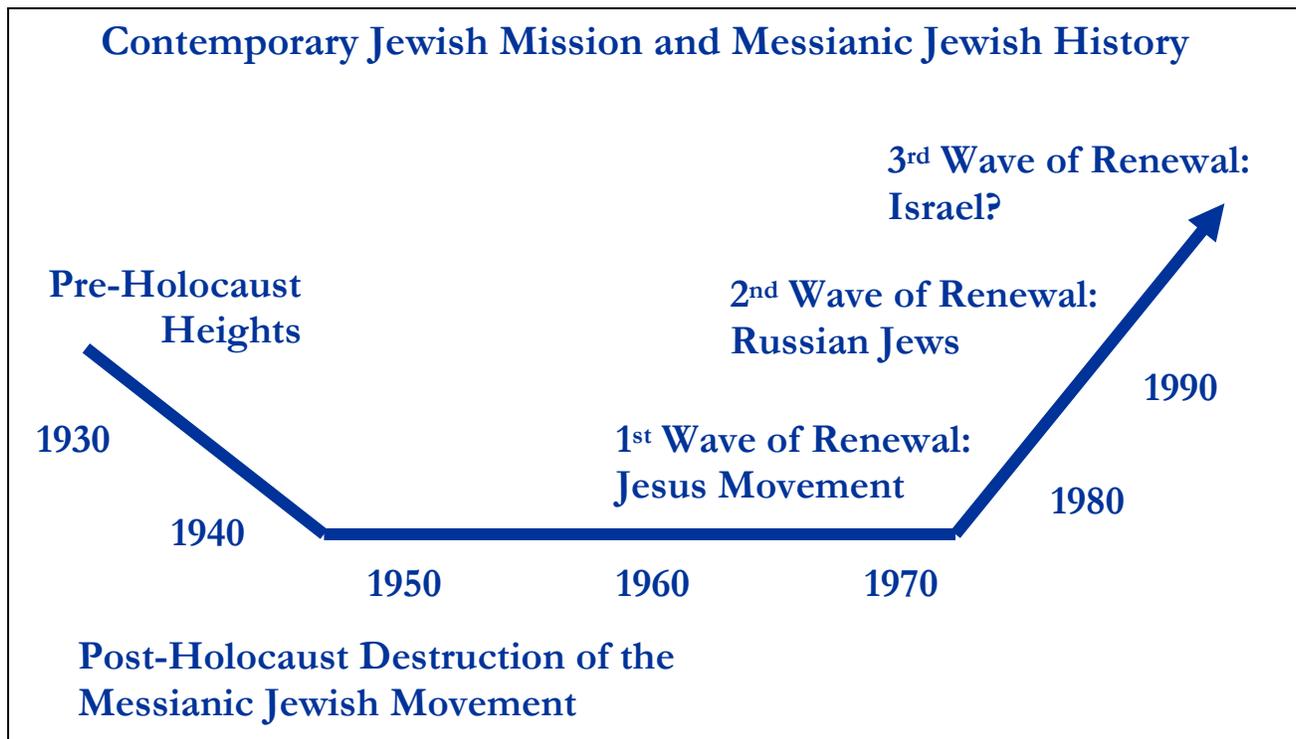
congregations. When I say yes, instead of getting a theological third degree I get a smile and am asked if there was some way they could attend a service too.

Last September we held a conference in Germany where we invited Russian Jewish believers who were planting congregations to come and meet one another and participate in what turned out to be an excellent training program. Dear friends, we had almost 90 congregations where Russian was the primary language – and they came from Russia, the Ukraine, Israel, Canada, Australia, the United States and many other countries. What was most remarkable was that not one of these congregations began before 1989.

In Israel we have seen a moving of the Holy Spirit in bringing many Messianic believers back to the Land and now to our delight we are witnesses to the doubling and tripling of the Messianic Jewish community within the Land. Today there are more than a hundred congregations in Israel of every stripe: Hebrew-speaking, Amharic-speaking, Russian-speaking and French- and Spanish-speaking as well. And one day they will all be speaking and conducting their services in Hebrew as their children assimilate to Israeli culture and become full members of Israeli national life.

We have so much to be thankful for, and certainly the Lord has brought our movement a long way over the last three decades. We are alive as a movement!

Still, we must ask our selves the question: *Are we alive AND well?* I think so. Sort of... somewhat! It depends on your perspective, so allow me to give you my opinion. I want to cast my thoughts with a chart that might give us all a different look at where we have come from as a movement and help us to know where we are going. I prepared this chart for the LCJE meeting held in Hungary this summer:



As you can see, we are living in a new day and in my estimation we are at the dawn of a movement, which will one day find its fulfillment as described by Rav Shaul:

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." (Rom. 11:25-27)

From my perspective, we are doing pretty well – as well as can be expected – because we are young. And we are growing – in numbers, in understanding, ability, scholarship, wisdom and in almost every conceivable area where new and dynamic movements tend to and need to grow. Reflect for a moment upon the chart I just showed you. Who would have ever thought the Lord would be working in such power in the modern state of Israel? Sixty years ago, there was no modern state of Israel!

And so, we have much to be thankful for and of course many serious concerns to handle as our worldwide, multi-lingual, multi-cultural movement propels forward on its course to the fulfillment described in Romans 11.

The Holocaust decimated our movement as our leaders were murdered, our congregations and properties brought to ruin. The Holocaust silenced the voices of a generation of young Messianic leaders and nailed the coffins on our more immediate European Messianic future. Hitler snuffed out our schools, congregations, mission stations, libraries and even our corporate sense of Messianic Jewish-ness. A deep chasm resulted, cutting us off from our rich Messianic heritage, which only today is being recreated and renewed to some degree.

Some of you have asked why we wanted to have this conference. May I say it simply? Those of us who planned this event believe we have a duty to repair our Messianic past and to step forward in redeeming the future of our movement. This conference is essentially an act of Tikkun Olam!

We are a vibrant witness – to the Jewish community, the Church and even to those who still seek the destruction of the Jewish people – that we are Jews who love Yeshua, and we are now growing more rapidly than ever before. And if we do not repair the past by accepting our losses and moving forward, we will never be able to assure our Messianic children – our offspring by both natural and spiritual birth – of their divine destiny as the remnant of Israel.

This is why a diverse group of Messianic leaders; including Russ Resnick, Michael Wolf, Barry Rubin, Akiva Cohen, Dave Rosenberg, Mark Kinzer, Stuart Dauerman, Jason Sobel, Andrew Sparks, David Sedaca and myself met in a meeting chaired by a righteous Gentile, John Holbrook, in an Orthodox Jewish hotel in Borough Park, Brooklyn to see if there was any possibility of organizing a small theological symposium to discuss our very different viewpoints

on the issues that are so important to many of us. We agreed that we would not seek to unite, but instead to listen to each other with deference and respect, without acrimony.

We invited others from varying perspectives and eventually reduced our group to a smaller planning team that met a number of times in Borough Park to make this evening become a reality. What a beautiful thing it is to see so many of our Messianic leaders gathered together in one room (sound familiar), because each of us loves Yeshua and cares so deeply about our Jewish people.

I am sorry we could not actually meet in Borough Park, but first of all the hotel was too small and secondly they finally figured us out!! But, we will keep the name!

Brothers and sisters, so many of you have been enthusiastic about coming together because I believe we all understand that we need this meeting at this time – and that what happens here will impact the future of our Messianic movement. We understand, do we not, that any movement that is growing will have growth-related problems. Much of what we have understood as *disunity* during the past few years is in reality signs of life and vigorous spiritual growth. If we were dead, we would not have any problems.

The 21st-century Messianic movement is seeking to define itself and you and I are part of this great defining process. We know we are Jews. We know we love Yeshua. We know He is the promised Messiah of Israel, but how we put this all together is a perplexing pilgrimage for each one of us.

I hope this Symposium will go a long way towards helping us get to know one another – both as theological thinkers and as brothers and sisters in the Messiah. I am sure that some of our misunderstandings about one another will be clarified over the next few days. Some of us will come to understand that our differences are smaller than we thought before we came to this gathering. I am also certain that some of us will conclude that our theological differences are far greater than we previously thought. It is the hope that of the planning committee that our discussions will produce more light than heat and that in general we will leave having a better understanding of one another at this critical time in the history of our movement. More than anything, we believe a new generation of Messianic Jews are observing us and are not only interested in what we believe but also want to see if knowing Yeshua makes a difference in how we disagree with one another. They want to know if we are capable of contending for truth while at the same time treating one another with both grace and respect.

Brothers and sisters in our beloved Messiah Yeshua, we are moving rapidly towards the culmination of world history when an *end time* Jewish remnant cries out to Yeshua and confesses Him to be Lord of Israel and Lord of all. In the meantime, thousands of Jewish people are coming to know Yeshua as their Messiah. These new believers speak English, Russian, Hebrew, and a host of other languages, and as leaders we need to be part of encouraging and nurturing their spiritual growth. We must provide the next generation with a role model for this Messianic faith and life that is relevant, flexible, encouraging of new ideas, joy-filled and marked by grace yet true to our growing understanding of what it means to be faithful to the living and written Word and as Jews.

Personally, I have already found it a joy just to be in the same room with so many other Jewish people, and especially leaders who love Yeshua. All I can say is Baruch Hashem, times have changed since the day I accepted Yeshua as my Messiah in November of 1970. I don't feel alone any more. It is good to know that He is faithful to His promises and that our Remnant and Messianic community is growing.

A Final Story

Allow me to conclude with a brief story. Earlier, I mentioned a conference for Russian Jewish believers who were planting Messianic congregations, which was held last September in Germany. We have about 100 representatives of more than 85 congregations – all of which had been planted since Perestroika in 1989. The leaders of these congregations came from the Former Soviet Union, Israel, the United States and places with the particle “stan” attached to it that I had never heard of before! We had a wonderful time enjoying one another's fellowship and good teaching – all by Russian Jews – though of course I did not understand more than a word or two. The conference in itself was one of the sure signs that our movement is growing!

But perhaps nothing compared to what took place on Friday afternoon of the conference. We decided to do what every conference does and take a group picture. But, our German director Vladimir Pikman decided that the best place to take the picture would be standing on the steps of the Reichstag! Can you imagine more than a hundred Messianic Jews standing on the stairs of a building that promoted policies of hatred that almost destroyed the our Jewish people.

Not only did we gather for a picture, but we began spontaneously singing Hebrew songs. One of them was Hiney Ma Tov, from Psalm 133:1, “How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.” And then we sang another Jewish folk song that is somewhat of a “secondary” national anthem...the words simply say, Am Yisrael, Am Yisrael Chai: The people of Israel will live...the people of Israel will live. It is sung as a chant and in reality is a Jewish rallying cry that testifies to God's faithfulness in not allowing His Chosen People to be destroyed. And we sang that song on the very steps that were walked daily by those planning our destruction.

The entire conference was a powerful testimony to our God who keeps His word and promises. Singing with my brothers and sisters on these steps was a witness for the Lord. In fact, there were a number of people who asked us what we were doing including a number of Israeli tourists and one Jewish couple from New York City. I suppose they did not expect to see 100 Messianic Jews singing Hebrew songs on the steps of the Reichstag!