

Distinctives of The Messianic Jewish Service

Current Messianic congregational life reflects aspects of both the traditional synagogue and Biblically-centred New Testament congregations. In that sense, it is an unusual hybrid that combines and mirrors the spiritual, cultural and community needs of these two types of communities.

Messianic congregations have a special focus on Jewish lifecycle events and the Moedim (the holidays). Major lifecycle events include male circumcisions— “b’rit milah” or for girls, “simchat bat” (joy of the daughter); bar/bat mitzvah, bar/bat Avraham, weddings and funerals. We also celebrate and remember the life and ministry of Yeshua through the Moedim and regular readings of the Brit Hadashah.

The synagogue service includes: basic elements of the traditional Jewish morning service called Shacharit, including introductory prayers, the Shema, the V’hahafta, readings from Torah portion for the week, the traditional Haftorah and a reading from the B’rit Hadashah. These selections may at times vary. Congregations may have cantors whose focus is the liturgical preparation and development of the service.

Congregational worship will encourage men to wear the kippah and prayer shawl, however, our Messianic authorities stress that the prayer shawl is most appropriate for Jewish men. The practice of continually wearing a kippah is a lifestyle choice of traditional or Orthodox Jews and Messianic Jewish leaders will often wear a kippah for identification as a Jew. Similarly, some may choose to wear fringes as a sign of devotion to the Torah. This is also a lifestyle choice and not a requirement of the community. Women by tradition may keep their heads covered during prayer times. During the service this is rarely our practice. The Torah reading and exposition of the Torah are often central to the service.

Leadership of women as cantors may become more common in Messianic congregations.

Traditions Inherited from Jewish Synagogue Practice

1. The primary symbol of Jewish worship is the menorah.
2. The symbol for identification as Israel and the Jewish people has become the Star of David. Both symbols are present in our services.
3. Traditionally, congregations face east during worship. If that is not possible, then the congregation faces Jerusalem while reciting the Shema.
4. The ark contains the Torah scrolls (sefer Torah), and by tradition has over it a *ner tamid* (eternal light).
5. Opening of the Torah scroll is the usual tradition of the Jewish service, as is the reading of the Torah passage in Hebrew.
6. The traditional congregation uses a Siddur or prayer book in order to follow the order and content of the traditional service.
7. Our congregation currently has a very limited liturgy but this could change if cantor was present to oversee liturgical services and development.

Why Do We Have The Emphasis On Tradition?

1. The commitment to Jewish continuity is a response to the failure of the Hebrew Christian movement.
2. In a time when Israel exists as a nation, sustaining Jewish identity outside of Israel, is our unique challenge as Messianic Jews.
3. We are committed to communicating the Jewish identity of Yeshua within our community, and the ongoing relevance of the Torah for those who follow the Messiah of Israel.
4. Messianic synagogues primarily were created to allow Jewish followers of Yeshua to remain Jewish, and this ongoing challenge persists during a time of continuing assimilation. This is a cause in which we need the support of Messianic Gentiles.

Intermarried Messianic couples

1. KEC from its inception was focussed on ministry to intermarried couples (that included most of the founding leadership).
2. We regard intermarried couples as primarily with us in order to create a Jewish identity for the couple and their children.
3. We consider it a Jewish family.

Messianic Gentiles

1. Gentile followers of Yeshua who join our communities are equal and equally respected members of our spiritual family.
2. They are invited to join us in all aspects of our spiritual life.
3. Their calling could be described as *Ahavat Yisrael* (love for Israel) and an affirmation of the special roles affirmed by Paul in Romans 11: 13ff.
4. They join us with a special calling to witness to the Jewish people.
5. The growing numbers of Messianic Gentiles remains a challenge for Messianic Jewish congregations. The UMJC requires their full member congregations to have a minimum of 10 Jewish families.
6. Some congregations do promote conversion; KEC does not see that as a Biblical mandate.

Messianic Jewish Challenges

Currently we are facing three great challenges in the ongoing vision of Messianic congregations.

No compromise on the divinity of Yeshua: The UMJC statement on the identity of Yeshua - "Yeshua is the incarnation of the Divine Word through Whom the world was made, and of the Divine Glory through Whom God revealed Himself to Israel and acted in their midst. He is the living Torah, expressing perfectly in His example and teaching the Divine purpose for human life. Yeshua is completely human and completely divine."

2. The place of the Oral Law as authoritative in Jewish instruction for the spiritual life of the believer and Jewish community life. This would include Rabbinic teachings rooted in the Talmud and related extra Biblical teachings and traditions.

3. The growing number of Messianic congregations without Jewish leadership or Jewish involvement and the growing number of retiring Messianic Jewish leaders. Reaching the next generation is our shared priority across every segment of the Messianic Jewish movement around the world.